

A Netherlandish Manuscript Page at Florida State

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From the ninth century, hand-executed liturgical books were valued for religious, aesthetic and edificatory reasons and were often listed as part of an inheritance in a family inventory of treasured items. As printed books multiplied, the acquisition of the older hand-made manuscripts was related to their value as commerce. In many cases, unmoved by the incomparable worth of the lustrous pages as complete volumes, the profitable return on individual pages tempted some book dealers to separate manuscripts and sell the leaves one by one. Single manuscript pages in diverse collections may be a result of this custom.

Among the collections at Strozier Library, Florida State University owns a manuscript page which was acquired in the 1940s but has never been identified. The recto of the page is shown in Figure 1, the verso in Figure 2. The page measures 11.3 × 15.9 centimeters. There are nineteen ruled lines of text written in brown ink, accented with red, and with red rubrics. The leaf is certainly a page from a Book of Hours, written in the Middle Netherlandish language.

The Book of Hours was the most popular book in medieval Europe. Although first adopted as part of the Breviary in the tenth century, the Book of Hours became a separate book during the thirteenth century. The demand for new copies by the faithful from the thirteenth through the sixteenth centuries was not extraordinary if one considers that its appeal was remarkably fitted to the devotional habits in favor at the time. The Book of Hours was the layman's prayerbook for private contemplation, the monastic's handbook for daily recitation, and the prince's volume for wealthy display. With its anthology of psalms, Collects (prayers), hymns and responses, it afforded the opportunity to repeat the canonical offices of the church liturgy in private devotions.

According to John Harthan in his summary, *The Book of Hours*, the calendar at the beginning was fixed, but the order of the separate parts varied as did the number of texts and their position in the book. They are listed here in the sequence which was most common.¹

1. Calendar
2. Sequences of the Gospels
3. The prayer *Obsecro te*
4. The prayer *O intemerata*
5. Hours of the Virgin
6. Hours of the Cross
7. Hours of the Holy Spirit
8. Penitential Psalms
9. Litany
10. Office of the Dead
11. Suffrages of the Saints

The liturgical day was divided into specific "hours" for

performing the different services of worship. There was no exact time for the recitations as long as they occurred at approximately three-hour intervals.² There were seven Hours distributed into night, day and evening categories. The times below are only estimations, and would have been influenced by the seasons and the occupations of the participants.³

<i>Night hours</i>	Matins Lauds	3:30 A.M. 5:00 A.M.	(to be recited between midnight and dawn)
<i>Day hours</i>	Prime Tierce Sext None	6:00 A.M. 9:00 A.M. 12:00 noon 3:00 P.M.	
<i>Evening hours</i>	Vespers Compline	4:30 P.M. 6:00 P.M.	

The most familiar part of the Book of Hours is the Hours of the Virgin (*cf.* item 5, listed above). In those Hours, the length of text for each service varied. Matins, Lauds and Vespers are the longest. Prime, Tierce, Sext and None are short, with a simplified text composed of verse, response, hymn, three psalms, Capitulum and Collect. Some of the longer services could take as much as two hours to complete. The Hours of the Holy Spirit usually came after the Hours of the Virgin—its text generally quite short, consisting of a hymn, antiphon, and prayer.⁴ The Florida State University page is from the "Short Hours of the Holy Spirit." In Netherlandish manuscripts, the regular grouping of texts consists of antiphons, versicles, sometimes psalms, prayers (Collects), invocations (Vespers), and a hymn.⁵ Placed in the liturgical hours, Florida State's leaf contains the end of None and the beginning of Vespers.

On the first line of the recto are the last eight and a half words of the versicle. Then comes the prayer or Collect. The lower six lines on the recto are the beginning of Vespers, or the standard invocation found at all hours except Matins and Compline. The rubric for the hymn, "ymnus" is the last word on the recto page.⁶ The verso of the leaf contains the text of the hymn, and in Netherlandish texts it would usually be the same in each of the hours. Here it is the Dutch translation of the Latin hymn, "Veni creator spiritus."⁷ The antiphon and the psalm would have followed.⁸

Toward the end of the Middle Ages, cities and economies were burgeoning, and irregularities in church practices occasioned protests for reform. The general sentiment was a demand for a more individual rather than an institutional form of worship. One of the most eloquent reformers was the Dutch scholar, lawyer, cleric, and theologian, Geert

Grote (1340–1384).⁹ He had a passion for books, exhibited by his employment of five full-time copyists and his constant negotiations involving the exchange and copying of books for himself and others. His letters on pastoral or personal matters always seemed to return to discussions about the price of parchment, the need for speed in copying, the lending of the copy-models, or the desire for additional bags of books. In reply to a letter from a friend asking advice, “Grote began his letter by saying ‘I love you, because you love books.’”¹⁰

Evidently, a man of enormous energy and accomplishment,¹¹ Grote preached, traveled and wrote copiously. Along with scholarly opinions on ecclesiastical themes, objections to the building of the cathedral at Utrecht, and an unflinching attack on the Focarists (clergy who lived as married men),¹² he also wrote many treatises on spiritual and practical guidance.

Grote read and quoted from Aristotle, Seneca, Livy, Cicero, Gregory, Augustine, Bernard, Aquinas, and the Bible, among favorite books. Moreover, he wrote translations of notable literature which he felt should be widely dispersed, and—most important in this regard—he wrote a Dutch translation of the Book of Hours. Almost all of the Middle Netherlandish prayerbooks that survive contain his translation.¹³

The acceptance of a vernacular translation was swift and points to an atmosphere receptive to personal communion with God outside the strictures of the church.

Organized around Grote’s preachings and treatises, his enthusiastic followers sought to establish houses for communal lay groups who wished to live apart and worship properly. As a result, the Brotherhood of Common Life was begun in 1383,¹⁴ and led to the formation of fraternities dedicated to the education of schoolboys and the copying of books. Figure 3 is a map of all of the Houses of the Brothers of Common Life. Deventer was the hometown of Geert Grote.

Geert Grote’s religious reform movement is referred to as the Modern Devotion. In his book *A Century of Dutch Manuscript Illumination*, L.M.J. Delaissé writes that it was a popular movement that appealed to an intellectual and spiritual elite. He also states that “The Modern Devotion can be considered one of the most vital changes in the spiritual life of western Europe.”¹⁵ Consequently, Grote contributed not only the translation of the Book of Hours, but the schools of copyists who would continue to produce an enormous amount of church and classical manuscripts.¹⁶

By the fifteenth century there were a large number of lay workshops and free-lance practitioners involved in the calligraphy and decoration of manuscripts. The brethren in the Grote fraternities were lay persons who undertook to copy books as a full-time occupation. Often there were thirty-five copyists working in a single Brotherhouse, plus the thirty or forty schoolboys in the usual Brotherhood hostel. Some Brotherhouses conducted schools for local and boarding students, while others merely provided the hostel for out-of-town schoolboys who would otherwise be unable to attend nearby universities. When not occupied with their studies, the boys copied books to help defray the cost of their lodgings. It is interesting to note that Erasmus attended the school of the Brotherhood from 1478 to 1483, and that Martin Luther boarded with the Brothers and attended school in Mageburg in 1497.¹⁷

Admittedly, the Florida State acquisition could have

been produced in another workshop, but a routine day in a Grote Brotherhouse will give an understanding of the pattern of meditation and writing involved in producing hand-lettered books. According to R.R. Post in his book *The Modern Devotion*, the brethren rose at half past three to read the Breviary and pray the Hours of the Virgin. Afterward there was opportunity for studying the Holy Scripture for an hour. From seven until ten each morning the brethren copied books, and then attended Mass in a parish church. There was reading aloud during meals and in the summer the Brothers could take a nap at the table while the reader finished his meal. In the afternoon they again wrote from twelve until three. Vespers were at half past four, followed by writing from five to seven. Then they had their evening meal and attended Compline. Everyone had to be in bed at half past eight.¹⁸ Throughout the day, while copying, the brothers were to meditate on subjects chosen and announced each morning. A fearful subject one day was alternated with a comforting one the next.

From comparison with similar, dated manuscripts, the approximate date of the Florida State leaf can be determined. However, there are divergent views about the region of origin. There is evidence relating the page to two different Netherlandic areas, the southern Netherlands and the northeastern Netherlands.

A Dutch manuscript of the Book of Hours owned by the Boston Public Library (MS 159) has pages in which the illuminated border decoration and the painted initials resemble those of the Florida State leaf. There is a difference in the decorative placement, however; the Boston pages have the design at the bottom and around the outer borders, never on the top and bottom only. After examination, Laura Monti, Keeper of Rare Books and Manuscripts at the Boston Public Library, concluded that they are undoubtedly from the same school of illumination, of the same era, but differ in the copyist hand. The Boston manuscript was produced in the Netherlands in the fifteenth century.¹⁹ In its Lewis Collection, the Free Library of Philadelphia has a manuscript (MS 131) with full borders which repeat many of the decorative elements of the Florida State leaf. The Lewis Book of Hours was produced in the southern Netherlands in 1470.²⁰

Dr. James Marrow, of the University of California, an expert on Dutch fifteenth-century illuminated manuscripts, in an October 23, 1984 letter regarding the Florida State page, writes that “bits of the dialectical peculiarities of this version of Geert Grote’s basic text . . . make it clear that the scribe of your leaf was from the southern rather than the northern Netherlands (present-day Belgium), a judgment I base not only on the dialect but also on the style of page layout, border decoration and painted initial. Southern Netherlands, ca. 1475 would not be far from the mark.”

Another manuscript, see Figure 4, dated 1475 from the city of Ghent in the southern Netherlands, or Flanders, is from the Bodleian Library, Oxford, England, the Book of Hours, folio 15, page 68 verso. It is probably from another workshop, but there is a likeness in the shape and composition of the floral motifs within the decorative borders. Likewise, the Beinecke Library at Yale University owns a Book of Hours (MS 190) produced in Flanders, dated 1470 (Figure 5). Instead of top and bottom border decoration, it includes full borders with similarities to both the Oxford and Florida State pages. Admittedly there are differences in the leaves, however, the repeated elements in the Oxford,

Beinecke, and Florida State images are sufficient to demonstrate a style of decoration common to manuscripts originating in the southern Netherlands during the last third of the fifteenth century.

In Flanders, Books of Hours were often made without miniatures. Sometimes the beginning of each service was placed on the recto of pages, so that miniatures could later be inserted opposite them. Most of the attachable miniatures were produced in Utrecht. In 1427 the city of Bruges prohibited the sale of miniatures from Utrecht. The northern pages must have flooded the market and presented a threat to the artists of Bruges. From an illustration in Delaissé's book, see Figure 6, an example of the inserted miniature can be seen in two pages owned by the National Library in Vienna, MS 1988, page 30 verso and 31 recto. The recto exhibits the broad acanthus leaves characteristic of books made in Ghent,²¹ the page is dated 1480 and resembles the Florida State leaf. The page facing it, however, was probably made in Utrecht. There is indeed a great disparity between the Ghent page and its opposite miniature.

The Florida State page may be from Flanders because it is from the less elaborate type of book, without miniatures—at least there was no miniature distinguishing the beginning of Vespers, which did appear on the recto of the page. The initials are painted and illuminated, but they are not inhabited, historiated, textured, or foliated, and birds and animals are absent from the borders (Figure 7).

The Special Collections of the Van Pelt Library at the University of Pennsylvania owns a Book of Hours in the translation of Geert Grote.²² Their leaf 105 (recto and verso) contains the same text as the manuscript leaf from the Florida State library collection. Page 95 recto in the Van Pelt volume also displays the large blue and gold acanthus leaves in the border (Figure 8). In his 1976 article "Medi-

eval Netherlandic Manuscripts in Greater Philadelphia Libraries," Phillip E. Webber describes the Van Pelt manuscript as fifteenth century, in the dialect of the northeastern Netherlands.²³

Likewise, in correspondence about the Florida State leaf, Dr. Webber writes "The language is not, however, that of the southern Netherlands, but rather that of the northeast (provinces of Gelderland and Overijssel). The language is, for the most part, free of any regionalisms, a situation which is more common in the northern than in the southern Netherlands."²⁴ He does not deal with the pattern of decorative motif, but uses dialectic features to explain his conclusion. As an example, Webber says that the word *seuenuoldich* (sevenfold) on line 8 of the Florida State verso, would invariably be *seuenoudich* anywhere else except the northeastern Netherlands.²⁵

The northern designation is further supported by Dr. P. F. J. Obbema, the Keeper of Western Manuscripts at the University of Leiden. He states "according to language and decoration the provenance must be the northern Netherlands (not Flemish . . .). The date will be about 1450–60."²⁶

Undoubtedly, the approximate dates of origin for the Netherlandish page at Florida State are 1450 to 1480, and more specifically, *ca.* 1475. Much evidence can be adduced to support the idea that the page originated in the southern part of the Netherlands, and possibly in the city of Ghent, and equally convincing points can be made to corroborate the notion that it was produced in the north, but neither conviction can here conclusively be shown to be accurate. Nevertheless, if Grote's philosophy of rapidly copying books for educational distribution persisted into the late fifteenth century in the Netherlandish Brotherhouses, then the Florida State University leaf is quite likely to have been produced in just such an environment.

Florida State University

This author offers sincere thanks to Dr. James Marrow, Professor of Art History, University of California, Berkeley, and to Dr. Phillip E. Webber, Central College, Pella, Iowa, for so graciously sharing professional knowledge concerning the Florida State manuscript page.

1 John Harthan, commentary and historical survey, *The Book of Hours* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1977), p. 15.

2 Harthan, p. 12.

3 Gloria König Fiero, "Devotional Illumination in Early Netherlandish Manuscripts," Florida State University, 1970, p. 13.

4 Harthan, p. 17.

5 Correspondence from Dr. James Marrow, October 23, 1984.

6 Marrow.

7 F. J. Mone, *Lateinische Hymnen des Mittelalters* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder'sche Verlagshandlung, 1853), p. 241.

8 N. Van Wijk, *Het Getijdenboek Van Geert Grote*, Naar Het Haagse Handschrift 133 E21, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1940) "The Book of Hours of Geert Grote, after the Hague Manuscript 133 E21" The standard modern edition of the Dutch Book of Hours.

9 For a complete analysis of the life and writings of Geert Grote see R. Post, *The Modern Devotion* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1968).

10 Post 103. From W. Mulder, editor *Gerardi Magni Epistolae* in a series of *Ons Geestelijk Erf* (Antwerpen, 1933) n. 23, pp. 100–106.

11 For a discussion of Grote's intellectual abilities and learning, see Post, pp. 98–108.

12 Grote gave a famous sermon on August 14, 1383 in which he said, "Shun those priests, who live as married men and shun all sinners, isolate them, have nothing to do with them." *Modern Devotion*, p. 130 from J. G. J. Tiecke, *Die Werken van Geert Groote*, Diss. Nijmegen, 1947, 144–152.

13 Marrow.

14 Post, p. 202.

15 L.M.J. Delaissé, *A Century of Dutch Manuscript Illumination* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968), p. 9.

16 For a concise review of Grote's Modern Devotion movement, see Delaissé, pp. 8–12.

17 Post, pp. 350, 629.

18 Post, p. 236.

19 C. U. Faye and W. H. Bond, *Supplement to the Census of Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts in the United States and Canada* (New York: The Bibliographical Society of America, 1962), p. 218.

20 Phillip E. Webber, "Medieval Netherlandic Manuscripts in Greater Philadelphia Libraries," *Archives & Bibliothèques de Belgique* (Brussels, Belgium: 1976) p. 487.

21 Delaissé, p. 72.

22 Supplement, p. 480.

23 Philadelphia Libraries, pp. 477-478.

24 Correspondence from Dr. Webber, July 10, 1985.

25 A. Van Loey, *Middel nederlandse Spraakunst*, vol. 2 *Klankleer* (Groningen: Wolters-Noordhoff, 6th ed. 1969) par. 96.

26 Correspondence from Bibliotheek der Rijksuniversiteit te Leiden, Netherland, October 26, 1984.



Figure 1, Page from Netherlandish Book of Hours, ca. 1475, Florida State University, Special Collections, Strozier Library.



Figure 2, Verso of Netherlandish Page, Florida State University.

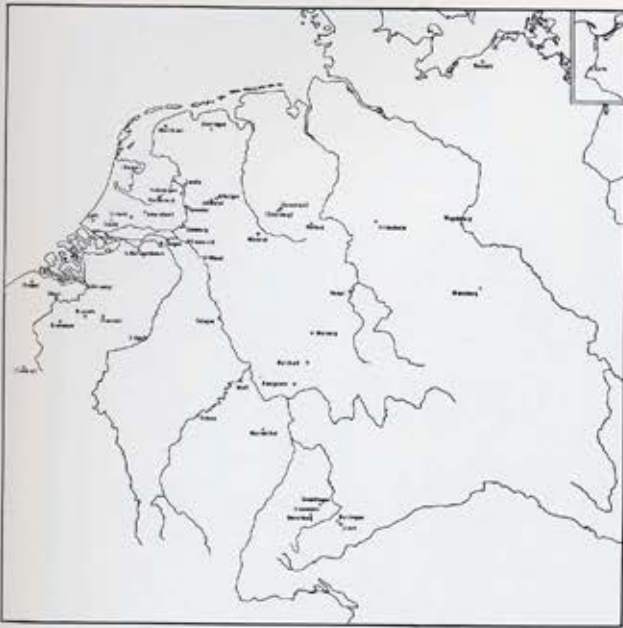


Figure 3, Map of the Houses of the Brothers of Common Life, 1968, R. R. Post, *The Modern Devotion*, courtesy of E. J. Brill, Leiden.



Figure 4, MS Gough Liturgy 15 folio 68v, 1475, courtesy of the Department of Western Manuscripts, Bodleian Library, Oxford, England.



Figure 5, MS 190, folio 14r, "Gimbel Hours," courtesy of the Beinecke Library, Yale University.



Figure 6, MS 1988, *The Annunciation*, Nationalbibliothek, Vienna, L. M. J. Delaissé, *A Century of Dutch Manuscript Illumination*, 1968, courtesy of University of California Press.

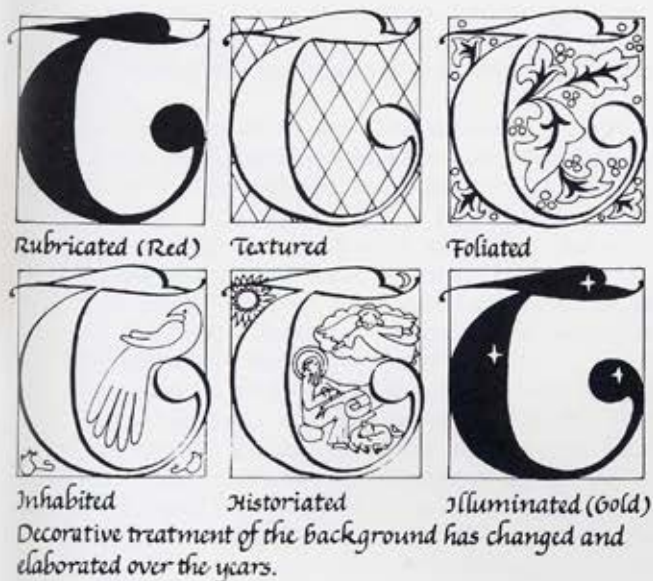


Figure 7, Margaret Shepherd, "Gothic Capitals," 1982, *Learning Calligraphy*, courtesy of Macmillan Publishing Co.



Figure 8, MS Flemish 1, 95r, courtesy of the Van Pelt Library, University of Pennsylvania System.