

Prayer Book of Anne de Bretagne

The Prayer Book of Anne de Bretagne was created in Tours, France between 1492 and 1495. This is near the end of the medieval era as we discussed in class. During this time period religion played a prominent role in many people’s lives. To further enhance people’s faith in Christianity and help them during their time worshipping, prayer books were created to guide them through the journey. Some books were small for personal use and some books were large for churches so many people can view them.

Jean Poyer, an eminent illustrator of his time, designed the “Prayer book of Anne de Bretagne”. He also illustrated “Hours of Henry VIII”, another prominent prayer book. This shows that he was an outstanding painter during his career. Queen Anne de Bretagne requested the book to be created by Jean Poyer. She requested the book because she wanted to give it to her son, Charles Orland, for him to learn about religion. However, Charles died at a very early age of two years old.

The book was written in French and Latin. Some parts of the book was written in Latin and most other parts were written in French. By going through the pages, the readers can see that the text is in French but the prayers and parts from the Bible is Latin. Since we already know who it was written for – the son of Anne Bretagne- there is a logical reason behind why the book was written in two different languages. First, only the highly educated knew how to read Latin so it shows that this book was meant only for the highly educated. However, since the original intention was to give the book for a new born boy, it would have been hard for him to read the book if the book was entirely in Latin. Therefore, the book had to contain some French in order for the young boy to comprehend the meanings of the text. Therefore, because the book was written in French and Latin, most French people would have been able to read the book. In many cases, many books that were written for an average person would contain limited Latin because they were not educated enough to read Latin. Their only knowledge of Latin would have been from the preaching of the church.

The contents of many book of hours – otherwise known as prayer books – are very similar. First, most books included a calendar of widely observed feasts. This is because religious days were very important during the medieval times. This would help people keep track of when and why the feasts were celebrated. Then came the four gospel lessons from the book of John, Luke, Mathew and Mark. These chapters were essential because these four chapters talk about the life of Jesus Christ, which Christianity is based on. There are other main key components to the book such as “The Hours of the Virgin”, “The Hours of the Cross and the Hours of the Holy Spirit”, “Two prayers to the Virgin” “The Penitential Psalms and Litany”, “The Office of the Dead Numerous Suffrages”, and additional prayers that were all taken from different sections of the bible. These prayers were guidelines for Christians on how to pray. The book of hours helped the readers to read the highlights of the bible and learn the important morals to help them with their prayers.

The size of the book is 126 mm x 80 mm. The size of the book is relatively smaller than the other books from the Middle Ages. This means that the primary purpose of the book was for an individual – Charles in this case – to carry the book around rather than using it for a group of people. This enables him to strengthen his faith for Christianity which also reflects how important religion was in the medieval ages. Since people of royalty were seen as role models for the average citizen, everyone would have tried to have their own personal books for religion.

The book is bound by a rose velvet in red morocco chemise, in red morocco case. From the information given, it does not state if the book was rebound or not. However, by looking at the pictures of the book, there does not seem to be any evidence of a rebounding because the spine seems to be in a poor condition. The book was probably not rebounded again because rebounding books damages the pages, as we learned in class during our trip to Emory’s Rose library. Now, the book does not need to be rebound because modern technology can help to preserve the book. However, the book was taken care very well for it to last centuries without being rebounded.

The pages of the book is very detailed and very colorful. It seems much like a modern children book with bright colors and words that correspond with the drawings. This could be because the original audience for the book was for a child. This would have helped Charles to comprehend what the text is about by matching the text with the illuminations. Each of the pages has decorated illuminations that contain many different colors. The book has 34 miniatures which would have taken a long time to paint. Each page of the book also has a unique design surrounding the miniatures which shows that the artist took time to construct each page. The design consists of letters spaced out evenly spelling Anne de Botagne’s name, with blocks or lines that surrounds each letter. (See image 1)The colors used for the design are mainly dark and light brown, red and blue. The artist uses these colors to make the book more vibrant and more capturing for the reader. This shows that this book would have been costly and was not intended for the average person.

Each page only consists of little bit of text and most of the page is filled with drawings and designs that pertains to the text; each page has only one or two sentences. This makes the book easier to read and understand which would have been beneficial to Charles since he was only a child. Furthermore, the beginning letter of every page is decorated. The letters are bigger with color decorations – the letters are white but blue, red and green are used around the letters for decorations. Some letters have colored lines and other letters have colored dots. These detailed drawings show how much time Jean Poyer has spent on creating this book. This further supports that an average person would not have owned this book because of how costly it would have been to purchase one.

Overall, this magnificent prayer book displays one of many personal books that Christians used to devote their life to their religion. Compared to many other books, this book is unique because of the precision that has been put to create this book because the language and the drawings seem very meticulous. The book also further represents how prominent religion played on the European culture during the medieval ages and how religious books were ubiquitous in the culture. It helped to strengthen people’s faiths through religious rituals such as prayers and feasts.



(Image 1) fol. 1v–2

Reflection

For my manuscript analysis, I made a few changes from the previous paper. First, I changed a few words which to better describe what I was talking about. For example, when I was describing what each page of the manuscript looks like, I wrote, “ each of the pages has decorated manuscripts but I meant to say illuminations instead of manuscripts. After reading through the paper, I also noticed some awkward sentences that was hard to understand so I changed the structure of the sentence to make it more clear. To expand on the paper, I included some details that I left out before. For example, I wrote how Charles died when he was a child which helped to the context of Charles’ life which was the original owner of the book. I also explained more about the contents of the book. For example, I wrote why the dates for feasts were part of many prayer books and what the importance of having the Bible verses from John, Luke, Mathew and Mark. I also further explained why the book was written in French and Latin.