

# MS 13 BOOK OF HOURS & THE 15TH CENTURY BOOK TRADE IN ROUEN

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Books of Hours provided the basis of personal devotions for Christian populations in western Europe from the 13th century. When Henry VIII broke with Roman Catholicism in the 1530s, such works became actively repressed in Britain. While some survived in English hands, most books of hours in British repositories today were imported in later centuries. Eighteenth century antiquarians sought them out as historical documents, the bearers of medieval art and ornament, while 19th-century collectors often saw them as products of early - and purer - forms of Christianity. This richly decorated manuscript was acquired, almost certainly in France, by Samuel Lethieullier (1701-1760), a man of impeccable Protestant credentials, who was elected to the Society of Antiquaries in 1725. His six Books of Hours were termed 'Gothick manuscripts' when his library was sold in 1761. Lethieullier's fellow antiquarian, Charles Lyttelton (1714-1768), Bishop of Carlisle from 1762, acquired the manuscript, which entered the collections of the Society of Antiquaries with Lyttelton's huge library of books and manuscripts on his death.

Rouen was a major producer of manuscripts after it was recovered by the French crown from the British in 1450. Books of hours were produced in large quantities even when in competition with decorated printed versions produced in bulk in Paris from the mid-1480s. Illustrations were an essential part of these books, the images guiding the thoughts of the user as prayers were read or recited (the prayers are all in Latin, with only one in French).

Compositions used for miniatures in Rouen books of hours from the 1470s until after 1500 are strikingly uniform; the calendar illustrations in Antiquaries MS13, for example, were from a set used from around 1480, executed by different hands. Elsewhere, subjects from the New Testament and Old Testament brought together the essential parts of ancient and modern history, so that the image of the Man's Fall (Eve tempted by the serpent) is placed opposite the Annunciation (announcing Christ's arrival to redeem sin). A picture of a terrified man contemplating a truly horrifying view of Hell shows an avoidable future. Some of the ornament is of a traditional kind, with stylised flowers and grotesques in borders, but there are as well vases, romping figures and bulbous acanthus stems for enthusiasts of Renaissance styles.



Unusually, the manuscript contains details about its early owners. The names of Jean Dufour and Marguerite Austin are spelt out in the margins. The manuscript was probably made or adapted for them at the time of their marriage. Both were from wealthy bourgeois families prominent in the government of Rouen. The Dufours were the principal patrons of St Maclou, a church which in the 1520s was being finished in an extravagant flamboyant Gothic style (today it is one of Rouen's architectural marvels). There are several people named Jean from the Dufour family who might have been the joint owner of this manuscript (one died in 1514, another was active in the 1540s) but none is thus far known to have had a wife named Marguerite. Among prominent members of the Austin family was one Guillaume Austin, a cathedral canon who died in 1503.