

## THEORY AND CRITICISM OF LITERATURE & ARTS

SPECIAL ISSUE

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# BIBLIOCLASM & DIGITAL RECONSTRUCTION

ELEVEN SCATTERED MANUSCRIPTS DIGITALLY REASSEMBLED THROUGH THE WAYBACK RECOVERY METHOD©









Cover

Selection of leaves from the Research Centre for European Philological Tradition manuscript collection

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### THEORY AND CRITICISM OF LITERATURE & ARTS

# BIBLIOCLASM & DIGITAL RECONSTRUCTION

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This special issue is dedicated to the memory of Prof. Erik Drigsdahl

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### De Ponthieu Hours

### Carla Rossi

A Book of Hours in Latin, use of Paris, 160 by 102mm, order of leaves altered, wanting single leaves with miniatures at the beginning of the Hours of the Cross and the Penitential Psalms. Originally composed of over two hundred leaves; 178 leaves when auctioned at Sotheby's in 2013 (unsold) and in 2014.

Page layout throughout the manuscript consists of 22 lines in a Gothic bookhand, some letters with ornamental cadels in upper border, capitals touched in yellow, rubrics in red or blue, one-line initials in gold on red and blue grounds. Only 14 full-page miniatures extant, illuminated in Paris, by Jean Pichore and Jean Coene. Rectangular marginal blocks with acanthus leaf and foliage panels divided obliquely, gold leaf detailing; sloping blackletter hand with blue and red touches, gold leaf versals, red ruled layout lines.

We learn from a handwritten note in French at the end of the manuscript, that it had already lost many leaves before 1605, when it was sent to Paris to be restored and rebound.

In the 18th century, some flyleaves joined the manuscript collection of John Percival (1683-1748), Earl of Egmont. Dismembered in 2014, after being auctioned at Sotheby's for (only) GBP 20,000.

For the following digital reconstruction, I started from a leaf owned by the Research Centre for European Philological Tradition (Fig. 1).

If I had not carried out this research, I would never have suspected that our leaf had been part of one of the most richly illuminated Books of Hours ever created in Paris, during the final production period of this genre of illuminated manuscripts, around 1510.



Fig. 1. De Ponthieu Hours, fol. 46r, leaf in our Research Centre's manuscript collection.



Fig. 2. De Ponthieu Hours, fol. 46v.

It is worth making a general remark here: unfortunately, given my experience working with scattered leaves, I have noticed that when an intact manuscript is auctioned at an affordable price, it happens that it is bought by a handful of dealers, who divide up the quires and then sell the individual leaves on sites such as eBay or Abebooks.

If one wanted to put a stop to the unfortunate habit of scattering such unique masterpieces that we are struggling to save from oblivion, the auction houses themselves should have a list (as indeed our centre has) of unscrupulous dealers.

During the *examinatio*, I took note of all those elements useful for the identification of the digital fragments to be searched, i.e. sheet size (158 x 103 mm ca.), 22 lines of text, Gothic bastard handwriting, presence of animals in the borders, initial letter typical of Rouen workshops, etc. I then started the *recensio*, resulting in the discovery of over a hundred digital fragments.

The further I went into the *recensio*, the more it became apparent that the parent manuscript had been richly illuminated and that many borders featured crickets, dragons, insects and grotesques painted in unusual shades of orange (Fig. 3).



Fig. 3. De Ponthieu Hours.

Digital reconstruction

Once I collected a sufficient number of digital fragments, it was time to try to identify the parent manuscript. During the *repertum*, I managed to trace two auctions of a manuscript that had all the characteristics I was looking for.

It was a 160 x 102mm Book of Hours, auctioned twice at Sotheby's: the first time in 2013 and the second in 2014. It was not difficult, therefore, to retrieve all the digital fragments relating to both auctions, which were useful to make a 'comparison test' (one of the stages of the recensio, according to the WBRM) with our source leaf, and then to check, on the auction house's official website, the detailed description of the manuscript.

The catalogue note reported an inscription (Fig. 4 and 4 bis) at end of manuscript, dated 26 March 1605.



Fig. 4.

Having come into possession of this information, it was not difficult to identify, at a US dealer. notorious for dismembering manuscripts, the leaf (Fig. 4, here on the left) with this note, which turned out to be extremely interesting, since it specified the reason why this Book of Hours was sent to Paris: the manuscript was i n poor state of preservation in 1605 (a loss of leaves and the need for restoration were reported).

Why was it sent specifically to Paris?

In all likelihood because the writer of the note, a member of the noble De Ponthieu family who had inherited it, knew that the book had been produced a century before in Paris in the famous atelier of Jean Pichore.

Although Pichore was mainly an illuminator, he was also entrepreneur among the first French imprimeurs, Laistre in 1503. He setting up a press with Remi de designed numerous metalcuts for himself and others, publishing a first series under his own name in 1504. By 1508, he was supplying designs for Books of Hours by other printers, especially Simon Vostre, Thielman Guillaume Eustace and the brothers Gillet and Germain Hardouin.

He is mentioned in several sources between 1502 and 1520 that link him both to illuminated manuscripts, and book printing.

He had done his early training in Rouen, most likely as a pupil of Robinet Boyvin, and worked for several members of the French court and the famous cardinal of Rouen Georges d'Amboise.

Jean Coene IV (who before 1997 was known as the Master of the Parisian Entries [1]) belonged to a well-known family of Bruges artists that had settled in Paris in the early fifteenth century. He often collaborated with Jean Pichore and his workshop

Evidently, such a luxuriously illuminated manuscript was not only created for a distinguished member of the De Ponthieu family, but could only be restored in Paris.

[1] The Master of the Parisian Entries was identified with Jean Coene IV in 1997 by Eberhard König on the basis of an inscribed painted frame in the Crucifixion of a Missal that reads "De Jos Coene". See E. König, *Boccaccio und Petrarca in Paris*, in *Leuchtendes Mittelalter Neue Folge*, Passau, 1997, p. 320.

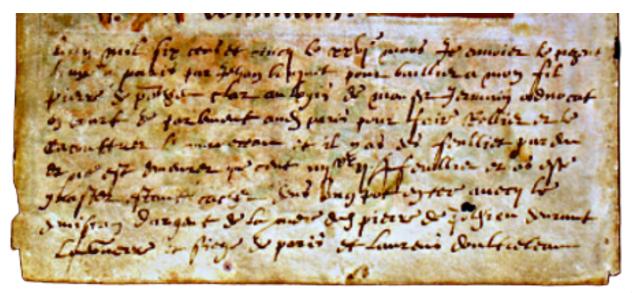


Fig. 4bis

Although difficult to read, the handwritten note can be translated as follows:

On 26 March 1605, I sent this book that belongs to me to Paris, through Jehan Bouquet, to my son Pierre de Ponthieu, trainee at the service of Monsieur Jeannin, lawyer in the court of Parliament at the Paris Chatelet, to have it bound and restored. Some leaves are lost.

The handwritten note ends with a reference to the *guerre* et siège de Paris. Since the siege dates back to 1590, I will provide further historical information in the forthcoming edition of the De Ponthieu Hours.

At the Paris State Archives, I identified the marriage contract, twelve years later, of a certain Pierre de Ponthieu (it is not sure whether it is the same person, but he is the only one by such name in this timeframe) with Marie Caffin [2].

I will also provide further information on the presence of the Sibyls in the bas-de-page of the main miniatures of this luxurious manuscript, a masterpiece dismembered in Germany in 2014.

[2] Minutes et répertoires du notaire Nicolas Nourry, 6 juin 1592 - 21 juillet 1644, MC/ET/XVII/166, Contrat de mariage entre Pierre de Ponthieu, maréchal, et Marie Caffin. 68

A leaf with the beautiful miniature of the Presentation at the Temple has entered the collection of the University of Melbourne Library ( $SpC/RB\ 6oC/7$ ).

The digitally (partially) reassembled manuscript can be browsed at the following link:

https://www.receptioacademic.press/deponthieuhours

DOI: 10.55456/deponthieuboh



Fig. 5. De Ponthieu Hours. Digital reconstruction. Presentation at the Temple, this leaf is part of the collection of the University of Melbourne Library (SpC/RB 6oC/7)



Fig. 6. De Ponthieu Hours. Digital reconstruction.



Fig. 7. De Ponthieu Hours. Digital reconstruction.