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Points of Difference

Charollette Stoehr

The Book of Hours represents a change of beliefs that was taking place as the needs and uses of devotional manuscripts were shifting from primarily liturgical use to personal use. When Portland State University's Book of Hours was created, a shift from liturgical prayer and worship to personal prayer and worship was taking place throughout Christendom. As a broad segment of the population began to learn to read for themselves, where once only the priests in the churches and monks who transcribed the illuminated manuscripts could, the desire emerged to skip the "middle man" and seek a direct connection to God through personal prayer and devotional study.

The new use of illuminated manuscripts as personal devotional objects created a demand for smaller manuscripts that could be held in the hand or carried on the person. The text remained in Latin in most medieval illuminated manuscripts with some, such as PSU's Book of Hours, written in both Latin and the vernacular French.¹

Illuminated miniatures of the Annunciation largely continued to be traditional, using the same subjects, and changes were only reflected in the arrangement of subjects and the way the message was depicted from Gabriel to Mary (Fig. 4). The message could be writing suspended in the air, golden lines of light such as the PSU Book of Hours or a scroll bearing writing. An image of God sometimes appeared above the picture suspended in the heavens looking down, with open hands in blessing or, as in PSU's Book of Hours, a white dove suspended in air over Mary's head.

There are many points of difference and continuity amongst Book of Hours. We can see that differences occur over time periods, between regions, uses and the people who owned the books of Hours. Despite the many changes and individualized illuminations, the Book of Hours endured throughout the centuries as a personal tool of devotion and became a reflection of the time period.

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¹ "A Rouen Book of Hours." Princeton University 11, no. 1 (1952)

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