

The Brussels Hours



The Duke of Berry's Mysterious Jewel

EA Manuscript Full of Memories of the Duc de Berry

Although the creation of the Brussels Hours remains somewhat elusive, there are clear indications to remind us that the book must have been made on behalf of the Duke of Berry, as the ducal arms, his emblem the bear and the initials VE from his motto, all appear in the ornamental borders of this beautifully illuminated manuscript.

Furthermore the litany, i.e. that part of the book which contains the intercessory prayers, names many saints specially venerated in Poitou and Berry, the duke's own country. Besides the litany, the Brussels Hours contain an Office of the Virgin Mary, the Penitential Psalms, Hours of the Cross and an Office for the Dead.

The reader will also be interested in some clues, possibly indicating memories of a wonderful romance. It must have been an English lady who inflamed the duke's heart, as all works the duke had made after the Brussels Hours include the blessed swan which his grand nephew René d'Anjou interpreted as a symbol of loving but painful memories.

The Mystery of its Origin

One of the highlights in the Brussels Hours is without any doubt a double page executed in demi-grisaille technique. The grisaille technique was used in book illumination since the 14th century. It became very en vogue in the Parisian manuscripts of the 14th century whereby the painters modelled their figures in different shades of grey. The uniform grey reminds one of the material of a statue and allows to play on volume and light.

While the grisaille technique was used in panel painting to refine this play on volume and light, book illumination generally applied this technique as an original artistic means of expressing new aestheticism and sensitivity, much like the demi-grisaille technique of the Brussels Hours where strong colours were added.

There is still disagreement among art historians as to the masters who executed the Brussels Hours. Before our commentary was published, the scientific debate had mentioned a number of various names.

One of them is André Beauneveu, a sculptor and painter from Hennegau. His great reputation was mainly based on works done for the French court. Beauneveu proved his artistic qualities with a series of impressing sepulchral statues executed on commission of King Charles V for St. Denis Abbey. The same Beauneveu was responsible for the opening miniatures in the famous Psalter of the Duke of Berry. So the

question as to who executed these grisaille illustrations which were obviously made before the manuscript itself, Beauneveu or another painter hitherto unknown, has not yet been fully cleared.

A Landmark in the Development of French Book Illumination

The Brussels Hours mark a turning point in the history of this book genre. What was considered in the Petites Heures as the height of aestheticism, is now completely remodelled in the Brussels Hours which are widely recognised as a true model of a Gothic book. It includes for the first time a truly modern approach to illumination: a large miniature in a simple rectangle, without any tracery and quite independent in style. It seems as if the painter cut a window out of the vellum to cast a look outside.

Painting now leaves its decorative function behind. The Brussels Hours may be considered one of the most decisive works in this respect. It is assumed that layout and sketches were executed by the miniaturist Jacquemart from the little town of Hesdin in the North of France.

The life of this painter is a matter of conjecture. Only a few works have been ascribed to him with certainty, among which a depiction of Christ carrying the cross, which had been removed from the Grandes Heures and is now kept at the Louvre in Paris. Paradoxically, it was a painter from the North who first conveyed the new Italian style.

He had been in the services of the duke since 1384 and had also participated in the completion of the Petites Heures made for Berry. Jacquemart symbolises a turning point in Northern European painting. He transformed the miniature into a full-page, independent picture, after the Italian model.

The Fine Art Facsimile Edition

A True Gem Not Only for Admirers of the Duke of Berry

The illuminated manuscripts of the Duke of Berry rank among the most beautiful things ever made by a European artist of the Middle Ages.

The fine art facsimile edition has faithfully reproduced all 276 pages of the original, down to the most minute detail, in the format of 27.5 x 18.5 cm, including 20 full-page miniatures and 17 marvellous initial pages with partial ornamental borders. Each leaf was trimmed in accordance with the original and stitched by hand. The book is gilt-edged on three sides.

The red kidskin cover is expensively decorated with gold and embossing. The most up-to-date technical perfection and highly qualified artful handiwork have enabled us to produce this unique limited edition of 980 copies world-wide.

The Commentary Volume

The commentary volume with its 293 pages provides a useful companion for a journey through the Brussels illuminated manuscript. Recent research and contributions have led to new sensational findings.

Contributions by: Dr. Pierre Cockshaw, Director and Chief-conservator of the Royal Library Albert Ier, Brussels; Dr. Bernard Bousmanne, Researcher in the Brussels Department of Manuscripts and Prof. Dr. Gerhard Schmidt, University of Vienna.

Both the facsimile edition and the commentary volume are available in a protective case made of acrylic glass.

Documentation Kit

A documentation folder containing two full-sized leaves from the facsimile edition and an illustrated 16-page information brochure is available for information upon request.