



Books of Hours

Medieval Books of Hours and Their Readership

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- Examines Books of Hours, the most popular books of the late Middle Ages, which were widely owned across social classes
- Highlights the widespread ownership of these books, from dukes to merchants and servants, in both Latin and vernacular languages, and in varied formats, from simple to luxurious
- Provides a unique sociological analysis of the role and significance of Books of Hours, beyond their decorative aspects
- Investigates intriguing questions, such as the book's name ("Book of Hours"), its readership, and its repeated appearance in Flemish portraits of the time
- Explores the use and meaning of these books in daily life and medieval society, filling gaps in existing literature
- Published to accompany the exhibition *Pride and Solace: medieval books of hours and their readers* at the Musea Brugge in Belgium, from 4th April 2025 to 7th October 2025

Books of Hours were the bestsellers of the late Middle Ages. From dukes to merchants and servants – this book found its way into almost all walks of life: among both women and men, in Latin and the vernacular, and in simple and luxurious editions. Much has been written about the decoration or illumination of books of hours, but information on their use and meaning is scarce. Who were the readers, what topics do the texts cover, why is it called a 'book of hours' and why do they appear time and again in Flemish portraits from the late Middle Ages?

This publication offers an in-depth sociological look at books of hours and their representation in portraits by the Flemish Primitives, using the internationally renowned collection of Musea Brugge as a starting point.

Dr. Evelien Hauwaerts is Curator of Medieval Manuscripts, Openbare Bibliotheek Brugge in Bruges, Belgium. Her areas of specialization are: Medieval manuscripts and book production, incunabula and librarianship of special collections (especially collection valorization and digitization); Medieval and Burgundian reading culture: reception, consumption and transmission of texts; Monastic manuscript culture; Medieval miniatures and woodcuts; International Image Interoperability Framework (IIIF) and Linked Open Data (LOD).

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