

Books of hours as text compilations in the Low countries

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Abstract

This paper proposes to analyze specifically the networks of manuscripts and texts in the Books of hours produced in the Low countries to better understand how the interdependence of devotion, commercial imperatives for export and mass production, and of the prevalence of certain uses has given rise to the dissemination and hybridization of texts. The research is part of the HORAE project (ANR-17-CE38-0008) and based on the database of 7282 manuscripts, including 442 manuscripts from the Low Countries.

Books of hours, copied in droves in the Middle Ages, usually contain a calendar, liturgical offices (Hours of the Virgin, Holy Spirit and Cross, Office of the dead, suffrages) and additional texts, esp. prayers in Latin or Vernacular. They supported the devotion of the faithful and adopted liturgical particularities (so called “uses”), in accordance with the geography of production or the patrons’ wishes. They are complex and codified compilations. They circulate and transmit different sets of texts, and constitute precious sources on medieval devotion, liturgy, social representation, and text dissemination in Western medieval society.

Books of hours produced in the Low countries may be identified based on decoration, liturgical specificities (“use”), and regional devotions appearing in the calendars (Bavo, Donatian...), litanies (Walpurga, Vedast...) and suffrages (Adrian...). They present researchers with specific challenges: miniatures are often added on stubs, making the place of origin less certain; many manuscripts present a decoration from the Low Countries with (a) the use of Rome for the Hours of the Virgin and/or the Office of the dead; (b) a Southern Textualis (Rotunda) script [1], [2].

As for the liturgical uses, K. Ottosen highlighted two clearly distinctive textual types of the Office of the dead (type 83-25 and type 25), grouping the manuscripts produced in/for the

Proceedings of the 19th Colloquium of the Comité international de paléographie latine (Berlin, 16-18 September, 2015), E. Overgaauw and M. J. Schubert, Eds. Turnhout: Brepols, 2019, pp. 97–116.

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- [5] E. Drigsdahl, 'Late Medieval and Renaissance Illuminated Manuscripts - Books of Hours 1300-1530', 2013. <http://manuscripts.org.uk/chd.dk/> (accessed Mar. 22, 2017).