



# HOURS OF CHARLES OF ANGOULÊME

## TRACTATUS DE HERBIS



mandragora.

# HOURS OF CHARLES OF ANGOULÊME

BIBLIOTHÈQUE  
NATIONALE  
DE FRANCE  
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*Unique and unrepeatable  
first edition, strictly limited  
to 987 numbered and  
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New

- **Shelf mark:** Latin 1173
- **Date:** c. 1485
- **Provenance:** France
- **Size:** ± 215 x 155 mm
- **Artist:** Robinet Testard
- **230 pages, 38 full-page miniatures**
- **Red leather binding with gilt border**
- **Full-colour commentary volume**

The audacious illuminations in this book painted for Charles of Angoulême make this manuscript the most splendid example of its prolific genre: the book of hours.

Such boldness, which could only stem from a profound intellectual understanding between the artist and the patron, extends beyond the concept of the book of hours, i.e. an instrument of personal prayer for its owner.

Perhaps the licentiousness that characterised the French court for centuries, the lack of religious inhibition of a prince as powerful as the Count of Angoulême and the scientific acumen of such a true naturalist as Robinet Testard can help explain this feat in the closing stages of the Middle Ages.

In any case, rather than an ideal instrument for personal prayer, this book was apparently

an effective medium for the personal entertainment of Charles of Valois, a codex deliberately designed and manufactured to arouse his curiosity (f. 52v), distract him from worldly matters (ff. 28v and 52r), make him laugh (ff. 3r, 4v and 5r), foster his fondness for the arts (ff. 16v and 26v) and his love of the jovial pastoral life (f. 20v), and delight this avid reader of love stories and (f. 2v) and books of



chivalry (f. 53v) whilst still satisfying his vanity as a prince – according to Ahuva Belkin's allegorical interpretation (f. 41v).

In addition, it is significant that the folios most likely to inspire devotion, such as those in the biblical cycle of the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Christ (f. 106v), are not solely the work of Robinet: they are a series of twelve prints by Israhel van Meckenem (I.M.) which Testard merely coloured using his characteristic and magnificent pallet.

The fact that Robinet Testard chose not to paint the holy of holies of this book of hours himself and preferred to incorporate work by other painters (Jean Bourdichon) or print-makers (Israhel van Meckenem), should be interpreted not as a desire to appropriate the artistry of others but rather as an indication of the artist's intellectual uprightness and refusal to compromise his own principles by portraying scenes with which he could not, as a naturalist, fully empathise.

Furthermore, the addition of extraneous secular elements – including *costumbrista* (ff. 4v and 20v), mythological (f. 41v) and chivalrous (f. 53v) motifs – plus the lengthy Passover narrative in the vernacular (ff. 60r

- 115v) in a book which is by definition entirely or predominantly Latin, all emphasises how original this manuscript is in comparison with the usual conventions of books of this genre.

It would only be a slight exaggeration to describe this codex as an extraordinary artistic melting pot that almost undermines and desecrates the religious intent of the book of hours. This manuscript is an antithesis of the book of hours, in short, an anti-book of hours.

Three of its illuminations are particularly captivating: the lively pastoral dance in the Annunciation to the Shepherds with consummate naturalism above all in the traits and movements of the male figures; the mysterious scene of the Death of the Centaur and his rider, the Wild Woman, with its mythological tones and two allegorical interpretations: ethical (the struggle between good and evil) and political (the death of Louis XI, "the spider king", and his daughter Madame Anne of Beaujeu); and the legendary scene of the prince, St George of Cappadocia and the Queen of Lydia, an illustration ideal for a book of chivalry but completely out of place in a book of hours.



f. 2v



f. 3r









f. 20v



f. 22v



*Oraison a nostre Dame retrograde en tous sens.*

**A**

Myriee.	Cresnotable.	Trefoiere.	Cheritable.	Madefse.	Remission.	Maphaelle.	Situation.
Preceuse.	Cresluisate.	Cresbeueuse.	Triuphate.	Desiree.	Heliate.	Beneuree.	Chumante.
Siguliere.	Pardurable.	Cresfentiere.	Amiable.	Almaistresse.	Perfection.	Denoblesse.	Remission.
Glorieuse.	Crespuissate.	Cresputeuse.	Cresplaisate.	Reuerce.	Bemignite.	Honoree.	Virginite.
Cresuale.	Cresleigne.	Cordiale.	Cresendine.	Eternelle.	Crespuide.	Immortelle.	Excellente.
Dame de par.	Du firmem.	Amerepar.	Duimenem.	Angelique.	faceaussi.	Autetique.	Chapsc siesse.
Triuphille.	Digne et fine.	Virginalle.	Mature.	Belle et belle.	Pudente.	Celestuelle.	Premiere.
Reuerce.	Excellente.	Conceyosier.	Notable.	Magnifique.	Pourchasse.	Pacifique.	Grace et gloire.

*Sen suit aultre oraison par vers collateraux en latin contenant par teste l'eno  
delateur desqueux deux sont retrogrades.*

Onlas	Virgo	Multis	Opno	Nitida	Turis.
Virgo	fulgida	Gloria	patris	Virgula	felix
Multis	Gloria	lux pia	spasq;	florida	clenies
Opno	patris	spasq;	stilia	punica	demens
Nitida	Virgula	florida	punica	stragere	praua.
Turis	felix	clenies	demens	praua	q; sena.

*Ces deux vers sont retrogrades.*







f. 41v



f. 52r





f. 53v



f. 59v





f. 77v



f. 98v



TRACTATUS  
DE HERBIS

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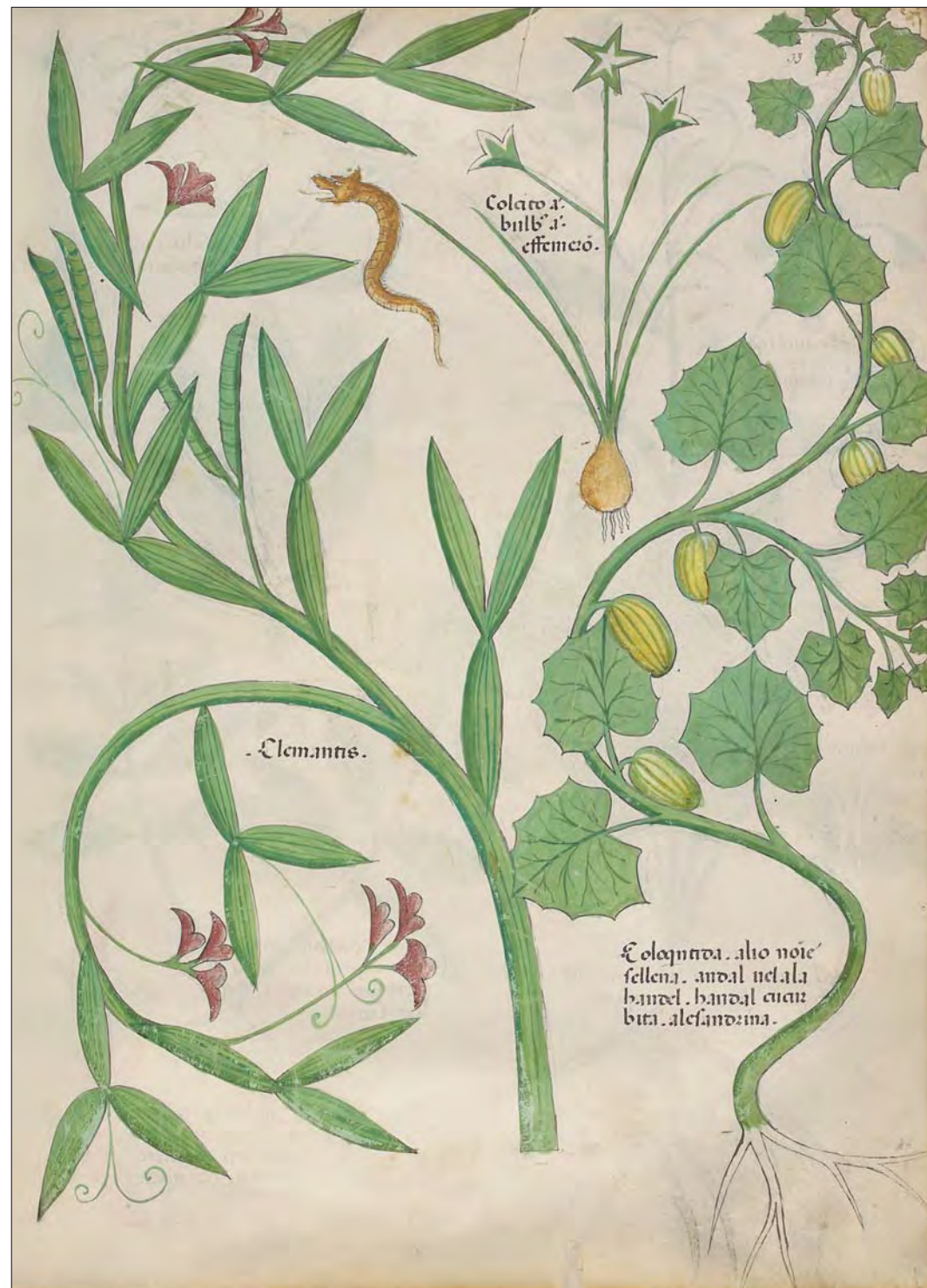
- **Shelf mark:** Sloane Ms. 4016
- **Date:** 1440
- **Provenance:** Italy
- **Size:** 380 x 265 mm
- **218 pages**, all illuminated
- **Bound** in embossed, dark green leather
- **Full-colour commentary volume** (510 pp.) by Alain Touwaide (Smithsonian Institution)

In the Middle Ages, medicine was undoubtedly the scientific realm influenced most by the many cultural elements that contributed to shaping society. Its Greek foundations were added to by Latin, Byzantine, Arabic and Mozarabic contributions and others from further afield that were transmitted by cultures bordering on the western world. As a result, each medicinal plant had as many names as

the cultures using it to make remedies. But the variety of names used for a single plant in different cultures sometimes led to confusion. To avoid this risk, dictionaries were produced and botanical albums too, featuring pictures of the plants and other simples used in everyday therapeutic practices together with the various names they were called by the different peoples that comprised medieval socie-

ty. The *Tractatus de Herbis*, codex Sloane 4016, currently in the collections at the British Library is one such book enabling the different names of these plants to be linked to the plants themselves. This helped avoid confusion and the disastrous consequences of giving a patient a simple other than the one prescribed by the physician.









f. 38r



f. 40r

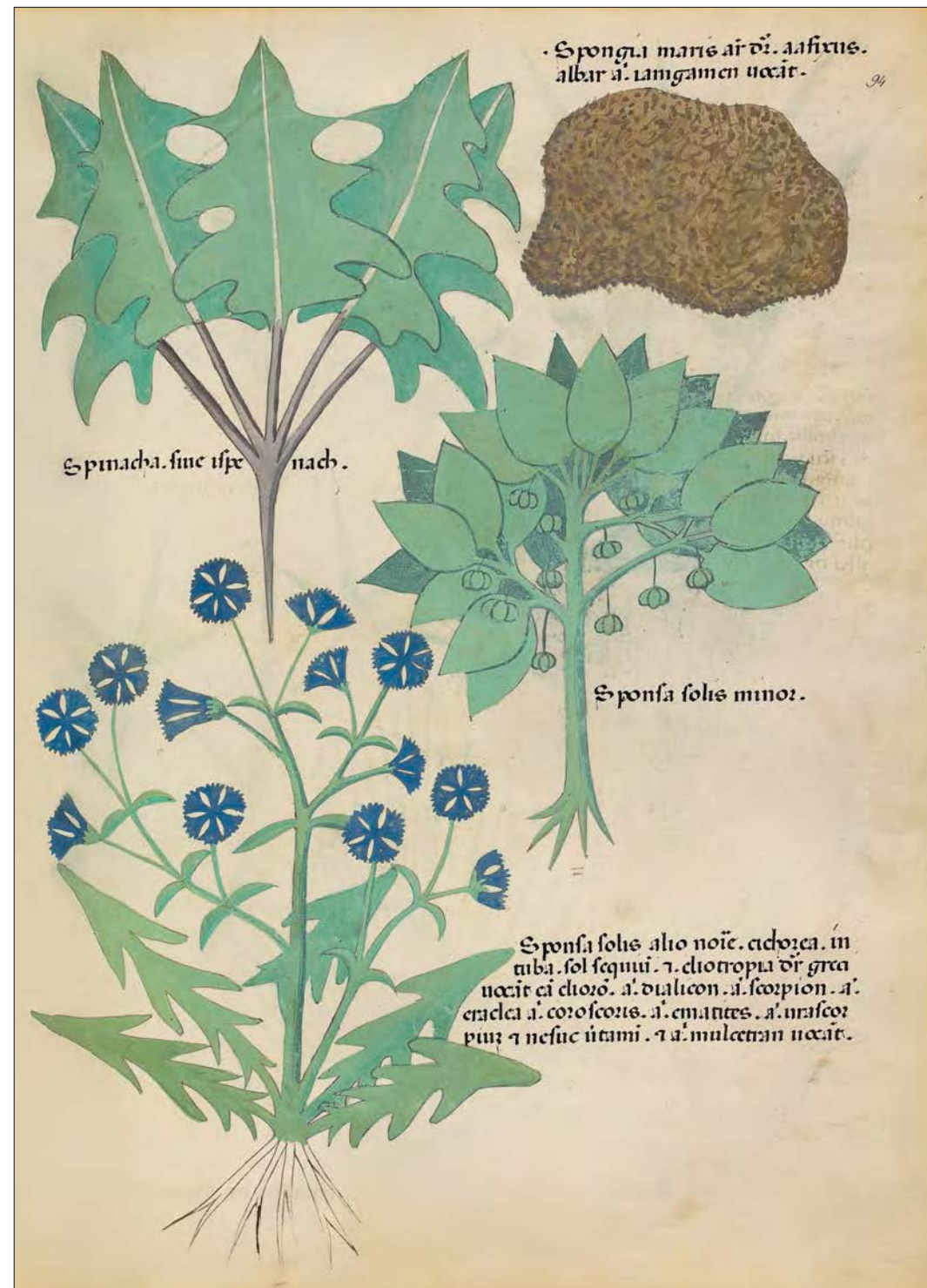








f. 91v



f. 94r









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The foregoing is pursuant to document 3156 in my records which I authenticated on October twentieth of the year two thousand and eleven.

Lugo, 28 de octubre de 2011.

Lugo, October 28<sup>th</sup>, 2011.



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