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REVIEWS

Roger S. Wieck, *Painted Prayers: The Book of Hours in Medieval and Renaissance Art*, paperback ed. (New York: George Braziller 1999) 144 pp., color ill.

As a fan of Wieck's earlier book, *Time Sanctified*,⁴⁴ I came to *Painted Prayers* with high expectations. Like *Time Sanctified*, *Painted Prayers* began life as an exhibition catalogue; *Time Sanctified* addresses the collection of the Walters Art Gallery in Baltimore, while *Painted Prayers* turns its attention to the manuscripts of the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York. Yet while *Time Sanctified* is so much more than a gallery manual, *Painted Prayers* is somewhat disappointing even as an exhibition guide.

Painted Prayers is reminiscent of *Time Sanctified* in style and organization; indeed the chapter headings are exactly the same, reflecting the progression of a Book of Hours itself. Yet *Painted Prayers* is a slimmer book, without the basic information *Time Sanctified* provides, and it excludes essays by other scholars, a highlight of the earlier book. If *Painted Prayers* is intended as a mere supplement to *Time Sanctified*, that should be evident, yet instead many of the same rather pedestrian points are restated.

Wieck has neither rethought his overall structure nor deepened his intellectual perceptions in the nearly ten years between his two books. He rearranges his language a bit, and although the chapter titles remain the same, the text is not copied verbatim. Yet even this seems to have been affected simply for variety, and not to reflect any particular change or new emphasis. A new simile in *Painted Prayers*, "Books of Hours are like automobiles" (99), adds little to our appreciation; the point is simply that they are alike in the ability to be "accessorized." The focus remains on the surface of the manuscripts, on their beauty, their medieval popularity, and their current monetary value.

With the emphasis upon surface aesthetics, however, *Painted Prayers* is, perhaps, superior to *Time Sanctified*. There are more color illustrations in the new book and they are larger and more attractive than those in *Time Sanctified*. While the latter may contain more illustrations overall, many are small and in black and white. *Painted Prayers* certainly shows off the Morgan manuscripts beautifully.

Indeed, *Painted Prayers* is far more focused upon its illustrations. It is a glossy book with a bigger typeface, and the text of each chapter is quite secondary to its main attraction, the plates and their captions. The captions are often of great interest, but they left me frustrated, with no real narrative to bring together the images. On page 10, for example, a caption comments on how Gothic architecture sometimes "frames" scenes from the life of Christ. The reason given is simply that it makes the events "appear timeless, eternal" (10), but it seems to me that it also contemporarizes the transhistorical Christ. It would have been helpful to have a text to pick up and continue these ideas, or at least to have attached a footnote to the caption to let me know where I might go for more information. Footnotes are not used at all in *Painted Prayers*, and

⁴⁴Roger S. Wieck, *Time Sanctified: The Book of Hours in Medieval Art and Life* (New York: George Braziller 1988).

other scholarly apparatus is minimal.

There are also interesting thematic issues raised in the Introduction which are not elaborated as the book progresses, but might have offered another way to organize the text. Issues such as the alternation of Latin and the vernacular, the book's audience of female and young persons, and the link that Books of Hours create between the church and the home, the public and private, would have been fine subjects to treat chapter by chapter. Equally, another organizational possibility would have been to take each major Morgan manuscript and deal with it as a whole, to give a better sense of how the prayers worked together organically, and to give us a better sense of a whole manuscript, how it was typical and how individualized. Either kind of restructuring would make more sense to me than the book's movement through a Book of Hours itself. While this is tidy, I was still left uncertain about how a Book of Hours would have been used on a daily basis, which is the one advantage I can think of for progressing through the Book in this way. I had hoped to gain both a deeper understanding of the theoretical issues behind Books of Hours and a practical knowledge of the entirety of any one Morgan manuscript; I would have settled for either, but neither was forthcoming.

Painted Prayers is much more of an exhibition catalogue than a book to be enjoyed in its own right like *Time Sanctified*. It is a fine start for a specialist, who wants a sense of the Morgan collection, but he or she will have to go elsewhere for more detailed analysis, context, or simply to see any one manuscript in its entirety. *Painted Prayers* did pique my interest and gave me a sense of the sort of questions I might want to ask of a manuscript, both theoretical and technical, but it provided answers for none, and does not provide enough in the way of footnotes or bibliography to provide further help. I will have to return to *Time Sanctified* for scholarly leads.

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