

The Prayer Book of Anne de Bretagne



A Queen's Ornate Treasure

The carefully designed prayer book was commissioned by Anne of Brittany, wife of two successive kings of France, Charles VIII and Louis XII and thus twice Queen of France, for herself and her son Charles-Orland. It was made in Tours from 1492 to 1495 and is now preserved in the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York. The book fascinates in its rich illustration and its 34 airy, light flooded miniatures which are among the most delicate examples to be found at the end of the 15th century.

They are the work of an excellent illuminator of the time, Jean Poyet, who is mentioned by contemporary authors in the same breath as Rogier van der Weyden, Hugo van der Goes and Jean Fouquet. His extraordinary talent is shown in his extremely spacious and vaporous landscapes. The soft carnation of his faces, the graciously presented figures as well as his bright and frequently unusual combination of colours used for clothing, and last but not least the architecture of Italian influence so typical of his miniatures, announce the advent of the Renaissance in France.

A Testimony to Motherly Love

The decoration of the Prayer Book reflects Anne's personal ideas. To live in faith was a great aspiration of hers which is widely expressed in this magnificent uvre. Anne obviously wished to pass on this philosophy to her son, the future King of France, as the sequence of prayers in this manuscript was conceived as a spiritual aid and moral support for a young boy of his age.

The richly illustrated little book was designed so that Anne could sit down with her son and teach him to pray. The unfinished prayers were thought of as cues for the young Dauphin. With regard to his future function as a king of France, his mother inserted a prayer specially designed for this purpose. It is a supplication for the wisdom the king would need.

However, destiny decided otherwise. Charles-Orland died at the age of three. His small prayer book has survived until today, as a testimony to motherly love and care.

Moreover, its lay-out and decoration later served as an example for another prayer book commissioned by the loving mother for Renee de France, her youngest daughter of her marriage with King Louis XII. The Flowers Prayer Book of Renee de France has also been reproduced by Fine Art Facsimile

Publishers Lucerne and is now out of print.

A Bibliophile Sovereign and Royal Patron of Art

For all of her life, Anne was a tireless and generous patron not only of the visual arts but also of literature and music. She bought numerous manuscripts and financed artists of the court as well as poets and musicians. Reputed authors served her as secretaries and chroniclers. Anne's personal library comprised more than 3000 volumes, including religious, historic and literary books, mainly of Italian origin. Anne's library is a testimony to her high level of education: she had a good command of Latin and Greek and some knowledge of Hebrew.

Jean Poyet - A Most Extraordinary, Universal Artist

The miniaturist whom Anne charged with the execution of her Prayer Book has often been compared to the greatest artists of his century. Like Fouquet, he worked in Tours and was the undisputed successor of the great Jean Bourdichon after his death. The artist was highly esteemed by three royal courts: official painter under Louis XI, he became a greatly admired illuminator at the courts of Anne of Brittany, Charles VIII and Louis XII and also organised and furnished the solemn ceremonial entries of the royal couple. In the 19th century, Jean Poyet fell into undeserved oblivion. The facsimile reproduction of one of his most beautiful works helps bringing him back to the position he deserves among Western book painters.

The Facsimile Edition

The facsimile edition reproduces the magnificent manuscript in its original format 125 x 80 mm down to the most minute detail. It boasts an enormous wealth of illustrations: 34 full page miniatures, all by a masterly hand and framed with large ornamental borders containing the letters A, N and E, ornate its 62 pages. The name letters are formed by or interlaced with the Franciscan cord and the use of this emblem of Anne of Brittany further indicates the highly personal character of this book. Numerous coloured initials decorated with flowers, partly on gilded ground or interlaced with golden rinceaux on red or blue ground, subdivide the prayer texts which are mostly written in Latin, with the exception of one which is written in Middle French. The binding is carried out in burgundy red velvet.

The facsimile edition is published in co-edition and limited to 1980 copies world-wide. The edition reserved for the German speaking countries is limited to 980 copies.

The Commentary Volume

The expert commentary comprises articles by Roger S. Wieck, curator of the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York and Michelle Hearne who deals with the personality of the Queen, a patron of the arts and a loving mother. The work of Jean Poyet is explained in context with the rest of his oeuvre. The commentary also contains a full transcription and translation of all the prayers to help make the manuscript accessible for today's readers.

The complete edition, consisting of a facsimile and a commentary volume, is available in a protective case covered with scarlet leather. The decoration of the case corresponds in its entirety with the original of the Pierpont Morgan Library.