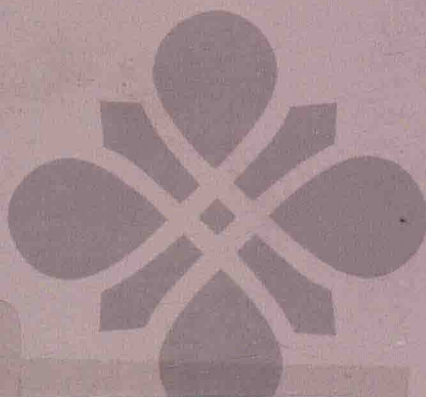




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Women's Books of Hours in Medieval England



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CHARITY SCOTT-STOKES

Women's Books of Hours in Medieval England

**Selected Texts Translated from
Latin, Anglo-Norman French and Middle English
with Introduction and Interpretive Essay**

**Charity Scott-Stokes
Clare Hall, Cambridge**

D. S. BREWER

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for Natascha and Sebastian

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Abbreviations

- AH* *Analecta Hymnica Medii Aevi*. Ed. G.M. Dreves and C. Blume, with H.M Bannister. 1886–1922. Leipzig: O.R. Reisland.
- EETS* Early English Text Society; O.S. Original Series; E.S. Extra Series.
- IMEP* *The Index of Printed Middle English Prose*. Ed. R.E. Lewis, N.F. Blake, and A.S.G. Edwards. 1985. New York & London: Garland.
- IMEV* *The Index of Middle English Verse*. Ed. C. Brown and R.H. Robbins. 1943. New York: Columbia University Press.
- IMEV*
Suppl. *Supplement to the Index of Middle English Verse*. Ed. R.H. Robbins and J.L. Cutler. 1965. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press.
- MMBL* *Medieval Manuscripts in British Libraries*. Vols 1–3, N.R. Ker; Vol. 4, N.R. Ker and A.J. Piper. 1969–92. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- RH* *Repertorium Hymnologicum. Catalogue des chants, hymnes, proses, séquences, tropes en usage dans l'Eglise latine depuis les origines jusqu'à nos jours*, I–VI. U. Chevalier. 1892–1920. Louvain–Brussels: Société des Bollandistes.
- Roman*
Breviary *The Roman Breviary*. An English Version: compiled by the Benedictine Nuns of the Abbey of Our Lady of Consolation, at Stanbrook in Worcestershire. Ed. C.F. Brown. 1936. London: Burns, Oates & Washbourne.

Preface

The book of hours is said to have been the most popular book owned by the laity in the later Middle Ages. The earliest surviving exemplar made in England was designed and illustrated by William de Brailes in Oxford in the mid-thirteenth century, for an unknown young lady whom he portrayed in the book several times. Women were often patrons or owners of such books, which were usually illustrated. It is clear from manuscript catalogues, and from authoritative studies such as those by Janet Backhouse, John Harthan and Roger Wieck, that the majority of the surviving medieval books of hours were made and used in continental Europe. Yet some were made in England, or for use in England, and of these at least fifty can be positively identified as having been made for a woman patron, or having been in female ownership at an early date.

This volume brings together a selection of texts in translation from women's books of hours. The texts are of great importance to a Library of Medieval Women, since they are fundamental to an understanding of medieval piety, and women book owners recited them regularly. Although some do actually still occur in bibles or prayer-books, others have to be sought in specialist publications, often embedded in other material, and a few have not until now been available at all in modern editions or translations.

Most of the manuscripts considered here are now located in British libraries. One is in Germany. Manuscripts from Boston, New York, and Urbana-Champaign in Illinois provide only a representative sampling of books of hours in American collections. A full investigation of American libraries would undoubtedly yield further manuscripts of great interest and relevance to this field of study.

The book is intended for the general reader, as well as for students of medieval literature, social and religious history, cultural studies and women's studies, at undergraduate or postgraduate level. The glossary and annotated bibliography will facilitate access to these materials for readers who are not familiar with Christian traditions or terminology.



1. The Annunciation, from Isabel Ruddok's Hours. Bristol Public Library MS 14, fol. 14v

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Introduction

Background, Development and Contents of the Book of Hours

A medieval book of hours was in essence a miscellany of prayers, made for an individual, a family or a community. It was designed for use at home, and also, in some instances, at church. It was intended primarily for private devotion, that is, as a book enabling its users to direct their minds in faithful service to the worship of God in private prayer during the course of their daily lives. There was also a strong focus on the Blessed Virgin Mary. It was in the main a religious compilation, yet it could also include secular, or worldly, items. The manuscripts were often beautifully illustrated, sometimes with embroidered or bejewelled covers, and even bags to keep them in – valuable, holy and protective in their material substance as well as in the prayers enclosed.

This introduction offers background information designed to put the book of hours in context, followed by discussion of the standard and supplementary textual contents, the visual aspect and music, and some observations on the original languages of the texts.

*

Since the Virgin Mary features very prominently in the book of hours, and the core text of the book is the Little Office, or Hours, of the Blessed Virgin (text 1),¹ it is useful to review the growth of narratives and veneration of Mary from the early centuries of Christianity to the late Middle Ages.

Mary is the central figure in the New Testament narrative of events in Nazareth and Bethlehem leading up to the Nativity of Jesus, as recounted most fully in the gospel of St Luke. She received the salutation of the angel Gabriel at the Annunciation, conceived and gave birth to Jesus, and nursed the child as the shepherds and Magi, or three kings,

¹ The term 'book of hours' is a modern one. The most frequent medieval Latin designation of the book was simply *Horae* 'hours', abbreviated from *Horae beate Marie virginis* 'Hours of the Blessed Virgin Mary'. In Middle English the book was usually referred to as 'primer'/'primmer'.

came to adore him. She presented him in the temple forty days after his birth, where Simeon recognised him as the saviour of mankind and made prophecies regarding his future greatness, and the suffering in store for both Jesus and Mary. Mary's husband Joseph fled with the young mother and the baby Jesus to Egypt, to escape the persecution of King Herod, and returned with them to Nazareth after a period of years. When Jesus was twelve years old, Joseph and Mary lost him in Jerusalem, and he was found in discussion with the learned in the temple.

Mary is mentioned briefly during Christ's years of ministry and miracles, for instance on the occasion of his first public miracle performed at the marriage at Cana, when he turned water into wine, and she is prominent once more, in St John the Evangelist's gospel only, during the events of the Passion at Eastertide, when she stood with St John at the foot of the Cross on which Christ was crucified. In the Acts of the Apostles, who were the first followers of Christ to believe his message and teach it after his death, the narrative is continued from the point where the gospel story ends. In Acts it is said that Mary awaited with the apostles the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, or Whitsuntide, which took place seven weeks after the Passion, and ten days after Christ ascended to heaven.

In the early centuries of the Christian era many stories of the Virgin were told in what are known as apocryphal narratives and gospels, that is to say, books which did not come to be included in the Bible. These stories fill the gaps, as it were, by providing information about Mary's infancy, and about her later life, the end of her life, and her assumption into heaven and coronation there. Apocryphal stories circulated widely in the Middle Ages, and were translated from Latin into the vernacular languages of western Europe, such as medieval French and English.² They were read and heard by both lay and religious audiences. According to these narratives Mary was born when her parents Anne and Joachim were already advanced in years, mirroring the birth of John the Baptist to the elderly Zacharias and Elizabeth as described in the first chapter of St Luke's gospel. Descriptions of Mary's infancy include such features as her parents' presentation of her in the temple when she was a small child, her dedication to the lord, and her desire to serve the woman destined to be the mother of Christ, ten years or so before she knew that she herself was to be that woman.

The Marian material, both biblical and apocryphal, was woven into rich drama, poetry and narrative, as well as into anthems and hymns,

² See James 1924; Stace 1998.

Offices and Masses. A full account of her life, drawing on biblical and apocryphal sources, is given in the *Ave et gaude* salutations of the Carew-Poyntz Hours (text 10.2).

In the late tenth and the eleventh century there was a period of monastic reform in England, during which time the Benedictine order was revitalised and strengthened. At this time the Christian order of monks and nuns founded by St Benedict, in the fifth century, was still by far the largest and most important monastic order in Europe. From the late tenth century comes the earliest mention of an Office of Mary, that is to say, a monastic religious service worshipping God, the deity, but expressing also special veneration of Mary. The Office prayers praise her and appeal to her for intercession, asking her to pray to Christ for the salvation of mankind in general, and for the supplicant in particular. There was a text for a regular Saturday Office of Mary from the mid-eleventh century, Saturday being a day set aside for devotion of Mary except when another major festival fell on that day.³ A full Office of the Virgin was used on Marian feast-days, which celebrated the major events of her life. The feast of her Conception was celebrated on 8 December. This came to be termed the Immaculate Conception, because it was held that Anne conceived Mary without the sin of concupiscence, or sexual desire – the ‘original sin’ transmitted to posterity by Adam and Eve because of their fall from grace in the garden of Eden.⁴

Mary’s Nativity was celebrated on 8 September. Her Presentation in the temple as a small child was remembered on 21 November. The feast of the Annunciation (coinciding with the Conception of Christ) fell on 25 March, and was not the occasion of a major festival in spite of its importance to salvation history. It usually occurred in Lent, shortly before Easter, and the church did not celebrate major festivals other than those of the Passion of Christ at this season. A ‘women’s festival’ was the Visitation, 2 July; on this occasion the pregnant Mary visited her cousin Elizabeth, mother-to-be of John the Baptist. The Nativity of Christ, at Christmas, was celebrated as a festival of Christ, not of his mother. The Purification, when Mary went to the temple for the ‘churching’ ceremony in which she was cleansed of impurities forty days after giving birth, coincided with the Presentation of Jesus in the

³ See Clayton 1990, 270; 271; Roper 1993, 50. Mary was venerated especially on Saturdays because it was held that after Christ’s death on Good Friday she alone remained strong throughout the Saturday in her belief in the Resurrection of Christ, which took place on Easter Sunday. See 10.2 36.

⁴ The doctrine of the Immaculate Conception was widely accepted from the late Middle Ages, yet there were some important theologians who rejected it. It was not accepted as a dogma of the Roman Catholic church until 1854.

temple, and with the popular pre-Christian feast of Candlemas, on 2 February.⁵ Mary's Assumption into heaven following her death, or 'dormition' (falling asleep), was celebrated on 15 August. Of these events, only the Annunciation, Visitation and Purification are recounted in the Bible. The remaining feast-days are based on apocryphal narratives.

The full Marian Office for all these occasions was recited or sung in monasteries from the tenth or eleventh centuries by those in religious orders, and subsequently also by secular priests in cathedrals, colleges or churches. There was also a simplified version, with fewer variations, known as the Little Office or Hours of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The Little Office remained part of the breviary used in monasteries and secular churches, but it could also be written out separately, especially in manuscripts destined for lay use.⁶ Devout lay people tried to emulate the religious life by integrating as much as possible of the Little Office into their daily lives. Once the Office became detached from the breviary, other Offices, psalms and prayers accumulated around it, resulting in the course of time in what we now know as the book of hours.

The production of devotional manuscripts for lay people, such as the book of hours and, before it, the psalter, was encouraged by the church in response to a decree issued by the Lateran Council of 1215. This decree required parish clergy to attend more assiduously than had previously been the case to the spiritual needs of lay parishioners. Friars of the mendicant religious orders, Franciscans and Dominicans, played an important part, alongside secular priests, in the move to produce edifying texts for the laity. Spiritual guidance of lay people was part of the mission of priests and friars. The earliest book of hours to have survived from medieval England, the mid-thirteenth century *De Brailles Hours*, shows Dominican influence.⁷ The fourteenth-century *De Mohun Hours*, probably a marriage gift for a young lady from the county of Somerset, has among its supplementary contents a long penitential mendicant poem, probably Franciscan, in Anglo-Norman French (Boston Public Library MS 124, fols 58r–63; Dean and Boulton 2000, no. 789).⁸ In the fifteenth century, Dominican influence is still in evidence, for instance in the *Bolton Hours* (York Minster Additional

⁵ The occasion continued to be referred to most frequently as 'Candlemas'.

⁶ See Wieck 2001, 492: 'the Hours had consoled the ordained for hundreds of years before becoming the center of lay devotion in the mid-thirteenth century'.

⁷ See Donovan 1991, 125.

⁸ For the original patron of this manuscript see Michael 1982.