



Hours of Henry VIII

M
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The *Hours of Henry VIII*, Jean Poyer's masterpiece, receives its name from King Henry VIII of England, second monarch of the House of Tudor. It is documented that the manuscript belonged to a series of later English kings. For example, there is proof that between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries it still belonged to the library of George III (1738-1820). **It is a lavish work of incomparable dramatic force, fit for England's most fascinating and passionate monarch.**

Jean Poyer's career as a painter was short, from 1483 to 1503, but he was famous for being a master colourist and a genius at composition and perspective. In the *Hours of Henry VIII*, the beauty of the Franciscan Calendar is good proof of his reputation and, among other sections as the Office of the Dead and the Hours of the Virgin, makes this manuscript a peerless treasure.



f. 7r

The manuscript is bound in red velvet. Its clasps contain Henry VIII's coat of arms (three fleur-de-lis quarterly 1 and 4, three lions passant guardant quarterly 2 and 3). They also contain his monogram H.8.R (*Henricus Octavus Rex*) and his famous motto, HONI SOIT QUI MAL Y PENSE (Shame on him who evil thinks).



Shelf mark: MS H.8

Date: c. 1500

Provenance: Tours, France

Size: ± 257 x 180 mm

Painter: Jean Poyer

400 pages with 55 full-page miniatures

Bound in red velvet with clasps

Full colour commentary volume

On the manuscript's last blank leaf, there is a note supplied by George Wade (1673-1748), one of its owners:

In the Year 1723, being at Mons and hearing of This Book as the greatest Curiosity of its Kind, I found it in the hands of Mons[ieu]r Charle Benoit Desmanet, a Gentl[lema]n of that Town, (and after his Death procured it from his Executors) he Shew'd it me with great care and precaution not Suffering me to touch it, but tur'd over the leaves with a Small pair of Silver Tongues made for that purpose, And perceiving me to Smile at this Nicety, he said with some Warmth, Sir In this manner my Ancestors for above a hundred Years past have preserved this Book from blemish and in the Perfection you now see it; He told me likewise That the Tradition of the Family was That it was formerly A Present from the Emperor Charles the Fifth to Henry the Eighth King of England [...]

GEORGE WADE

September: Wine making (f. 5r)

September's labour is wine making. In the left background scene, women are picking grapes which the men then carry to the barn. They empty their baskets into large winepresses, where the fruit is trampled. Once crushed, the must is transferred into a vat. From it, the liquid is then poured into barrels for aging purposes.

The zodiacal sign is Libra, the Balance. The saints appearing in the right margin are St. Maurice and his companions (September 22), St. Michael the Archangel, slaying a demon (September 29, even though his feast is not shown in the Calendar), and St. Cosmas and St. Damian (September 27). As for the left margin, it shows St. Giles with a dog (September 1), St. Anne holding the Virgin (September 8), the True Cross (Exaltation of the Cross, September 14), Matthew the Apostle (September 21) and possibly St. Euphemia (September 26).

Jean Poyer, a masterful artist, does not only convey the labour's inherent vividness. Quite appropriately, one single colour plays a leading role in the composition: that of wine. It is present not only in the liquid's depiction, but also in the characters' clothes and in the background colour of the image's bottom half, where the saints are shown.






 In illo tempore. Missus
 est gabriel angelus ad
 civitatem galilee: cui
 nomen nazareth. ad virginem &
 sponsatam viro cui nomen erat io-
 seph & domo david: et nomen vir-
 ginis maria. Et ingressus angelus
 ad eam dixit. Ave gratia plena do-



David and Uriah (f. 108v)

To solve the problem of Bathsheba's pregnancy, King David sends a letter to Joab, ordering him to put Uriah, Bathseba's husband, in the forefront of the battle, where he would surely find death. In the miniature, Uriah, kneeling, has just received the sealed order from the king. His horse waits in the background. On the left, a figure in the shadows stands leaning against the bed where sin was consummated.

Although the most common theme illustrating the penitential psalms is of King David in penance, at the time of the *Hours of Henry VIII* the subject of his adultery with Bathsheba was also very popular. The episode here selected, after his adultery is consummated, is more unusual. However, this topic is sometime chosen to illustrate the penitential psalms in some printed Parisian Horae of the early sixteenth century.







Ad matutinas. Vinit. Regem cui
omnia viuunt. Venite adorem.
Venite exultemus. Dominum
iubilemus deo salutari nro:
precoripemus faciem eius in
confessione et in psal



Petrus apostolus et paulus
doctor gentium ipsi nos do
cuerunt legem tuam domine. **Vs.**
In omnem terram exiuit sonus eo
rum. **R.** Et in fines orbis terre ver
ba eorum. Oremus. **Oratio.**
Deus cuius deus beati
petri apostoli ambu

St. James with Hermogenes and Decapitation of St. James
(f. 176r)

After the Ascension of Christ, James the Greater preached in Judea and Samaria. Later he went to Spain. When he returned to Judea, the Pharisees asked the magician Hermogenes to send his disciple Philetus to confront and refute the saint. James did some miracles, which resulted in the conversion of Philetus. Hermogenes was infuriated and ordered two demons to capture both. James prayed for these demons to turn against Hermogenes and bring them before him. Hermogenes repents and promises to go get and destroy his magic books. Afraid of the demons, he asks the saint to give him one of his possessions to protect himself and James gives him his cane. The magician, once converted, returns with all his books and the Apostle throws them into the sea.

Disappointed, the Pharisees bring the saint before Herod Agrippa, who sentences him to death. On the left of the bottom illustration is a kneeling crowd watching the beheading of the saint.

After the death of St. James, angels carried his body to Spain. His relics were discovered in 800 and were then taken to Compostela, which, during the Middle Ages, became a centre of pilgrimage.

At the time, the saint was usually depicted as a pilgrim. His outfit included a bag decorated with a shell, a big hat, a cape and a cane. In the miniature, two scallop shells adorn his hat. Curiously enough, Poyer paints the demons as soldiers dressed in exotic costumes.





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