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Bridget Eide

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Arma Christi

Bridget Eide

In this Kerver Book of Hours (c.1507), there are two *Arma Christi* pages and both include the Instruments of the Passion. The *Arma Christi* and the Instruments of the Passion images found within a medieval book of hours were used for purposes of prayer and reflection. As part of their spiritual discipline, daily prayer was a routine practice and was believed to bring the reader closer to God.¹ Sensory stimulation from the images, either through visual or aural contact, was a way for the reader to gain indulgences for their sins.² Indulgences were believed to be offered to the readers by their reciting of prayers, while either looking or touching the image, either touching it with their hand or placing a kiss on or just below the image.³

The two images in this book appear to have come from the same metalcut plate and include the same instruments. In both of images, Jesus is shown upright, against the cross, while holding a spear in one arm and the crucifix in the other. To the left central portion of the image is the crown of thorns. To the left of that is the pillar of flagellation with a rooster sitting on top. Directly above Jesus is his chalice, resting on the left arm of the cross. To the right of Jesus is a reed with a sponge attached at the top end. A hammer lays at the bottom, to the left of the foot of Jesus. The Instruments of the Passion are considered to be the instruments used against Christ to make him suffer. As he resisted the torture, they have also been interpreted as

¹ Deeley, p. 20.

² Kamerick, p. 6.

³ Kamerick, p. 338.

the weapons used by Christ to defeat Satan.⁴ Each of the items shown hold a specific significance in regard to the Passion of the Christ. For example, the rooster represents the betrayal of Peter to his Christian faith.⁵

Images of the *Arma Christi* and the Instruments of the Passion allowed medieval readers to experience, first hand, the suffering of Christ.⁶ The use of these prayer pages was a way for the reader to, personally, experience the passion of the Christ, through prayer and reflection.⁷ Through this devotional practice, the reader was believed to experience miracles or gain protection against evil. Specifically, the spiritual connection between the reader and the image was believed to protect them from death (while in war, for example) and/or the devil.⁸ The two *Arma Christi* images in this book are accompanied by different prayer verses and are in separate areas of the book. One is towards the front, on sig. f5, while the other is located towards the back, on sig. s7v. One possible explanation is that the book may have had a custom inclusion of the additional copy as a benefit to the reader and to complement the prayer verses associated with the pages.⁹ Another possibility, while considering the mass production of printed books, is possibly that some of them contain duplicate images to serve a specific market. This could have been done to fit the area of distribution, or background of the reader. For example, this Kerver Book of Hours was produced in France, possibly for a Spanish market,

⁴ Noonan, p. 296.

⁵ Sommers, p. 17.

⁶ Noonan, p. 2.

⁷ Noonan, p. 2.

⁸ Kamerick, p. 310.

⁹ Maddocks, p. 25.

and it is possible that the duplicate *Arma Christi* images are of special significance to its original audience.¹⁰



Image of the *Arma Christi* on page s7v.

¹⁰ Maddocks, p. 26-27.

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