

The Tavernier Book of Hours

KBR, ms. IV 1290



The text and content units

With its series of prayers and offices which are unsurprisingly repeated from one manuscript to another, the text of Books of Hours may, at first sight, appear to be less than interesting. How is it therefore possible to explain the irresistible appeal which it has for some specialists, so much so that they can be caught spending long periods gazing at dry pages covered in script, almost forgetting to pay any attention to the superb decoration that frames the other folios? The fact is that unlike most medieval works of art, Books of Hours contain, concealed in their text, precious indications that can frequently determine the 'destination' of the manuscript, i.e. the precise place (a church, a chapter, an abbey, etc.) or even the person for whom they were created. An apparently stereotyped content conceals local 'uses' which are observed in many key-places: the calendar, the Little Hours of the Virgin and the Office of the Dead, the litanies and the suffrages. In the paragraphs that follow we are going to examine these different units of content to try to discern the profile of the person for whom the *Tavernier Book of Hours* was intended and find out whether it is compatible with the hypothesis of a ducal commission³⁷.

A study of the calendar reveals that the scribe has used two separate sources. From January to mid-March and from mid-April to the end of June, a Parisian model has been used as an example.



³⁷I would like to thank Erik Drigsdahl, a specialist in Books of Hours and their texts, for the fruitful exchange of views that we have had on the *Tavernier Book of Hours*. For more detail on the methodology, the first works to consult are Leroquis 1927 and Delaissé 1974.

This corresponds very closely to the calendars of the other Books of Hours known to belong to Philip the Good, which are kept in Munich³⁸ and The Hague³⁹. The rest – from mid-March to mid-April and from July to the end of December – is modelled on the French principle of the full calendar (one feast per day), but it is distinguished by the presence of a large number of universal feasts belonging to the Roman calendar. Many of these, sometimes some of the most solemn, are shifted by one or even by several days: for instance the Visitation is on July 3rd instead of the 2nd. The same ‘nonchalance’ can be seen in the transcription of names, which are sometimes barely recognizable (‘Geferin’ for ‘Zephyrin’, on 26 August, for example). Due to its composite character, this calendar would certainly be worthy of more detailed examination, since it is such an example of the lack of rigour with which the scribes could put together largely arbitrary series, because they were obliged to put in one feast for every day of the year⁴⁰. The use of two sources, which might alternate within a single month and whose permutations correspond precisely to turns of the page, also invites us to wonder about the method of transcription of these texts. Perhaps several models were used simultaneously⁴¹. We should reiterate here that, like the other Books of Hours made for the Duke of Burgundy, the scribe opted for a full calendar of the French type. This choice distinguishes the *Tavernier Book of Hours* from the practice generally adopted in the Burgundian Low Countries, since in this region preference was given to calendars which only mentioned the principal feasts, leaving a large number of empty spaces.

The Little Hours of the Virgin make up the core of the Books of Hours, and their importance can be measured above all by the number of pages: this is the most voluminous part of these manuscripts of private devotion. This Marian office is made up of eight canonical hours of prayers, and it is usually illustrated by a cycle of images marking the beginning of matins, lauds, prime, terce, sext, none, vespers and compline. Apart from their devotional function, these miniatures allowed the faithful to find their way within the text: there is an illustration associated with each hour, which in the Burgundian Low Countries is usually based on the narrative of the infancy of Christ. The importance of these cycles of images also comes from the fact that there are many variants, which sometimes indicate a region of origin. Table 1 shows the originality of the solution adopted in the *Tavernier Book of Hours* in relation to the cycle usually found in ‘Flemish’ Books of Hours. A double inversion is found between sext and none and between

³⁸ Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cod. gall. 40.

³⁹ The Hague, KB, ms. 76 F 2. On this book, see the latest synthesis to date: Korteweg, 2002 (to be published).

⁴⁰ It remains to be explained why two dates (7 September and 26 October) remained empty.

⁴¹ This is a complex problem. The first ‘deviation’ from the Parisian model (second half of the month of March and the first fifteen days of April) (F^o 5v^o-6r^o) occurs on opposite pages. On the other hand, the second deviant part begins on a recto, after an ‘orthodox’ verso (second half of June/beginning of July) (F^o 8v^o-9r^o).

vespers and compline, a solution to which we only know one equivalent to this day, in a codex which is vital to the understanding of the Brussels manuscript: the Book of Hours of Claudio Villa, attributable to a first-rate artist close to Jean Tavernier⁴².

	KBR, ms. IV 1290		'Flemish' cycle
Matins	Annunciation		Annunciation
Lauds	Visitation		Visitation
Prime	Nativity		Nativity
Terce	Annunciation to the Shepherds		Annunciation to the Shepherds
Sext	[Presentation]	↗	Adoration of the Magi
None	Adoration of the Magi	↘	Presentation
Vespers	Flight into Egypt	↗	Massacre of the innocents
Compline	Massacre of the innocents	↘	Flight into Egypt

Table 1 – *Infancy Cycle of the Tavernier Book of Hours compared with the 'Flemish' cycle*

If this cycle is compared to that of the other two Books of Hours attributed to Tavernier (table 2) it can be seen that the Brussels codex and the Book of Hours of Claudio Villa are distinguished by their faithfulness, at Prime and Terce, to the 'Flemish' solution (table 1). Yet, they share with The Hague and Paris manuscripts the inversion of sext/none and vespers/compline which is characteristic of the Tavernier group, of which they constitute a more 'orthodox' variant. The examination of the cycle of illustrations therefore confirms what has already been shown by stylistic analysis, namely the close link between the *Bruxellensis* IV 1290 and the work of Jean Tavernier.

	KBR, ms. IV 1290 and Book of Hours of Claudio Villa <small>(location unknown)</small>	The Hague, ms. KB,76 F2	Paris, BNE, ms. new. acq. Lat. 3225
Matins	Annunciation	Annunciation	Annunciation
Lauds	Visitation	Visitation	Visitation
Prime	Nativity	Annunciation to the shepherds	Annunciation to the shepherds
Terce	Annunciation to the shepherds	Nativity	[Nativity]
Sext	[Presentation]	Presentation	Presentation
None	Adoration of the Magi	Adoration of the Magi	[Adoration of the Magi]
Vespers	Flight into Egypt	Flight into Egypt	Flight into Egypt
Compline	Massacre of the innocents	Coronation of the Virgin	Massacre of the innocents

⁴² See Avril 1999, pp. 20, note 7. On the Book of Hours of Claudio Villa, last reported in 1939, see Sotheby's 1939, n° 12. The manuscript was once part of the Perkins, Spitzer and Van Zuylen collections: see Perkins 1873, lot 599; Spitzer 1892, n° 26, p. 140-141; Sotheby's 1929, n° 190 (with my thanks to Heribert Tenschert for having allowed me to benefit from the infinite resources of his collection of sale catalogues). It goes without saying that we are looking forward to see the reappearance of this treasure!

Table 2 – *Infancy Cycle of the Tavernier Book of Hours and the Book of Hours of Claudio Villa, compared with two Books of Hours from the Tavernier group*

Another interesting feature of the Little Office of the Virgin is its liturgical use. Before the progressive uniformisation of the rite in the 16th century and the generalisation of the Roman use, many churches, chapters or other religious institutions were likely to have their own liturgical variant, characterised by a specific arrangement of the texts of prayers making up the office (psalms, hymns, antiphons, capituli, responses, versicles, etc.). These uses were highly varied in the Burgundian Low Countries. For many of them we have unfortunately lost all trace of the institution to which they were attached. This is the case for the *Tavernier Book of Hours*, of which the Office of the Virgin remains a unique and non-localised variant. Fortunately the various texts which constitute it, when considered separately, are well known. An analysis of the rarest among them makes it possible to identify their geographical origin. Erik Drigsdahl has thus noted that the capitulum *Virgo verbo concepit* is only found at the hour of lauds in the northern part of the archdiocese of Reims, i.e. in our own region. Similarly, the presence at compline of the hymn *Fit porta Christi*, which originated with the German Benedictine monasteries, seems only to be found in countries where Germanic languages are spoken or those directly subject to their influence. It is found very early in the diocese of Liège and was later spread into Flanders. It also appears at St. Gertrude in Nivelles, St. Waudru in Mons, in the Brabantine monasteries subject to the Windesheim reform and in the collegial church of St. Gudula in Brussels. One might wonder whether the use of the *Tavernier Book of Hours* is not proper to one of the sanctuaries frequented by Philip the Good during his stays at the Brabantine capital.

Although it is very improbable that the palatine chapel on the Coudenberg can be taken into account due to its domestic character, it is known that the Church of St. James on the Coudenberg enjoyed particular favour among the Burgundian sovereigns. It was within its walls that Anthony of Burgundy was baptised in 1431 and Mary of Burgundy in 1457; this is also where the funerals of Isabelle of Bourbon, the wife of Charles the Bold, took place in 1465⁴³. The church was served by a provostry (community of religious led by a provost), affiliated to the rule of St. Augustine. It is not impossible that it may have followed a use distinct from St. Gudula's.

⁴³ See Lefevre 1942, pp. 91-92. My thanks to Antoine de Schryver for the valuable information he gave me on the Coudenberg community.

The litany includes a long list of saints whose prayers are invoked by the faithful. Very often these lists are also indicative of the



The Adoration of the Magi (f^o 112r^o)

destination of the Book of Hours. Like the calendar, they provide evidence of local or private devotions. In this particular case we should note the presence of a large number of saints associated with Burgundy and the East of France – St. Benignus of Dijon, St. Philibert of Tournus, St. Sequanus, the founder of the convent of Sicaster near Dijon, St. Mammes of Langres, St. Claud of Besançon – so that it is justified to speak of a ‘Dijon’ litany. This strong Burgundian accent is of course a weighty argument in favour of a ducal commission.

To this is added the high rank of St. Philip in the list of apostles: he appears in fifth place⁴⁴. It remains, as Erik Drigsdahl rightly stresses, to explain certain non-typical features, such as the presence, unique in Dijon so far, of the sisters of the Virgin, Mary Cleophas and Mary Salome. We will content ourselves by mentioning that this feast was not unknown in the diocese of Tournai, which covered a large portion of the Burgundian territories in the North: the *sorores beate Marie* appear from about 1400 in the litany of a Tournai Book of Hours⁴⁵. It should also be noted that in about 1450 Thurien de Praelles, Dean of the Cathedral of Our Lady of Tournai, founded the duplex of this feast on 25 May⁴⁶. How did this hybrid litany come into being? Once again the copyist of the *Book of Hours* in Brussels might have drawn from various sources to create a list of saints in which the Burgundian element remains predominant.

⁴⁴ Noted by Peter Kidd. See Sotheby's 2001, pp. 136, 138, n° 28.

⁴⁵ Paris, BNF, ms. lat. 1364.

⁴⁶ See Vos 1894, p. 21; Boeren 1988, n° 16, pp. 46–47.

⁴⁷ Brussels, KBR, ms. 11035–37, ff° 82v–87r.

⁴⁸ Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cod. gall. 40, ff° 133–147.

⁴⁹ The Hague, KB, ms. 76 P 2, ff° 41v–45v.

⁵⁰ Sotheby's 2001, p. 141, n° 28.

⁵¹ A colophon on folio 144v states: ‘Cy finent les ix lecons des vegilles des mors translatees en prose A Bruxelles lan mil CCC [et] l vng.’ [Here end the ix lessons of vigils of the dead translated in prose in Brussels in the year 1451.]

⁵² Also based on palaeography: Delaissé 1959, n° 92; Korteweg 2002.

The most spectacular characteristic of the text of this new acquisition is no doubt the presence of a sequence of three prayers in French which are exclusively found in this form in the prayer books which had belonged personally to Philip the Good: in the part which he added to his grandfather's *Book of Hours* in 1451, Philip the Bold⁴⁷, in the *Little Munich Prayerbook*⁴⁸ and – which had hitherto been forgotten – in the *Book of Hours of The Hague* painted by Jean Tavernier⁴⁹. Peter Kidd has suggested that the text of these prayers (see appendix) was composed specially for the Duke by his personal secretary Jean Miélot⁵⁰. This hypothesis seems quite probable.

In the *Book of Hours of Philip the Bold*, the sequence of prayers forms part of a series of additions which, on the basis of an analysis of the script, can be attributed to Miélot and dated after 1451⁵¹. It was also Miélot who, according to Léon Delaissé⁵², transcribed the original part of the *Book of Hours of The Hague*, the very part which contains the



The Massacre of the Innocent (f^o 125v^o)

⁵³ Reported by Peter Kidd. See Sotieby's 2001, pp. 136, 138, n° 28.

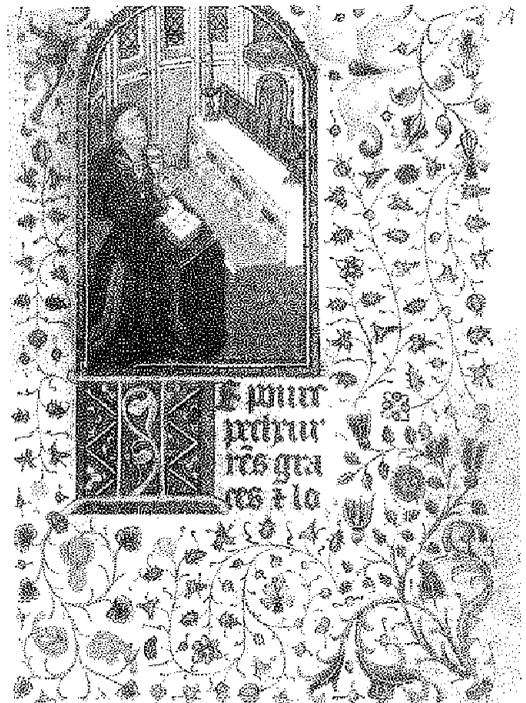
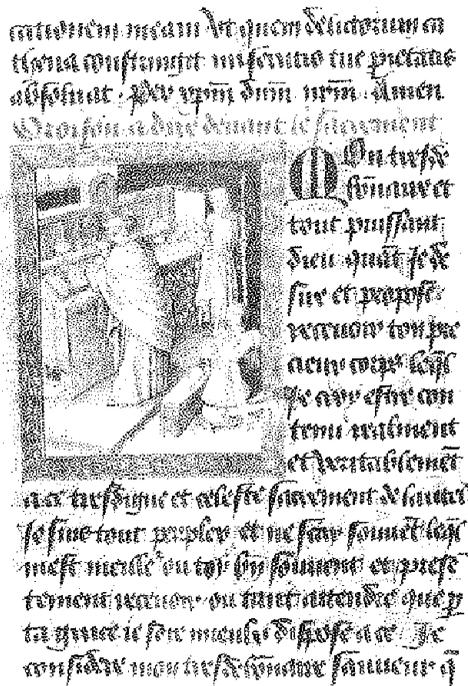
⁵⁴ See Mechtild de Hackeborn 1930, 1st part, chapter 47.

< Philip the Good in prayer before the priest at the altar Hours of The Hague, Southern Low Countries, Oudenaarde (?), c. 1450-1460 (f° 41v^o). The Hague, KB, ms. 76 F 2.

> Master of the Small Book of prayers of Munich, Philip the Good in prayer Small Book of prayers of Munich, Southern Low Countries, c. 1450 (f° 144^o). Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cod. Gall. 40.

three prayers. The personal nature of these prayers also clearly stems from their content. The first addresses a request to God which can only be that of a sovereign: 'Donne moy sens et entendement de moy et de mes subgetz gouverner en telle justice et telle equité [...] [Give me wisdom and understanding of myself and my subjects to govern so justly and equitably] (f° 50v^o)⁵³. In the former Burgundian Low Countries, who other than Philip the Good could have legitimately invoked God in these terms? What is more, in two of the ducal manuscripts in which they appear – The Hague and Munich –, these prayers are illustrated by a representation of the patron in prayer, about whose identity there is no doubt: he has the features of the Duke. In the Little Book of Prayers of Munich he even bears the collar of the Golden Fleece. Hence it is possible to express legitimate doubts concerning the possibility that, in the Tavernier Book of Hours, another patron would have dared to have himself represented in such a symbolically charged place.

The book also includes the Three Ave Maria of Saint Mechtild of Hackeborn (1241-1298), the famous German mystic to whom the Virgin promised to be present at her last hour if she recited three Aves every day, addressed to each person of the Trinity⁵⁴. This prayer, which is quite rare, does not appear in the Duke's other devotional





oroison a dire auant
quon se confesse.

Des santtorū
omnium an
gelorum et

Patron in prayer (f^o 179^o)

books⁵⁵. It should be noted, however, that a suffrage to St. Mechtilde is featured in a prayer book belonging to Philip the Good kept in Paris⁵⁶. No doubt the duke had a particular devotion to this saint.

In our opinion the analysis of the text therefore supports the hypothesis of a book intended for the personal use of the Duke of Burgundy. Its content is a mixture of French and 'Flemish' characteristics, and it corresponds perfectly to the mixed profile of the Great Duke of the West. What is more, the presence of prayers which were no doubt composed specially for the sovereign provides strong support for this presumption.

⁵⁵ The files of the KBR only report one copy of this, in the ms. 4483, a Book of Hours in French and Latin for Soignies use, perhaps made in Brussels. See Delaissé 1959, n° 168; Ottosen 1993, pp. X and 146.

⁵⁶ Paris, BNF, ms. nouv. acq. fr. 16428, f° 16r°.