

# Die Bibel in der Kunst / Bible in the Arts

Online-Zeitschrift 5, 2021

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## Abstract

This essay charts the significant trends and variations in the art decorating the section devoted to Pss 120-134 in medieval Books of Hours. An examination of over 30 manuscripts ranging in date and region reveals that the images display a remarkable breadth of subject matter, and promote a range of ethical, religious, and political agendas. This is distinct from other sections in the Hours which display a much more standard visual program. Looking at particular exemplars such as the de Brailes and the Taymouth Hours, as well as dominant pictorial themes such as the presentation of Mary at the Temple and the owners kneeling in prayer, the images present a window into the values and practices of lay women and men through centuries. Building on scriptural exegesis by earlier theologians such as Augustine, and shaped by traditions of reception history of the texts themselves, the illustrations model a variety of religious practices and aspirations. In a context where one's eternal life was held in the balance, the artistic programs of the Fifteen Psalms encouraged the readers in their daily prayers and almsgiving, and promoted particular social roles and political activity.

## 1. Introduction

Books of Hours were ubiquitous in the religious practice of women and men in Europe between the 10–16<sup>th</sup> centuries, with the late thirteenth century inaugurating their Golden Age in terms of use and influence.<sup>1</sup> These books were the most frequently purchased book of the late Middle Ages, and the rise of the printing press made the volumes even more affordable for more people. The main centers of production were France and the Netherlands, although their use permeated all of Europe. It is estimated that there were 57,000 printed copies in circulation just in England in the two generations prior to the Reformation, ranging in price from a king's ransom to only a few pence.<sup>2</sup> Derived from the more complex prayer prac-

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<sup>1</sup> For a general introduction, see Wieck, *Time Sanctified*, 159–162, 166–176; and Wieck, *Prayer for the People*, 389–416. For a discussion that includes a consideration of Books of Hours as well as illustrated Psalters, see Gillingham, *Psalms through the Centuries*, 62-66, 95-101, and 103-104.

The author would like to thank the anonymous reviewer for several helpful comments that have strengthened this article.

<sup>2</sup> Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, 25, 209–232. For more, see, by the same author, *Marking the Hours*.

tices of monasteries, Books of Hours contained an edited number of prayers and Psalms to be used by lay people. Their small size, usually around 5 x 2 inches, allowed them to be easily carried and read throughout the day.

A core component in many of these Hours is Pss 120–134.<sup>3</sup> These short poems were already linked together in the ancient world with the superscription “a psalm of ascents” in Hebrew beginning each one.<sup>4</sup> Within the Books of Hours, they were scattered throughout the daily offices, with Pss 120–122 usually read at the Third Hour, Pss 123–125 at the Sixth Hour, Pss 126–128 at the Ninth Hour, and Pss 123–126 again for Vespers. In addition, some Books of Hours also included a separate section containing all 15 texts in a dedicated section often referred to as *Quindecipsalmi* or The Fifteen Psalms.<sup>5</sup>

Originating as hand-written manuscripts, Books of Hours were infinitely variable in both text and illustration, yet certain patterns emerged as the patron conferred with a workshop to customize the text. Textual features that became standard include a calendar of holy days, the daily offices, and the Seven Penitential Psalms, while various prayers and commemorations followed regional practice. With regards to the artistic programs, some degree of standardization also emerges. The Office of Compline was regularly introduced with an image of Christ’s entombment, the Penitential Psalms with an image of the penitent David or Christ in judgment, the Office of the Dead with an illustration of the service for the dead, and the St. Jerome’s Psalter with an image of St. Jerome himself.<sup>6</sup>

When the Fifteen Psalms did appear as separate sections within the Hours, they were not always illustrated.<sup>7</sup> Yet, as Kathleen Scott has noted in her survey of late Gothic manuscripts, when they were illustrated, they depicted a surprising

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<sup>3</sup> Most Books of Hours contain 75 Psalms in total. For a chart listing the Psalms in various versions, see Donovan, *The de Brailes Hours*, 176–182; and Wieck, *Time Sanctified*, 159–162, 166–176.

<sup>4</sup> There is some slight variation in the collection, with the name of David appearing in the superscriptions of Pss 122, 124, 131, and 133 (“A psalm of ascents. Of David”), and Solomon in Ps 127 (“A psalm of ascents. Of Solomon”).

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, “Thys prymer of Salysbury use,” dated to 1534 for use in England and now held at Lambeth Palace. Psalm 130 also appears again in Hours containing the seven penitential Psalms (Pss 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, and 143).

<sup>6</sup> See the table of 42 English Books of Hours ca. 1390–1480 in Scott, *Later Gothic Manuscripts II*: 383.

<sup>7</sup> For Hours that include the Fifteen Psalms without any illustration, see the Hasting Hours, now in the British Library, Add MS 54782: [http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Add\\_MS\\_54782](http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Add_MS_54782); and the De Lisle Hours = New York, Pierpont Morgan Library MS G. 50. For Hours that introduce the section only with a decorated initial “A,” see MS Laud Misc. 188, Hours of the Virgin (ca.1380–1400), f.208r; [https://medieval.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/catalog/manuscript\\_6997](https://medieval.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/catalog/manuscript_6997); Sandler, *Gothic Manuscripts*, 171–72, no. 149; and MS Gough liturgy 6 (ca.1410), f.41v; [https://medieval.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/catalog/manuscript\\_4932](https://medieval.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/catalog/manuscript_4932); Scott, *Later Gothic Manuscripts II*: 111–112, no. 29.

variety of subjects.<sup>8</sup> While the decision to illustrate it with the Presentation of Mary or a laywoman at her prayers was not uncommon, other options included images of King David, Susanna, Christ, or God himself. The remarkable range of subjects has implications for tracking the reception of these Psalms in the western tradition. That is to say, the variable artistic program guiding the interpretation of these texts means that their meaning remained open. Because of the different images enhancing their visual presentation, the Psalms of Ascents were available to reflect connections with both men and women, lay people and saints, personages from the biblical past as well as people currently using the book itself. This openness also meant that texts could be associated with a variety of agendas related to politics, ethics, and religious practices.

The following essay charts the significant trends and variations in the art decorating the section devoted to Pss 120–134 in medieval Books of Hours. An examination of over 30 manuscripts that contain the Fifteen Psalms, ranging in date and region, reveals that the images display a remarkable breadth of subject matter, and promote a range of ethical, religious, and political agendas. Looking at particular exemplars such as the de Brailes and the Taymouth Hours, as well as dominant pictorial themes such as the presentation of Mary at the Temple and the owners kneeling in prayer, the images present a window into the values and practices of lay women and men through centuries. Viewed together as a group, the images both reflect and support a robust architecture of faith. Building on scriptural exegesis by earlier theologians such as Augustine, and shaped by traditions of reception history of the texts themselves, the illustrations model a variety of religious practices and aspirations. In a context where one's eternal life was held in the balance, the artistic programs of the Fifteen Psalms encouraged the readers in their daily prayers and almsgiving, and promoted particular social roles and political activity.

## 2. The de Brailes Hours: Prayer and Charity

One of the earliest Books of Hours from England is the de Brailes Hours, so-named for its illustrator who worked on the text in Oxford ca. 1240.<sup>9</sup> Given the early date, the de Brailes Hours emerged in a context with few antecedents, and the norms of the genre were still being worked out. Between its covers, we see so many of the features that would come to define the genre for centuries to come, including the daily prayer offices to be said throughout the day followed by ad-

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<sup>8</sup> Scott, *Later Gothic Manuscripts I*: 57.

<sup>9</sup> Ff. 90r–102r in Add MS 49999, now in the British Library, London; [http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Add\\_MS\\_49999&index=36](http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Add_MS_49999&index=36); Donovan, *The de Brailes Hours*; Kauffmann, *Biblical Imagery in Medieval England*, fig. 116; Kumler, *Translating Truth*, 110 (fig. 29), 111, 255 (n. 28).

ditional prayers to local saints, and separate sections for selected psalms (here, the seven Penitential Psalms, followed by the Fifteen Psalms). The text was also illustrated with miniatures and historiated initials depicting the life of Jesus and various legends, as well as a few portraits of the original female owner (ff. 64v, 75r, 87v, and 88r) and William de Brailes himself (ff. 43r, 47r).

In the section containing the Fifteen Psalms, all of the texts begin with historiated initials that include scenes, first from the life of Susanna (Pss 120–128; ff. 90r–96r), and then of a generous layman (Pss 130–134; ff. 97v–101v).<sup>10</sup> In the initial that begins Ps 120, Susanna kneels in prayer as she stretches her arms out towards heaven (Fig. 1), with the vernacular text below explaining “she calls on God in her tribulation.” In the following initials, Susanna is brought before Daniel and the judges (Fig. 2), and Daniel questions the first elder, then the second (Fig. 3–4). When the two testimonies contradict each other, the elders are exposed as liars and thrown into a fire (Fig. 5–6). In response, Susanna praises God, and later her soul is carried up to heaven (Fig. 7–8).



Fig. 1: MS 49999, f. 90r.



Fig. 2: f. 90v.



Fig. 3: f. 91v.

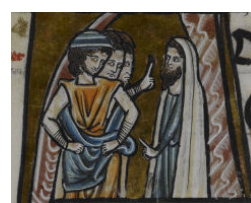


Fig. 4: f. 92v.



Fig. 5: f. 93r.



Fig. 6: f. 94r.

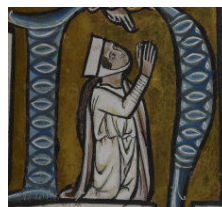


Fig. 7: f. 95r.

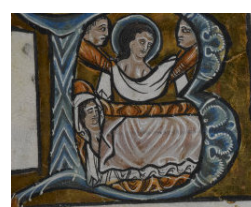


Fig. 8: f. 96r.

Divided by a decorated initial beginning Ps 129 (Fig. 9), the artistic narrative changes to the story of a layman told in the historiated initials that begin Pss 130–134. The first portrays a kneeling man holding a veiled chalice on an altar (Fig. 10) and we are told in the annotation below that his gift is for the church of St. Laurence. In the next scene the man lies dead on his bed, and the disturbed and red sky above indicates that all is not well in the heavenly realm (Fig. 11). He then appears standing between St. Michael and Satan as they contend for his soul (Fig. 12), and, as a man in a brick tower points to the next scene, St. Laurence places the man's head on one balance of a scale as Satan pulls down the other

<sup>10</sup> Some propose that the woman depicted is not Susanna, but rather the original owner. See Higgitt, *The Murthly Hours*, 182–183; and Gee, *Women, Art, and Patronage*, 69, n. 117.



side (Fig. 13–14). At the beginning of the prayer that closes the section, the initial depicts the man being carried up to heaven in a white sheet (Fig. 15).

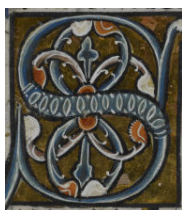


Fig. 9: f. 96v.



Fig. 10: f. 97v.

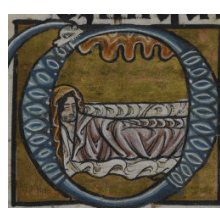


Fig. 11: f. 98r.

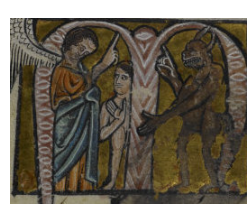


Fig. 12: f. 98v.



Fig. 13: f. 100v.



Fig. 14: f. 101r.

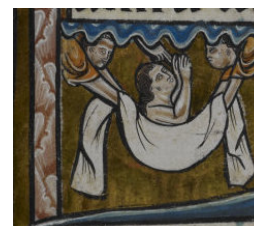


Fig. 15: f. 101v.

When comparing these Hours to those produced in later periods, one is struck by the generous amount of space and artistic consideration devoted to the Psalms of Ascents. As mentioned above, while these psalms aren't infrequently included in Hours, their popularity didn't become as great as other collections such as the seven Penitential Psalms. And even when they are included, usually the full text is given only for Pss 132–134, because Pss 120–131 also appear in the daily offices usually presented earlier in the volume. But here in the de Brailes, all of the Psalms are written out fully in Latin. Finally, while it is statistically rare that the collection is linked with more than one illustration, the de Brailes Hours introduces all but one of the Psalms of Ascents with an historiated initial (the decorated initial of 129 marking the division between the stories of Susanna and the generous layman), accompanied by captions in Anglo-Norman French explaining their contents.

In terms of religious practice and belief, the artistic program in the de Brailes's Psalms of Ascents promotes acts of prayer and charity by the laity as means for the ultimate goal of ascent into heaven. Unique within this book, Susanna and the generous man are the only lay or non-royal figures besides Jesus and the Virgin Mary to have their story presented over several pages.<sup>11</sup> It is also significant that both of these accounts begin in the middle of the story line. That is, we see Susanna first as she is praying to God, and have to fill in the information about

<sup>11</sup> The lives of Mary and Jesus take up much of the first part of the book, with narrative sequences devoted to Bp. Theophilus (ff. 32v–42v, 44r), the priest who only knew the mass of the Virgin (ff. 44v–46f, 48r–58r), and King David in the context of the Penitential Psalms (ff. 66r–72r, 78r–79r).

how she was falsely accused beforehand. And we have no idea why the man is presenting his gift on the altar of St. Lawrence, although judging by the size of the sins that appear on the other side of the balance upon his death, it seems likely that his generous gift aims to atone for considerable past wrongs.<sup>12</sup> Given that the Fifteen Psalms begin abruptly with the declaration “I cried out to God when I was in trouble” (Ps 120:1), beginning both pictorial programs at the point of narrative tension makes good exegetical sense. It also allows the reader more closely to identify with the characters. That is, without the specific “back story” of Susanna and the layman, other lay people in their own moment of crisis can relate to the predicament of the protagonists and be instructed by their pious acts of prayer and almsgiving.

In the scenes that illustrate the text, the ultimate end of such good deeds is acceptance of one’s soul into heaven. Both story lines conclude with such a scene, and, in so doing, draw parallels between the end of life of a layperson and the saints whose own heavenly destinations are depicted again and again throughout the volume.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, the ascent of the generous man’s soul into heaven is the final image in the book. As such, the artistic program concludes with the hopeful image of a spiritual state achievable not only by the saints, but laity as well. The initials provide “models of faith” for the laity of both sexes who contemplate them, depicting what Donovan labels “moralizing tales” that warn against sin and encourage pious deeds in order to receive the ultimate reward.<sup>14</sup>

For all that the artistic program of the de Brailes’s Fifteen Psalms envisions women as religious actors, it nevertheless also portrays them enacting traditional gender roles in which they are largely silent and passive. The prelude to the story of Susanna is a false accusation of her committing a sexual crime with a man other than her husband. Her only resources in this predicament are fervent prayer and the hope that Daniel will sort things out. This presentation is in sharp contrast to that of the generous man that directly follows. Although we don’t know for what the layman has been accused, he has the ability and resources to take deliberate action by purchasing and donating a chalice to the church. Supporting this enactment of female powerlessness is the visual presentation. Susanna’s story is dominated not by her but rather by Daniel – he appears front and center

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<sup>12</sup> There is a parallel here to the presentation of David’s life in the historiated initials of the Penitential Psalms which immediately precedes, in that the first scene depicts not his encounter with Bathsheba but rather his confrontation by Nathan.

<sup>13</sup> See the ascension into heaven by Mary (f. 61r), St. Lawrence (f. 28r), St. Catherine (f. 29r), Bp. Theophilus (f. 44r), and the priest (f. 58r).

<sup>14</sup> Donovan, *The de Brailes Hours*, 40. For an argument that the book includes several cycles of models of faith that intends to teach the reader, see Joiner, *Performing Faith*. Note also De Brailes’s self in a miniature of the Last Judgment in a manuscript in the Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, as such (MS W. 106, fol. 23); Randall, *En route to Salvation*, 83–93.

in four of the eight initials which is the same number of her appearances in a story that purports to be about her.<sup>15</sup> This artistic choice is especially significant given that the male protagonist in the other parts of the book appear in all of the historiated initials that tell their narrative.<sup>16</sup>

As one of the earliest exemplars, the de Brailes Hours models an approach to the visual presentation of the Fifteen Psalms that links the texts to lay moral exemplars who model earthly lives that cumulate in heavenly rewards. Although the lay man and woman depicted in this section don't have the same agency in responding to moral crises, they do both have access to God through prayer and good works. They are also both given the same eternal possibilities open to the saints and the ordained. Some of the earliest users of this book, both women and men, were spurred on in their prayers and deeds of righteousness via the images associated with the Fifteen Psalms.

### 3. The Owner at Prayer: Access to Heaven

After the de Brailes Hours, the figure of Susanna only rarely appears in later Hours, with a rare exception such as an English example illustrated in the early 15<sup>th</sup> century: MS B.11.7 (Fig. 16).<sup>17</sup> The vast majority of later texts associate



Fig. 16: MS B.11.7, f. 66v.

the Fifteen Psalms either with other biblical characters such as Mary and David and God (discussed later in this essay), or with portraits of lay people at prayer, kneeling before an open book or an altar. Above their heads, the heavens respond favorably, either with Christ holding an orb and stretching out his right arm in blessing or the hand of God reaching out from a cloud. The examples listed below manifest a wide temporal and geographical reach:

<sup>15</sup> In the presentation of the legend of Theophilus, the protagonist appears in all of the historiated initials (ff. 32v–42v; 44r), as does the protagonist of the story of priest who only knew the Mass of the Virgin (ff. 44v–46f, 48r–58r), as well as David in the Penitential Psalms (ff. 66r–89r).

<sup>16</sup> The one exception is when a male recluse points to the scene on the next page, where the deeds of the man are weighed in the balance (ff. 101v and 101r).

<sup>17</sup> F. 66v in MS B.11.7, now at Cambridge, Trinity College; <https://mss-cat.trin.cam.ac.uk/Manuscript/B.11.7/UV#?c=0&m=0&s=0&cv=72&r=0&xywh=-377%2C-190%2C5566%2C3768>.

Scott, *Later Gothic Manuscripts II*, 152–154, no. 47. For the date of the text and illustrations, see Orr, *Illustration as Preface and Postscript*, 162–163.



- Cod. lat. XIV (S.5); ca.1250, Oxford; a woman (most likely the original owner) kneels and reads at a prie-dieu in f. 173v.<sup>18</sup>
- MS 21000 (the Murthley Hours); ca. 1280, created in France for use in England; the woman owner kneels before her open Book of Hours as Christ looks down with arms raised in blessing (Fig. 17).<sup>19</sup>
- MS W. 97; late 13<sup>th</sup> century, Paris; a woman prays before an altar with the God-head looking on from the heavens (f. 81v).<sup>20</sup>
- MS W. 102; late 13<sup>th</sup> century, English; as a man kneels in prayer, an assailant approaches from behind with his sword raised. Above, the hand of God emerges from the clouds in blessing (Fig. 18).<sup>21</sup>



Fig. 17: MS 21000, f. 149v.



Fig. 18: MS W. 102, f. 39r.

- MS W. 40: Paris, 1200s; a king prays before an altar (f. 115).<sup>22</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Now in Museum für angewandte Kunst, Vienna. See Morgan, *Early Gothic Manuscripts II*: 66–67, no.104; Donovan, *The de Brailes Hours*, 151; Alexa Kristen Sand, *Vision, Devotion, and Self-Representation*, 162–163. Note that the same women in also depicted on ff. 25r and 153r. Whereas Morgan and Donovan agree that this is the original owner, Sand is less sure.

<sup>19</sup> Now in the National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh; <https://digital.nls.uk/murthlyhours/page/?folio=300>. The text is a composite volume, but the section with the Psalms of Ascents was likely created in the late 13<sup>th</sup> century for use by a woman in England likely Joan de Valence. See Higgitt, *The Murthly Hours*, 26, 145–150.

<sup>20</sup> Now in the Walters Art Museum, Baltimore. See Randall, *Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts*, 97–99.

<sup>21</sup> Now in the Walters Art Museum, Baltimore; [https://www.thedigitalwalters.org/Data/WaltersManuscripts/W102/data/W.102/sap/W102\\_000081\\_sap.jpg](https://www.thedigitalwalters.org/Data/WaltersManuscripts/W102/data/W.102/sap/W102_000081_sap.jpg); Sandler, *Gothic Manuscripts*, 24–26, no. 15. Note that the text has been bound in the incorrect order, and that the Fifteen Psalms appear on fols. 39r–v, 31r–34v, and 49r–51r.

<sup>22</sup> Now in the Walters Art Museum, Baltimore; Randall, *Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts I*:70–92.

- Egerton MS 2781 (the Hornby Hours); ca. 1320 for use in England (north Lancashire); the woman owner kneels in prayer before a book, with a girl kneeling at her side as a hand reaches out from the heavens (f. 122v).<sup>23</sup>
- MS Douce 231; ca. 1325–1330, English (diocese of Lincoln); a man kneels in front of an altar upon which sits a chalice covered with a corporal. Above, Christ holds an orb and reaches out his hand in blessing (Fig. 19).<sup>24</sup>
- MS M. 700 (the DuBois Hours); ca. 1325–30, for use in England (Oxford?); a man kneels before an altar upon which sits a chalice covered with corporal. Above, Christ holds an orb and reaches out his hand in blessing (f. 57r).<sup>25</sup>

Two examples portray an unidentified saint. In a French Book of Hours from the 1270s, a nimbed cleric kneels and clasps his hands in prayer.<sup>26</sup> In MS 39 (English from 1420–40), the historiated initial with a man in a hat, nimbed, kneeling in prayer with a gold hand of Deity emerging from above.<sup>27</sup>

The large majority of the figures illustrated were the original owner, although there are a few exceptions. Given that the name “Hawisia” has been inserted into several prayers throughout the volume (ff. 30r, 146v, 147r, 147v), the man praying in F. 57r in MS M. 700 is likely the husband or family member of the original owner. In addition, the figure portrayed in F. 88r in MS Douce 231 (Fig. 19) is also probably not the original owner, as he is paired with various saints in the volume.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Now in the British Library, London; [http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Egerton\\_MS\\_2781](http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Egerton_MS_2781). The text was probably made for Isabel de Byron, wife of Robert I de Neville (d. c. 1335); Smith, *Art, Identity and Devotion*.

<sup>24</sup> Now in the Bodleian Library, Oxford; <https://digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/objects/505e2c19-ce6e-4adc-8a05-e19c48faa249/surfaces/8cbe58e9-9281-42a8-bbbd-db3e7f16c353/>; Pächt / Alexander, *Illuminated Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library III*: 53, no. 575; Sandler, *Gothic Manuscripts*, 95–96, no. 87.

<sup>25</sup> Now in the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York City; <http://ica.themorgan.org/manuscript/page/47/133201>; Sandler, *Gothic Manuscripts*, 96–98, no. 88. Note that there are two more smaller historiated initials in this section. The initial beginning Ps 124 on f. 58r depicts a bust of a male with hair and a shirt, but has no discernible facial features. The initial beginning Ps 126 on f. 59r depicts a hybrid man, with hood and wings, and a human head at the hind.

<sup>26</sup> F. 75r in MS L.1990.38 (The Hours of Marie); now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Note that Bennett believes that, despite the halo, the image may not represent a saint but rather a confessor or chaplain. See Bennett, *A Thirteenth-Century French Book of Hours for Marie*, 27.

<sup>27</sup> F. 55v in MS 39, now in the University Library, Edinburgh. [https://archives.collections.ed.ac.uk/repositories/2/archival\\_objects/147780](https://archives.collections.ed.ac.uk/repositories/2/archival_objects/147780); Scott, *Later Gothic Manuscripts*, II: 235–237, no.81.

<sup>28</sup> According to Sandler, the figure is Thomas, Earl of Lancaster, and the image relates to a campaign to have him canonized. Sandler, *Gothic Manuscripts*, 96.



Fig. 19: MS Douce 231, f. 88r.

In texts that do depict their original owners, beginning the Fifteen Psalms with an image of the owner kneeling in prayer creates a self-reflective devotional tone. And, as Reinburg, puts it, the image allowed the artist to “tell a story about prayer.”<sup>29</sup> As both we and the original owners gaze at the image, we see assumptions about social hierarchies and belief structures present within this visual story about prayer.

Unlike typical portraits that are meant for public display, these scenes are designed to be viewed in private by the owner alone and creates a complex “reflexive image” of the viewer and the viewed. The owner sees her physical body kneeling in prayer in a kind of image loop, and at the same time, she also sees her spiritual self in the light of God.<sup>30</sup> And because the divine world indicates favor, the posture models the devotional ideal. In the Hornby Hours (Fig. 20), for instance, the image of the owner kneeling with her daughter (or granddaughter?) intensifies this sense, reminding the viewer of the need to enact such posture as a pious exemplar for the next generation.

Along with the posture of kneeling, the appearance of an altar or an open book is usually a key part of the scene as a means of access to the heavenly realm. A chalice on the altar points to the liturgical significance of and ultimate goal of the devotional moment – union with the crucified Christ. The open book telegraphs something similar via an emphasis on a “literate devotion.”<sup>31</sup> Even when the text itself is simply an indecipherable set of dots or dashes as in the Hornby Hours, it is recognizable as a Book of Hours on account of its small size and distinctive layout as one column of text. The image communicates the value of the book and its regular use as a fulcrum between heaven and earth. Opening it in prayer provides access to God throughout the day, even as a lifetime of use prepares the owner for the ultimate encounter with the divine at the end of life.

The relationship of these scenes with the Fifteen Psalms can be interpreted as an attempt to present these texts as holistically related to the daily offices said throughout the day, and to highlight the significance of their regular use. When images such as those in the Murthly Hours include books whose text is clear



Fig. 20: MS 2781, f. 122v.

<sup>29</sup> Reinburg, *French Books of Hours*, 116.

<sup>30</sup> Sand, *Vision, Devotion, and Self-Representation*, 5.

<sup>31</sup> Smith, *Art, Identity and Devotion*, 260.

enough to read, the words are those from Ps 51:15 that begin the first daily office of Matins in the Hours of the Virgin: “Domine labia mea aperies ...” (“Lord, open my lips ...”). Thus the Fifteen Psalms display the owner reading from a different part of the Book of Hours. As noted above, most of these Psalms are already integrated into the office texts so there is a degree of textual overlap. Nevertheless, the Fifteen Psalms in these volumes are now sequestered together near the end so they appear outside of the liturgical context in which the reader typically encounters them. In such an arrangement, the reader is reminded of the original textual context of the various Psalms as a discrete part of the Psalter rather than readings threaded throughout the daily offices. And by introducing Psalms with an image of the owners beginning their days in prayer, the artistic program emphasizes that these Psalms are as central to daily religious practice as the offices themselves.

Finally, it is interesting to note the prevalence of women as well as men in these images. As such, the artistic programs document the sense of social appropriateness that praying the Hours had for both sexes equally, and the equitable access to heaven that such practice enabled.<sup>32</sup> As represented by the artistic treatment in the de Brailes Hours, the Fifteen Psalms remain open to a program of illustration that visually relates the texts to both sexes.

#### **4. The Presentation of Mary: A Model and Mediator of Faith**

Decades after the de Brailes hours was produced, another image became prevalently associated with the Fifteen Psalms: the Virgin Mary climbing the fifteen steps to the temple as she is presented there by her parents.<sup>33</sup> Examples include:

- MS 94 (F. 5.21), c.1340–1350, English; in a half-page miniature (f. 109v), Mary clasps her hands in prayer as she kneels on the steps leading up to the temple. On the altar at the top stands a gold chalice. Behind her are a man with crutch (probably Joachim) and a woman (probably Anne). In the historiated initial below is a head of a woman, probably the patron of the volume.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> For a brief overview of women’s use and ownership of Books of Hours see Reinberg, *French Books of Hours*, 71–76.

<sup>33</sup>For prayers and illustrations of Mary within Books of Hours, see Harthan, *The Book of Hours*, 26–28.

<sup>34</sup> Now at Trinity College, Dublin; [https://digitalcollections.tcd.ie/concern/file\\_sets/cv43p238q?locale=en](https://digitalcollections.tcd.ie/concern/file_sets/cv43p238q?locale=en). Sandler, *Gothic Manuscripts*, 131–132, no. 118.

- J.A. 7396, 1412–1429, English (London?); in a half-page miniature (f. 65v), Mary is presented at the temple, while the patron (the Duchess of Clarence) kneels at her prie-dieu before a female figure in blue, without halo.<sup>35</sup>
- BL Add MS 28962, 1436–1443, Spain; in a half-page miniature (f. 329r), Mary, (with a nimbus and wearing a crown), climbs the steps to the temple with her hands clasped in prayer. Looking on at the bottom of the steps stand Anna and Joachim (also nimbed) alongside a young boy. Another boy begins to climb the steps even as an older man using two canes emerges from underneath the same steps. At the top of the steps to the side sit two crowned women, one with her Book of Hours open in her lap. In the historiated initial below, Mary, nimbed, sits with her Hours in her lap.<sup>36</sup>
- MS G.9, 1450–1460, English; in a half-page miniature (f. 84v), Mary kneels on the temple steps alongside Joachim and Anna, their hands clasped in prayer. At the top of the steps is a draped altar on which sits a small chest.<sup>37</sup>
- M.305, ca. 1495, Italy; Mary, nimbed and carrying her Hours, climbs the temple stairs towards the High Priest Zacharias who stands before open doorway, flanked by four young women (f. 250v). In foreground, outside the wall, stand Anna and Joachim. In the margin below, a medallion encloses the bust of a beardless nimbed head (John? or Mary?), looking at open book held with both hands. On the next page a historiated initial encloses the half-figure of Virgin Mary, nimbed, holding a closed book as rays descend from above.<sup>38</sup> In the margin below, a medallion encloses a male saint, emanating golden rays, wearing a hat and hood and holding a book (John the Baptist? David?).

All of these examples include aspects of the owner at prayer scene discussed above. The female praying owner is present in J.A. 7396 and probably MS 94 (F. 5.21) as well (Fig. 21). The latter text also has an altar with a chalice, while upon the altar in MS G.9 stands a box. Books of Hours also appear in BL Add MS 28962 and several times in MS M.305. This pictorial representation of the Presentation of Mary is itself a fusion of several aspects of Jewish and Christian traditions. The

<sup>35</sup> Mss from the Estate of Major J. R. Abbey, now in London. Scott, *Later Gothic Manuscripts*, II: 176–78, no. 56.

<sup>36</sup> Now in the British Library, London; [http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Add\\_MS\\_28962](http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Add_MS_28962); Badenas, *El Salterio-Libro de Horas del rey Alfonso de Aragón*, 211–237.

<sup>37</sup> Mss from the William S. Glazier Collection, now in the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York City. <http://ica.themorgan.org/manuscript/page/12/76947>; Scott, *Later Gothic Manuscripts*, II: 296–299, no. 108; Plummer / Clark, *The Last Flowering*, 16, no.23.

<sup>38</sup> Now in the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York City; <http://ica.themorgan.org/manuscript/page/12/77415>.





Fig. 21: MS 94, f. 190v.

Protoevangelium of James (ca. 200 CE) tells of Anna and Joachim bringing the three-year-old Mary to the temple to consecrate her to the service of God, parallel to the story of young Samuel in 1 Sam 1. There are also elements of the story of the presentation of Jesus, when Mary and Joseph brought their young son to the Jerusalem Temple to complete Mary's purification after childbirth by bringing an offering to the temple (Luke 2). Leviticus 12 specifies that this was required for the birth of both girls and boys, and that two turtledoves or pigeons could be offered if the parents couldn't afford a lamb. (Notice that Joachim holds two birds in MS M.305.) The link between the Fifteen Psalms and the temple steps is made in the Mishnah:

On the fifteen steps which led into the women's court, corresponding with the fifteen songs of degrees [i.e., Pss 120–134], stood the Levites, with their musical instruments, and sang. (m. Sukkah 5:4–5)

Early Christian theologians such as Augustine emphasized the Fifteen Psalms as a compendium to the spiritual life, with the texts guiding the transformation of those who yearn for the divine “until the image of God stamped upon human beings is released by God himself.”<sup>39</sup> With the later growing devotion to Mary (including the development of the Little Hours of the Virgin in the 10<sup>th</sup> century), the connection was made between the Fifteen Psalms and the Presentation of Mary at the Temple steps.<sup>40</sup>

According to Badenas, Philippe de Mézières (1326–1405), advisor to Carlos V, introduced the cult of the presentation of the Virgin at the temple to France, and promoted it as a feast celebrated in the Eastern Church. Subsequently, the monarch of Aragon gave this presentation special importance: Juan I ordered the copying of *The Office of the Virgin on the Ascent of the Fifteen Degrees of Mount Zion*, and founded a church in Barcelona with the same dedication. His brother, Martín el Humano, had the image reproduced in the illuminated Brevary in the monastery of Poblet (Paris, BnF, ms. Rothschild 2529, f.312). The cult of the presentation of the Virgin at the temple was subsequently reproduced in the *Officia*

<sup>39</sup> Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms*, 139. See also McLarney, *St. Augustine's Interpretation of the Psalms of Ascent*.

<sup>40</sup> For a history of the development of the offices Little Hours of the Virgin along with burgeoning devotion to Mary, see Brown, *Mary and the Art of Prayer*, 1–45. For the cult of Mary itself, see Rubin, *Mother of God*; Graef, *Mary*; Ellington, *From Sacred Body to Angelic Soul*; Reynolds, *Gateway to Heaven*.

*varia Horae et aliae preces* (c.1455) promoted by Alfonso V of Aragon, as well as in the Book of Hours of the Queen Juana Enríquez (c.1460), mother of Ferdinand the Catholic.<sup>41</sup> De Varagine's mid-13<sup>th</sup> century compilation of hagiographies in *Legenda aurea*, tells of Mary ascending the fifteen steps to the temple at the age of three "as if she had been of perfect age."<sup>42</sup> The later "N-Town Play" about Mary from 14<sup>th</sup> century Anglia creatively reenacts this moment.<sup>43</sup>

As a devotional image, the Presentation of Mary on the Temple steps models a life whose aim is to be fully transformed by God. With the support of Pss 120–134, the girl Mary moves ever more closely towards the holy presence. As viewers, about to read these very Psalms, we are encouraged to follow in her footsteps. With her life to guide us, we take the same path into the holy presence.

In addition to providing a spiritual role model, Mary on the temple steps also reminds the viewer of her role as mediator between God and humanity. As Augustine notes in his sermon on Ps 121, spiritual giants such as Isaiah and Paul themselves descended in order to minister to those still in need of growth: "People who, though they enjoy as much understanding of spiritual things as a human being can, nonetheless come down to the level of the little ones to tell them all they can take in."<sup>44</sup> And Christ himself "graciously willed to be humbled even to death on a cross and to suffer," providing a means for humanity's access to the heavenly realm.<sup>45</sup> Although Augustine does not name Mary specifically, including her into this line of interpretation does not require much of a conceptual leap. With the later emphasis on the role and work of Mary, she becomes the human vehicle for the presence of God in Christ on earth. And as the one who in the *Ave Maria* is implored to pray to God for sinful humans, Mary also functions as an ongoing mediator between the earthly and heavenly realms, facilitating in the transformation of humanity.<sup>46</sup>

The interpretation of both Mary as a model and mediator for the divinely approved human life and of the Fifteen Psalms as a vehicle of transformation led to creative artistic choices in some Hours. The male figures in and around the stairs in BL Add MS 28962 seem to depict the various stages of life that are supported and shaped by the Fifteen Psalms – in imitation of Mary the youth begins to climb the steps even as the elderly man, now needing canes for support, emerges from

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<sup>41</sup> Badenas, "El Salterio-Libro," 231.

<sup>42</sup> The Nativity of our Blessed Lady in Medieval Sourcebook (compiled by de Voragine and originally printed in 1275), 47–54.

<sup>43</sup> Sugano, *The N-Town Plays*; see also a study of the play's portrayal of Mary as exemplar of life as well as rhetoric and biblical interpretation in Napolitano, *The N-Town 'Presentation of Mary in the Temple'*, 1–17.

<sup>44</sup> Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms*, 5.500.

<sup>45</sup> Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms*, 5.510.

<sup>46</sup> For more on the role of Mary as advocate, mother, and model of devotion in the context of Books of Hours, see Reinburg, *French Books of Hours*, 209–235.

beneath them. The image suggests that Augustine's emphasis on the work of transformation is never complete in this lifetime, and that Ps 120–134 can be a rich resource for spiritual growth in all stages of life. One additional text also follows Augustine's interpretation closely by depicting the female figure climbing the stairs not as Mary but as the owner herself. On the page introducing the Fifteen Psalms in the Nuremberg Hours from the late 13<sup>th</sup> century for use in France, the woman kneels on the steps as Christ blesses her from the top.<sup>47</sup>

Through a somewhat circuitous route of reception history, the depiction of Mary on the steps of the temple are the most dramatic representation of the Fifteen Psalms themselves. All of the psalms in this section are present in this image, represented symbolically as the virgin's entrée into a life of devotion to God. And even as she models a life of piety vis a vis these texts, Mary enables the participation of other humans in the divine life. As the reader imitates her dependence on the Fifteen Psalms for spiritual development, they also rely on her role to provide access to the heavenly realm.

## 5. The Taymouth Hours: Female Morality



Fig. 22: MS 13, f. 139r.

While scenes of the owner at prayer or the presentation of Mary at the temple aim to inspire a mimetic devotion in the reader, the Taymouth Hours also includes a series of negative examples within the section of Psalms of Ascents (Yates Thompson MS 13).<sup>48</sup> Unique in its graphic depiction of the eternal consequences of sin, this Hours employs an illustration of Mary followed by a narrative cycle depicting the journey of sinners to hell, promoting acceptable female behavior with regards to spiritual, social, and political realms. The volume was made in London between 1325 and 1335 for a female member of the English royal family. The likeliest original owner was either Queen Isabella of France (wife of Edward II, who reigned from 1307–27), or Edward II

<sup>47</sup> Fol. 179v in Ms Solger 4.4<sup>o</sup>, now in the Stadtbibliothek, Nuremberg; Simmons, *Les Heures de Nuremberg*, 39–44. Note that in her review of this book, Bennett comments that the various collects (including the one that follows the last Gradual Psalm) give male grammatical forms: Bennett, *Review of Eleanor Simmons*, 273. See also Smith, *Art, Identity and Devotion*, 259.

<sup>48</sup> The MS is now in the British Library in London. [http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=yates\\_thompson\\_ms\\_13\\_fs001r](http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=yates_thompson_ms_13_fs001r).

and Isabella's daughter Eleanor of Woodstock, as a gift on the occasion of her betrothal, commissioned by her sister-in-law, the wife of Edward III, Philippa of Heinaut.<sup>49</sup> Although her identity is not certain, the royal owner is imaged wearing a crown and kneeling in prayer on four pages in the volume. One of these shows her appearing with the Virgin Mary to introduce the Psalms of Ascents (Fig. 22), with the heavenly queen leading the owner into the presence of Christ as “patron and sponsor.”<sup>50</sup> Following this image, a series of *bas-de-page* scenes depict devils transporting naked people to hell, alongside captions in the Anglo-Norman vernacular (Yates Thompson MS 13, f. 139–142; see Fig. 23–28).



Fig. 23: MS 13, f. 139v.



Fig. 24: MS 13, f. 140r.



Fig. 25: MS 13, f. 140v.



Fig. 26: MS 13, f. 141r.



Fig. 27: MS 13, f. 141v.

The scenes are remarkable in their graphic depiction of the torments of hell and sexuality. In the first scene (Fig. 22), two hairy and horned devils lead a bound group of naked sinners away, even as the sinners look back to entreat the angel guarding the heavenly gates with a sword. The caption below reads: “alas alas tristes dolenz allas alas” (Alas! Alas! Sad sufferers, alas, alas!).

The following scenes depict other hairy devils accompanying humans into hell, with some taken in a flaming wheelbarrow (Fig. 23), and others carried over the back or dragged by a rope (Fig. 25, 26). At the end of the section, the devils cast the naked humans, now bewailing their sins, into the hell-mouth (Fig. 28). The series clearly emphasize the miserable consequences of sin, with a particular focus on human sexuality. The devils often have large penises and testicles (i.e. Fig. 22, 23, 24). One woman is depicted saddled and bridled, ridden by a devil who whips her naked buttocks (or holds a dildo? Fig. 27). Standing behind, a second devil attempts to thrust a grapple into her anus. The caption below records the cry of the devils: “avaunt leccheur avant” (Forward, lecher, forward!).

<sup>49</sup> Slater, Queen Isabella of France, 209–246; Smith, *The Taymouth Hours*.

<sup>50</sup> Slater, Queen Isabella of France, 213.





Fig. 28: MS 13, f. 142r.

The relation of these images to the Psalms of Ascents is not at all straightforward, but such a perplexing pairing is not a new technique in the volume. Earlier in the book, the secular romance of Beves of Hampton accompanies Anglo-Norse verse prayers in a pairing that is difficult to understand (ff. 8v–12r).<sup>51</sup> Later in the text, the Matins of the Hours of the Virgin are accompanied by scenes from Enyas and the Wild Man (ff. 60v–68r).<sup>52</sup> Although

the exact significance is unclear, it does seem certain that the images throughout the volume aim to shape ethical and religious behavior. In concert with the volume's more typical images of the Virgin Mary in prayer with her Hours (f. 59v) and David playing his harp (f. 30r), the images model and compel an appropriate piety.

There also seems to be a political aspect in play. Slater has argued that the Beves of Hampton visual cycle could be read as a commentary on contemporary affairs of state. If the original owner was Isabella of France, then the illustrations could relate to her activities during the troubled years of 1325–1330, namely, her adulterous relationship with the English nobleman Roger Mortimer while in self-imposed exile in France beginning in 1325, her subsequent invasion of England (leading to the deposition and death of her husband, Edward II), and finally her *de facto* rule of England until the coup of her son, Edward III, in 1330. There may also be allusions to the last days of her husband Edward II, whose death, it was rumored, came about by a poker inserted into his anus, and who was involved in a homosexual affair with Hugh Despenser the Younger.<sup>53</sup>

The emphasis on illicit sexuality and its eternal consequences in the artistic cycle that accompanies the Gradual Psalms could also be read in this context. Equally, they make sense in the context of the next generation of royals trying to rebuild the dynasty and expand its influence. Read either by Queen Isabella or her daughter-in-law Eleanor, the scenes portray the consequences of a sexuality that strayed beyond traditional boundaries. From the perspective of a royal owner, these consequences were eternal damnation as well as dynastic instability. In an era in which unstable government and Edward II's non-traditional sexual practices

<sup>51</sup> Linda Brownrigg, *The Taymouth Hours and the Romance of Beves of Hampton*, 222–241, pls. 1–8; Brantley, *Images of the Vernacular in the Taymouth Hours*, 83–113; Slater, *Queen Isabella*, 209–246.

<sup>52</sup> Smith, *The Taymouth Hours*, 36.

<sup>53</sup> Slater, *Queen Isabella*, 217.



were familiar, the Taymouth Hours clearly illustrate the penalties for straying from chaste practices.

In a turbulent time, the Taymouth Hours provided guidance for its royal female reader. Along with the prayers of praise and confession, the accompanying images shaped the religious, moral, and political sensibilities of its royal reader. In this volume, the Gradual Psalms became a site to illustrate the eternal consequences of sin. Beginning with the portrayal of an ideal femininity (the Virgin Mary, whose chaste life now gives her access to the risen and enthroned Christ), the section also depicts the fate of those who stray from traditional moral codes. With this mix of both positive and negative examples, the Taymouth Hours actively shaped the moral, religious, and political selfhood of its reader.

## 6. The Hours of Queen Isabella: Re-Building Jerusalem with David

Perhaps surprisingly, given how closely he is associated with the Psalms, images of King David introducing the Fifteen Psalms are fairly rare. The earliest example under review is one from Lille, produced between 1275–1300.<sup>54</sup> Here the first initial of the Psalms of Ascents depicts a naked and crowned King David standing in water, his hands raised in the orans position (f. 144r).<sup>55</sup> From above, the hand of God reaches out in blessing, and the lower right margin contains a bird, possibly an owl. David is also praying in a Book of Hours created in northeastern France in the early fourteenth century, although here he kneels in prayer before Christ within heavy gold architectural frame. Musicians and hybrid creatures appear in the margins (Fig. 29).<sup>56</sup> More conventionally, the historiated initial in an English Book of Hours from 1440 depicts David in prayer with a harp.<sup>57</sup>



Fig. 29: MS W. 104, f. 61r.

<sup>54</sup> MS W. 39; Randall, *Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts*, I: 90–92; currently in the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore.

<sup>55</sup> <https://manuscripts.thewalters.org/viewer.php?id=W.39#page/294/mode/2up>

<sup>56</sup> F. 61r in W.104, currently in the Walters Art Museum, Baltimore. [https://www.thedigitalwalters.org/Data/WaltersManuscripts/W104/data/W.104/sap/W104\\_000125\\_sap.jpg](https://www.thedigitalwalters.org/Data/WaltersManuscripts/W104/data/W.104/sap/W104_000125_sap.jpg); Randall, *Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts* I:142–145.

<sup>57</sup> F. 87v in MS Add. 3–1979, currently in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge. Scott, *Later Gothic Manuscripts*, II: 233–235, no. 80.

Musicians are also present alongside David in the miniature introducing the Psalms of Ascents produced in Flanders in the late 1400s for Queen Isabella of Castile.<sup>58</sup> The larger, more luxurious scale of the book allows for additional illustrations throughout the section. In this context, what is highlighted is not David's musicianship but rather his installation of the Ark of the Lord in Jerusalem. The miniature introducing the Psalms of Ascents depicts a young crowned King David framed by musicians and instruments on the fifteen steps of the Temple (looking like a medieval church), even as an older and crowned David writes in a book on the side (Fig. 30). On the next page introducing Ps 121, a smaller miniature depicts a crowned King David overseeing the beginning of the building of a stone platform in a city, the shape of which looks like the apse of a church (Fig. 31).<sup>59</sup> Introducing Ps 127 ("Unless the LORD builds the house..."), God sits in the clouds surrounded by an assembly of saints as an angel unfurls a scroll that dangles between heaven and earth. Ps 132 is headed by another miniature, this one depicting the arrival of the Ark in Jerusalem (Fig. 32).



Fig. 30: MS 18851, f. 184v.



Fig. 31: MS 18851, f. 185r.



Fig. 32: MS 18851, f. 187r.

The scene takes place in an urban setting, in front of the same stone platform, now complete and looking like an apse of a medieval church open to the outside on three sides. Also in the scene are musicians, and, standing in front of what looks like a plain stone altar, a man clasps his hands in prayer as another cuts the throat of a lamb whose blood pours out onto the ground.

This visual program depicting scenes from the life of King David has clear religious and political implications. The selection of David's installation of the Ark to illustrate the Psalms of Ascents is unusual, as seen in comparison with the

<sup>58</sup> Add MS 18851, currently in the British Library, London. [http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Add\\_MS\\_18851](http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Add_MS_18851)

<sup>59</sup> The web site of the British Library describes this scene as Solomon overseeing the building of the Temple. The problem with this interpretation is that the architecture depicted is clearly designed to be a small and open-air space, the same size and style of the open-air platform that again appears with the ark a few pages later on f. 187r. In addition, the king in f. 185r wears the same gold-colored robe that David wears as he ascends the stairs in the miniature that begins the Psalms of Ascents (f. 184v).

other Books of Hours described above. In addition, Psalm 132 (which tells the story of David's oath to build a "dwelling place" for God) is a fairly obscure text compared to the other Psalms of Ascents, so highlighting it with its own miniature is significant. That is to say, Pss 120–131 regularly appear in the daily prayer offices, and Ps 130 is also included in as one of the seven penitential Psalms, but Ps 132 is usually much more invisible within Books of Hours. And as the section in Queen Isabella's Hours retells this story, the illustrations and their placement clearly emphasize God's direction and blessing of the royal program. As David begins to build, the accompanying Psalm proclaims that he works in the strength of God alone: "My help is in the name of the LORD" (Ps 121:2). The "building of the house" under God's guidance that Ps 127 describes is illustrated as David's efforts to build a venue for the ark in Jerusalem, blessed by God and according to a divine plan handed down directly from heaven. Finally, as Ps 132 relates the story of David's oath and God's subsequent blessing of David and Jerusalem, the accompanying miniature depicts the moment when the Ark is successively installed in the city. Clearly here the Psalms of Ascents are interpreted as a story of a king piously completing God's plan for Jerusalem under divine direction and with divine blessing.

The parallels with the life of the original owner are not difficult to see. The book was presented to Queen Isabella around 1497 to commemorate the marriages of her two children into the family of the Holy Roman Emperor, Maximilian of Austria. With the financial support of Isabella's husband King Ferdinand, Christopher Columbus had recently set out to find a new route to the East and discovered the Americas which he claimed for Spain. The year 1492 also marked the year when then the entire Iberian peninsula came under the control of Catholic rulers. Five years later, Isabella's future now would promise a grandson who would unite in his reign most of Europe and the New World.<sup>60</sup> On the basis of such grand prospects, the royal couple contemplated a new crusade to retake the Holy Land (Ferdinand held the title "King of Jerusalem"), and ordered the expulsion of Muslims and Jews from Spain.<sup>61</sup> While praying with her Book of Hours, Isabella could contemplate David as a royal role model, obeying God by leveraging the riches of the kingdom to prepare Jerusalem as a place to receive the holy presence, symbolized by the Ark.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Blackhouse, *The Isabella Breviary*, 5.

<sup>61</sup> Blackhouse, *The Isabella Breviary*, 56.

<sup>62</sup> For more on the interpretation of the Psalms in light of Columbus's pursuits, see Avalos, *Columbus as Biblical Exegete*, 59–80. For the use of the Psalms in 16<sup>th</sup> century Latin America see Lara, *City, Temple, Stage*; Lara, *Feathered Psalms*, 293–309.

## 7. Conclusion: God and the Saints

As much as this essay has sought to examine significant trends and exemplars of visual programs associated with the Fifteen Psalms in Books of Hours, there are a few texts that don't fit into any of the categories explored above. And this situation is itself a fine summary of the evidence that shows little predictability in the visual topic of these texts in the Hours. Taken in chronological order, the first comes from late 13<sup>th</sup> century France, and depicts St Leonard releasing prisoners.<sup>63</sup> The next three are from England, and depict members of the Trinity. One dates from 1280–90 and displays Jesus on the cross.<sup>64</sup> Another, from a few decades later, has the historiated initial depicting a resurrected Christ flanked by angels and instruments of the Passion.<sup>65</sup> In the final example, the English Hours of Elizabeth the Queen, ca. 1415, the head of God with white hair and a beard appears in the initial that begins the section (Fig. 33).<sup>66</sup>



Fig. 33: MS 50001, f. 30v.

God the Father, God the Son, and St. Leonard – these three join with many other saints and a few sinners as well on the pages devoted to the Fifteen Psalms in a joint textual and visual exegetical project. For all that the illustrations in Books of Hours added to their decorative beauty, they weren't merely ornamental. As the original patrons and artisans designed a particular volume, they choose illustrations to support the fundamental point of the books them-

selves in sparking the devotional imagination and encouraging a life of prayer. And while the images embellished the Fifteen Psalms, they also explicated them. Just as the earlier written commentaries on the Psalms fleshed out some of the deeper meanings and significance of the ancient poems, so did the illustrators of these books guide interpretation. And although the images are often examined apart from the texts which they accompany, the material history of Books of Hours moves one to ask how *both* parts of the page work together.

<sup>63</sup> F. 64r in W.98; now in the Walters Art Museum, Baltimore; Randall, *Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts*, 1.119–123.

<sup>64</sup> F. 69v in Add MS 89379, now at the British Library, London [http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=add\\_ms\\_89379\\_fs001r](http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=add_ms_89379_fs001r); Sandler, *Gothic Manuscripts*, 20–22, no. 11a and b; now reunited with the Psalter with which it was originally bound: <https://blogs.bl.uk/digitisedmanuscripts/2019/04/reunited-at-last-the-percy-hours-and-percy-psalter.html>.

<sup>65</sup> F. 95r in MS 158.926; (Norwich, Castle Museum MS 158.926); Sandler, *Gothic Manuscripts*, 53–55, no. 47. Cf. Deusen, *Jesus and the Psalms*, 25–48.

<sup>66</sup> F. 30v in Add MS 50001, now at the British Library, London; [http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=add\\_ms\\_50001\\_f027r](http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=add_ms_50001_f027r); Scott, *Later Gothic Manuscripts*, II: 171–176, no. 55. The section includes two other illustrations: an uncrowned younger man appears in the initial beginning Ps 132 (31r), and men with white hair and beards wearing hats are depicted in the initials beginning Pss 133 and 134 (31v).



What is perhaps surprising about this particular study is the widely varying taxonomy of images and narratives associated with these psalms, demonstrating an ongoing openness to a variety of interpretations. Although there are discernable trends in the association of certain visual topics with the Fifteen Psalms, the artistic program is far less predictable than in other parts of the books such as the Penitential Psalms. The characters range from sinner to saint, the various owners, and God himself. And the narratives depict Mary's ascent into heaven, and the journey of others into hell. Many of the scenes are not uniquely related to the texts themselves – images of the owners at prayer, Jesus on the cross, and the resurrected Lord are scenes that appear alongside different texts in different Hours. But other scenes are uniquely related to the Fifteen Psalms. The historiated initials depicting the stories of Susanna and the generous layman in the de Brailes Hours relate scenarios where people cried out to God in the midst of tribulation (Ps 120) and in the end found God's blessing (Ps 134). The Hours of Queen Isabella depict the story of David fulfilling his vow to build a place for God's dwelling in Jerusalem in a visual enactment of Ps 132. And appearing most frequently, the image of Mary climbing the fifteen steps to the Temple depict the metaphorical interpretation of the collection of Psalms as a staircase by which one can meet the divine presence.

Also widely varying are the ideological programs which the images support. Political expansionism to rebuild God's dwelling in Jerusalem, appropriate gender roles, and time devoted each day to prayer – all these are portrayed and promoted in the images that accompany the Fifteen Psalms. Usually depicted alongside signs of divine blessing, the significance of such programs is bolstered by bestowing upon them eternal import. Physically enacting what the images depict enables communion with God in this life, and ascent into heaven in the time to come.

Thinking about the images as telling "stories about prayer" nicely captures this variation in the choice of both scene and message to accompany the Fifteen Psalms. It also points to the unifying thematic element of all the images in the context of these texts. The person of God (present either as a head peeking through a historiated initial, in the person of Jesus, or simply as a hand stretching out from the sky) beckons the viewer into the texts and a life of devotion. And with images of St. Lawrence, King David, the Virgin Mary, or the owners themselves as guide, the one using the Book of Hours prayerfully reads the Fifteen Psalms again and again until their story becomes one with the divine.



## Table I

Pictorial Subjects of Books of Hours Containing a Section Devoted to the Fifteen Psalms (Ca. 1240-1460)<sup>67</sup>

Manuscript	Country	Date	Full- or half-page	Initial Letter	Borders
MS L.1990.38	France	1270s		Cleric with halo kneels in prayer	Men with weapons and animals
Add MS 28962	Spain	1436–1443	Mary ascending temple stairs, man at bottom	Virgin Mary reading Hours	foliate
Breviary of Queen Isabella	Flanders	1480s	Young David with musicians on steps of the Temple, as older David writes in book		Flowers on gold border
MS M.305	Italy	1495	Mary ascending temple stairs	Virgin Mary, holding closed book	Saints, floral, winged putti heads
The De Brailes Hours	England (illuminated in Oxford)	Ca. 1240		Susanna praying	Marginal extension of initial
Murthly	England/Paris	1260–80		Female owner kneeling with Book of Hours, Christ with orb reaches out from heaven	Bird hunt
MS W. 40	Paris	1200s		King praying before altar	
MS W. 39	French (Lille)	1200s		David praying in water	Bird
MS W. 97	Paris	1200s	Female owner praying before altar		

<sup>67</sup> The author would like to acknowledge and thank Susannah Rees for her initial draft of this table.

<b>Manuscript</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Full- or half-page</b>	<b>Initial Letter</b>	<b>Borders</b>
W.104	French	Early 14 <sup>th</sup> century	David kneeling before standing Christ		Musicians and architectural frame
W.98	France	1300s		St. Leonard releasing prisoners	Heraldic border ornament and lion
Cod. Lat. XIV (S.5)	English, Oxford	c.1250		Female owner kneeling in prayer and man wrestling with dragons	
Add MS 89379	English (York)	c.1280–90		Crucifixion	Decorative blue red and gold bar border
Solger 4.40, Nuremberg Hours	France (Paris) - England	Late 13 <sup>th</sup> century	Female ascending Temple stairs		
Walters Ms. W.102	English	1200s		Decapitation of a man	Marginal extension of initial A, with animal-human and foliate motifs
MS 158.926	England (Norwich)	c.1310–20		Resurrected Christ blessing with angels	Figural hybrids
Egerton MS 2781 (British Library)	England (North Lancashire)	c. 1320		Female owner kneeling in prayer before a book, with girl kneeling at her side	Full bar border with leaves and knots, and marginal figure
MS. Douce 231	English (Lincoln)	c.1325–1330		Man kneeling in prayer at altar, Christ with orb above blessing	Floral border, with goat

Manuscript	Country	Date	Full- or half-page	Initial Letter	Borders
MS M. 700 (De Bois Hours)	English (Oxford?)	c.1325–1330		Man (husband of owner?) kneeling in prayer at altar, Christ with orb above blessing	Foliage and spandrels, oak leaves, animals in pursuit
Taymouth Hours	English (London)	c. 1325–35	Kneeling female (owner?) presented to Christ by Mary, with souls carried to hell		Full foliate boarder
MS 94 (F. 5.21)	English	c.1340–50	Virgin Mary kneeling on temple steps	Head of a woman	Marginal extension of initial, foliage
MS Laud Misc. 188	English	c.1380–1400		Large decorated "A"	Marginal extension of initial forms 4-sided border
MS Gough liturgy. 6	English	c.1410		Large decorated "A"	Marginal extension of initial
The Hours of Elizabeth the Queen (Add MS 50001)	English (London)	1415		Bust of man w white hair	Marginal extension of initial
MS B.11.7	English (London?)	Late-14 <sup>th</sup> to early 15 <sup>th</sup> century		Susannah taking bath with Elders looking on	Three-sided blue border, with gold and foliage
J.A. 7396	English (London?)	1412–1439	Mary at the temple possibly with female owner		
MS Add. 3–1979	English (Norwich)	c.1440		David with Harp	Text decorations
MS 39	English (London?)	c.1420–40		David in Prayer	two bands of gold and blue, with foliage
Glazier MS G.9	English (London?)	c.1450–60	Mary on the steps of the temple with Joachim and Anna		Foliate, with hairy men holding vines

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