Leaf from a fifteenth century French Book of Hours printed for Antoine Vérard.

Essay on the Vérard Leaf:

The Tisch leaf is an example from a Book of Hours printed for Antoine Vérard. The date of the edition is unknown, but based on stylistic comparisons with a number of Vérard’s other Horae this fragment probably dates prior to 1500. Similar in format to Vérard’s “Petit Heures”, this prayers on the recto and verso of the folio, “Salve Sancta Facies” and “Obsecro Te”, are framed by borders with images and verses in French. The fragment is representative of the flourishing early printing market in contemporary Paris. In 1472, Paris’ first printing press was established by three German printers: Ulrich Gering, Martin Kranz, Michael Friburger. In the early days of the print market manuscript production served as the model, both aesthetically and for the types of books printed. The Book of Hours was a Late Medieval bestseller and therefore a potentially profitable venture for the early printers. The numbers of printed Horae left to us today are a testament to their popularity and ubiquity at a pivotal moment in book history. Books of Hours continued to be produced en-masse until their eventual decline in the mid sixteenth century.

Among these early printers, Antoine Vérard was an important figure in the early Parisian market. Of unknown origin, Antoine Vérard became active in 1485 and issued over 200 books, included 40 various editions of Books of Hours. Over the course of his illustrious career he was bookseller to the court of France, his important clientele included Charles of Orléans, the comte d’Angoulême and Anne of Brittany. Vérard was also known for his sometimes indiscriminating business practices. He often replaced printers marks with his own symbol, and in one instance even deliberately misattributed a work written by Jean Bouchet to the more popular Sebastian Brant. Despite these more questionable aspects of Vérard’s character, he was an important publisher who worked with many of Paris’s important contemporary printers as well as being credited with numerous poems included in his books. The exact date of his death is unknown although he printed his last book in 1513; he was succeeded by his sons.

Iconography:

The Tisch leaf is illustrated with both in-text woodcuts and borders which frame the text. The recto of our folio bears an image of Veronica and the Sudarium. The image, as is customary, is paired with the prayer, “Salve Sancta Facies” or “Hail Holy Face”. The prayer is an ode to the true portrait of Jesus left on the Veil of Saint Veronica after

1 Harvard: HEW 6.10.12; Boston Public Library: Q.405.107
6 Macfarlane, ibid.
7 Macfarlane, ibid.
8 Wieck, pg 105
she wiped his face on the path to Golgotha.  

The prayer was intimately connected to the image of Christ on the veil, expressing a desire to attain closeness to Christ through gazing upon his image. The image of the Veil of Veronica had various beliefs attached to it, and the contemplation of the image was said to afford the viewer various indulgences and even protection from a violent death.  

The image could thus be used in conjunction with the prayer, “Salve Sancta Facies” as a sort of visual aid.

However the image of the Veil of Veronica need not be used in conjunction with the prayer. Veronica’s Veil could serve independently for meditation, an image to inspire prayer and contemplate the Holy countenance. The desire to see the face of Christ finds a parallel in the Eucharistic liturgy itself. The raised Eucharist was known to inspire visions of Christ on the Cross, similarly rendering the invisible divine presence visible.

The Veil of Veronica represents a very personal image, through which one seeks a connection with God that goes beyond the spiritual.

The border on the recto illustrates various scenes and important biblical figures. At the top of the lateral border is an image of the Nativity; at center is a man, possibly an Old Testament prophet; and at the bottom Luke and his ox. In the foot-piece is an image of the Samian Sibyl who holds the cradle foreshadowing the nativity of Christ.

These border images appear to be modifications of similar scenes, though different cuts, found in other examples of Vérard’s Horae. A version of his Grandes Heures printed in 1490 and now in the Pierpont Morgan Library uses borders of similar layout and content, though in a larger format. The borders of the Morgan example include the full cycle of 12 sibyls in the foot-piece, and the lateral borders include an image of the life of Christ—often paired with an Old Testament prophet and an Evangelist. One folio includes the specific grouping found on the Tisch leaf: an image of the Nativity, an Old Testament prophet and Luke and his ox at the base, and the Samian Sibyl in the foot-piece, identifiable by the texts which accompany them.

Although the Tisch fragment does not retain these texts, the images and their order are the same. Recutting woodblocks was rather commonplace, and printers often adjusted images for new editions, meaning that the borders of the Tisch leaf could have been a more simplified version of these borders. Whether or not the designer intended the prophet in particular to retain his “original” identity is unsure, but in any case it is useful to make this identification if only to acknowledge the evolution of the image from other borders in Vérard’s Horae. This visual ‘redux’ could also mean that the borders

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11 Wieck pg 44; Iconographie de l’art Chrétien, ibid.

12 Wieck, pg 44


14 Pierpont Morgan Library: PML 566

15 These images are paired with 4 quotations, the first from Psalm 68:30, “Ego sum paup(er)” the second from Luke II: 7, “Et reclinavit eum in prespio”, the third a quotation from Isaiah 1:3, “Cognovit azinus presepe domini sui: ysaie primo”. Finally, next to the Samian sibyl, is found a highly abbreviated version of the text: “Ecce veniet dies et nascetur puer de paupercula bestie terre adorabunt eum”. These various texts comprise the sources for the prophesies of the twelve sibyls, an example of which can be found in the Oracula sibylline, compiled in 1477. It is probable that each of the figures accompanying the scene of the Nativity are representations of the ‘sources’ for these quotations, a system seen in the hours of Thielsman Kerver-- particularly as in PML 566, the figures are shown holding the scrolls on which these texts are written. For source-texts for the sibyls, see: http://www.chd.dk/sibyl/Oracula5.html#E. Blocksim, facsimile of the Oracula sibylline, from Benedectine Monastery of St. Gallen: W. L. Sereiber, 1903.

from the Tisch fragment indeed date to a later period than the 1490 Grandes Heures editions, since it appears that Vérard was using his own border cycles as models. In any case, it is unlikely that the more simplistic borders from the Tisch leaf would have served as a model for the 1490 versions—meaning at the very least they could be contemporaries.

The verso of the Vérard folio pairs the beginning of the poem, “Obsecro te” with a painted woodcut of the Virgin and Child, the Virgin holding a flowering rod in an architectural frame. Mary is crowned and nimbed, and the Christ Child perched on her right hip has a halo inscribed with a cross; Christ indicates the flowering rod his mother holds with his right hand.

This pairing is a fairly common solution to in-text illustration in Books of Hours. “Obsecro te” is a poem written in the first person, in which the individual directly addresses the Virgin Mary. The prayer themes operate around an exultation of the Immaculate Conception, a plea for intercession and a wish for proximity to the Virgin in all aspects of life—and through her, to Jesus Christ. The focus on the Virgin’s maternal and intercessory role makes the image of the Virgin and Child a fitting motif; it is this through this pivotal relationship that the individual seeks to gain aid.

The addition of the flowering rod, although less common, is nonetheless appropriate. There are two possible origins for this iconography, the first being Aaron’s flowering rod. According to the passage in Numbers, of the 12 rods representing the various tribes of Israel before the tabernacle it was Aaron’s alone which burst into flower.

The rod, like the Virgin, bears bud, blossom, and fruit against nature—just as the Virgin bears Christ without harm or defilement to her body. The rod is the Virgin (in French, the word for switch or bitch is “verge”, used to connect it to the word for Virgin, “Vierge”) the fruit that bursts forth, Christ. The rod, and the fruit that bursts forth, can also represent the fruit of the Cross, Christ’s body. Thus Aaron’s rod points not just to the Immaculate Conception, but the fruit of this Immaculate Conception and the promise of forgiveness and renewal this fruit brings. Triumphant held in the Virgin’s hand like a royal scepter, the flowering rod is the herald of a New Order and the hope this brings for those who are faithful—and those who pray.

The flowering rod could also make reference to an episode in “The Golden Legend”. In the “Golden Legend”, Mary is described as resistant to the idea of marriage. Not wanting to force her to violate a vow to the Lord, the high priests consult with God, who says Mary should indeed be married. To determine who would be her betrothed, each marriageable man of the house of David brought a branch to the altar. Again, one of these branches was to bloom and this was to determine Mary’s future husband. Joseph, thinking he was already too advanced in years to be Mary’s husband, does not bring a branch to the altar. When the next morning none of the branches have bloomed, the high priests ask God what is to be done. God says that the man who had not brought forth his

17 Wieck, pg. 105
18 Numbers, 17:7-8. “And Moses laid up the rods before the Lord in the tabernacle of witness. And it came to pass, that on the morrow Moses went into the tabernacle of witness; and, behold, the rod of Aaron for the house of Levi was budded, and brought forth buds, and bloomed blossoms, and yielded almonds.”
19 Avril Henry. *Biblia Pauperum: a facsimile edition*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Press (1987), pg 1, B. “According to Numbers XVII 1-11, the rod of Aaron burst into leaf and blossom one night. This rod prefigured the Virgin Mary who, unfertilized by male seed, was to bring forth the ever blessed Jesus Christ”.
branch, Joseph, was to be her husband. As soon as Joseph brings his branch to the altar it
flowers at once, and a dove from heaven perches upon it. 21 The connections between this
story and the story from the Old Testament are quite clear: once again, God chooses the
man who is to be a steward of the Lord through the branch that miraculously brings forth
life. Joseph is to look after Jesus in his youth, fostering the growth of the New Law.
Thus, connections can be made both between the two figures of Joseph and Aaron, and
between the symbolism of the two flowering rods. This symbolism appears not only in
the Golden Legend but in many medieval Biblical plays, suggesting that this additional
symbolism would have been equally well known. 22 Additionally, the Vérard Horae
contain frequent references to the stories of the Golden Legend; the verse in the borders
of this page include references to the story of Anne from the “Golden Legend”, mother of
Mary. In any case, both the story of Aaron’s flowering rod and from the “Golden
Legend” make reference to the Immaculate Conception of Christ.

The image of the Virgin and Child is accompanied by other images in the lateral
border. At the top, is an image of the Flight into Egypt, in the middle an image of a man
or Old Testament prophet, at the bottom is an image of Mathew and his Angel. In the
base of the foot-piece is another Sibyl—most probably the Cumaean Sibyl based on the
fact that this is the identity of the sibyl bearing the same headpiece in the Morgan
example, PML 566. Like on the recto of the page, these images complete the variety of
narratives found on the Vérard folio, for a more in-depth discussion of this interplay of
narrative please see the essay for the fragment printed by Thielman Kerver.

Poems:

The borders are filled not only with images, but with texts. Each page of the folio
contains one verse of a poem in French, which are as follows:

Sans vice, celle bouche qui est seule parole peut consacrer si noble sactifice le viatique
des humains le fervece le derrain m(ais) que en article de mort, chacun requiert pour
salut et confort.

Anne troys mariz acointa. En vroy titere de mariage. Et chascun diceul x l’enchainta.
Dune fille courtoise et sage. Marie dame parage. Mere de dieu le roy des roys. Estoit
premier en ce lignaige. Et fut la plus belle des troys.

The first verse is part of a series of verses accompanying various prayers to God
the Father, God the Son, the Holy Spirit, the Holy Sacrament, and Salve Sancta Facies. In
our folio, it accompanies Salve Sancta Facies. The rest of these verses are as follows:

Pere des cieul et premier pere sans pere De nul crce sans generacion. Non compose et
con conceu de mere. Prince eternel sans quelque inception. Sans fin aussi seul sans
dimencion. Avec ton filz engendré iesu crist. En

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L’unite de benoist saint esperit. Transmis no(stre) as de ta celique super ton filz iesus en reperacion du grant peche et honteux vituper qui fist adam per sa transgression por ce purgera souffert passion. Le doulx iesu filz de la vierge tendre. Dont bien tenus sommes graces te rendre.

Conversé a en ce monde mortel [au enques] nostre pais ensouuenance (souvenir?) a transmue son fait corps imortal en pain et vin por nous donner substance spirituel. et a donne puissance tant seulement a parolle de pretre, de pain et vin consacre dieu estre.

O combien dont doit estre sans ferivole pure nette sans difame sans vice, celle bouche qui est seule parolle peut consacrer si noble sacrifice. Le viatique des humains le seruice. Le d(t)errain mais que en article de mort. Chacun requiert por salut et confort.

It appears as if the text in the borders correspond tightly to the text at center. These verses accompany the same portion of the Hours in 2 other versions of Vérand’s Horae. 23 This connection becomes clearer when looking at the content of the verses themselves in conjunction with the text at center. The last stanza of the above verses from which the verse on the Tisch folio is taken discusses the miracle of the holy Eucharist and its transformation into the Christ’s body (celle bouche qui est seule parolle peut consacrer si noble sacrifice. Le viatique des humains les seruice). Both the verse and the prayer, “Salve Sancta Facies” discuss a similar ‘apparition’ of Christ—his true likeness on the holy veil. In ‘Salve’, the supplicant address the holy face, praying that through that holy apparition they will be lead to Christ himself, in very much the same way that the Eucharist is a key to a similar, physical connection with Christ. The raised Eucharist during mass was seen as a metaphor for the body of Christ on the Cross—and worship of the Eucharist itself was widespread during the period.24 Saint Francis of Assisi said that the Eucharist for him was ‘seeing Christ’”, it was the center of his devotional life—through which he ‘met’ Christ. 25 Both ‘Salve’ and the verses in the border then present a meditation on different ‘apparitions’ of Christ, one the miraculous Holy Face on Veronica’s Veil, and one the Holy Eucharist.

The second verse is actually part of a small ballade, attributed by Mary Beth Winn to Guillaume Tardif, a reader to King Charles VIII and prominent scholar in Latin at the Collège de Navarre. 26 The remaining stanzas of this poem are as follows:

Anne troys mariz acointa. En vroy titere de mariage. Et chascun diceul x l’enchainta.

21 PML 566; Paris, BN, Rothschild 22 [I.5.7]. cf Winn: Mary Beth Winn. “Guillaume Tardif’s Hours for Charles VIII and Vérand’s Grandes Heures Royales”. Bibliothèque d’Humanisme et Renaissance. 56(2) (1994), Appendix II.
24 Mary Beth Winn. “Guillaume Tardif’s Hours for Charles VIII and Vérand’s Grandes Heures Royales”. Bibliothèque d’Humanisme et Renaissance. 56(2) (1994). Appendix II.

De cleophas seco(n)dem(en)t. Elle eut la seco(nde) marie de salome finableme(n)t .... le ligne, et honnestest mais toute fois celle q(ui) fut p(re)mier ... estoit la plus belle des troys.27


This poem discusses the conditions of the birth of the Virgin. It outlines the three marriages of Anne and the three “Maries” she bore by each of these three husbands. The origins of this story are found in the Protoevangelium of James, and then in the Golden Legend (13th century) which helped to popularize the cult of Saint Anne.

In the first stanza, Anne is introduced, detailing her three marriages and the three daughters, who resulted from these marriages and Mary is affirmed as the most beautiful of the three. The next stanza, discusses the birth of the other two Maries to Cleofas and Salomae. The fourth stanza discusses God’s choice of Mary, Mother of God. Confirms that there is no one more beautiful than the Virgin Mother of God. The pairing of this poem with a specific text is less specific than the verse found on the recto, although it is found with “Obsecro Te” in the Tisch example but it accompanies a prayer to the three Maries in another edition by Vérard, and “Obsecro Te” and “O intermerata” in another. Although these texts are inconsistent, they are all texts specifically connected to the Virgin. This poem expands on these texts in a way quite different from the pairing of the French verse with “Salve”. These texts display an interest not just in Virgin from a devotional perspective, but from a personal perspective, perhaps fitting for a book that is seeks to achieve a proximity with the Virgin. The poem thus displays another role for the borders. They were not just a place for an expansion of devotion, but also a place to amuse oneself with the origins of holy figures.

The poem also illustrates the interesting connections between our folio and secular texts in the vernacular, such as the Golden Legend. The incorporation of this text, as well as other extra-biblical texts such as the Oraculla Sibyllian, show the diverse range of influences at work in Vérard’s Hours. The texts of Books of Hours themselves, long standardized, were expanded on and diversified through a range of other texts popular to readers in the period.

This folio from one of Vérard’s Books of Hours, though a simple fragment, is an interesting example of the myriad trends at work in a changing book market.

Bibliography:


27 Transcriptions of these texts are an ongoing project.