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Jereme Shaver

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The Flight into Egypt
Jereme Shaver

The account of the Flight into Egypt appears in the Book of Matthew. An angel appears to Joseph in a dream to tell him to flee to Egypt with Mary and his child, in order to escape King Herod's plan to slaughter all infants in the area.¹ The flight of Holy family into Egypt and their eventual return was interpreted by the Gospel writer Matthew as the fulfillment the prophesy of Hosea. This image is located in sig. i8 of the book, which places it in the Vespers section, which as the evening prayers falls at the end of the Hours of the Virgin.

This image of the Flight into Egypt was printed with a metalcut created by the Master of the Très Petites Heures of Anne de Bretagne, and many other works have been associated with this artist. Some scholars have speculated that this artist can be identified with Jean Diple from the Diple family of Parisian painters and illuminators.²

This rendering shows Joseph leading Mary and the infant Jesus, who sit atop a donkey. The background depicts the city of Sotina where the Holy family arrives at the end of their journey into Egypt.³ The upper left of this image depicts the fall of the pagan idols statues with two demons overlooking. According to legend, as Joseph approached the temple of in Sotina he raised his hand and the idol statues fell.⁴ The right side of the image shows the Holy family passing a corn field, alluding to the miracle of the harvest. The origin of this legend is unknown but an early appearance occurs in the apocryphal "Gospel of the Infancy."⁵ This legend states that after the Holy family departed Bethlehem, King Herod sent mercenaries to

¹ Schwartz, pp. 5-6.

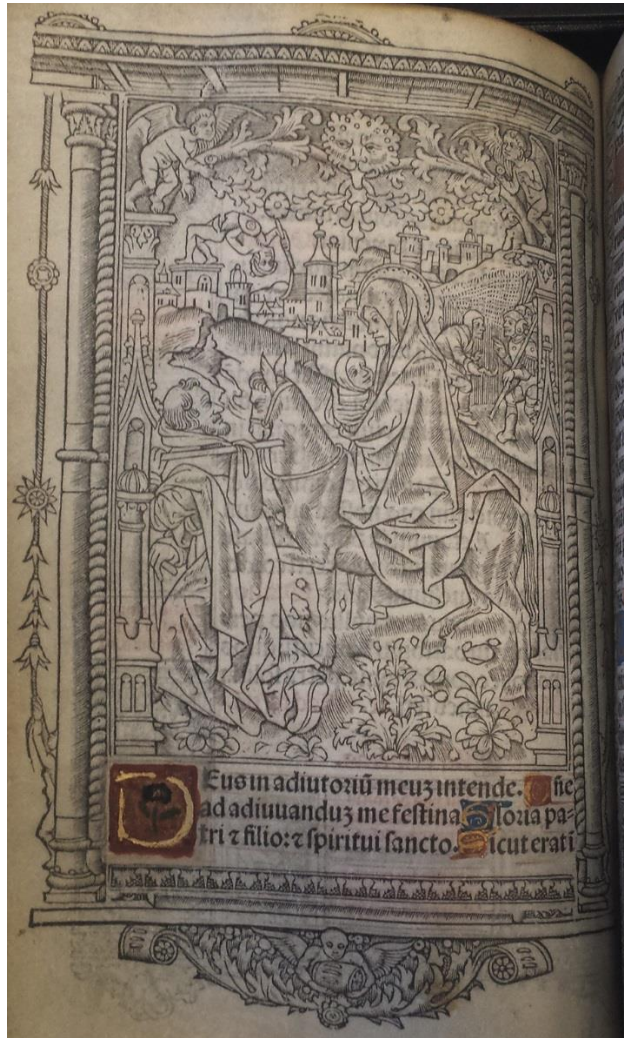
² Baker, pp. 31-37.

³ Schiller, p. 119.

⁴ Schiller, p. 120.

⁵ Tristram, pp. 115-6.

question farmers but eventually they abandoned their pursuit.⁶ Part of the legend included the infant Jesus causing freshly harvested fields to grow overnight in order to cover the tracks of the his fleeing family.⁷ The density of iconography found in this scene conveys a sense of the range of beliefs that could be evoked in its the sixteenth-century audience by even a single devotional image.



Fol. sig. i8v.

⁶ Schiller, p. 122.

⁷ Schwartz, p. 56.

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