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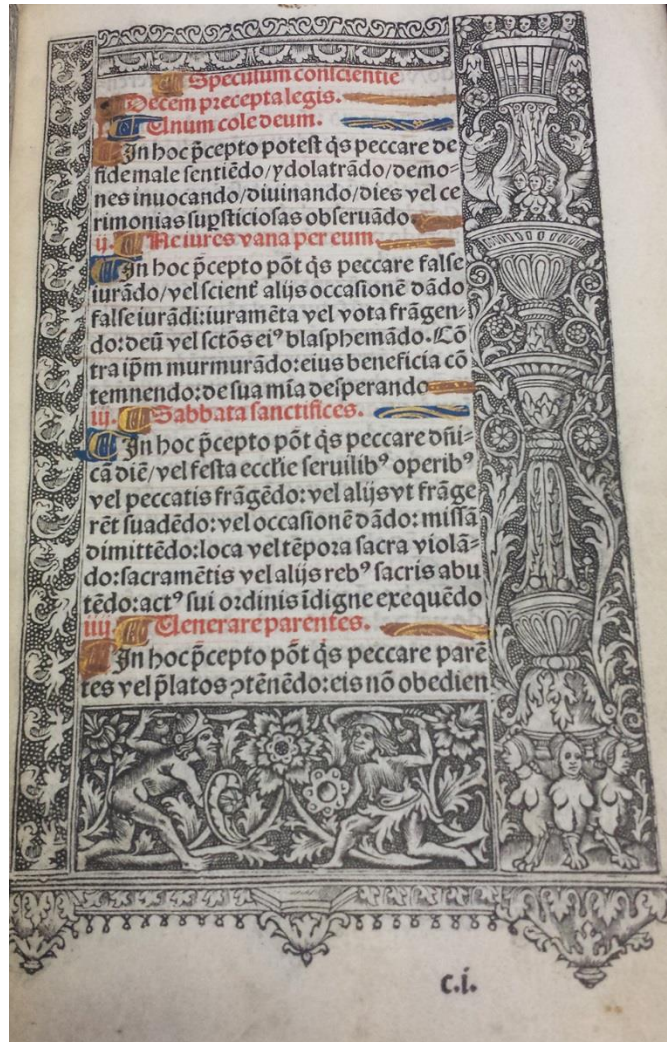
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Speculum Conscientie
Halia Daley

The *Speculum Conscientie* in the Kerver Book of Hours begins on c.1 and continues through the end of c.4v. It is headed by the title *Speculum Conscientie* in red lettering. *Speculum Conscientie* is Latin for “Mirror of Conscience” and this section of the Book of Hours is composed of elements that reflect that meaning. The section contains the Ten Commandments, the seven mortal sins, and the articles of the faithful which include the five senses, works of corporal and spiritual mercy, theological virtues, cardinal virtues, the seven gifts of the holy spirit, and the seven ecclesiastical sacraments. The headings of all of these subsections are also printed in red lettering.

Each commandment is listed by a title, then a description of what it is and how not to break it (c.1-c.2). This is followed by the seven mortal sins. Again, it both gives the title of the sin and then moves on to a description. This can be simple: the description for “lust” tersely



defines the sin as avoidance of the behavior forbidden by the sixth commandment above, “adultery” (c.2-c.3).

Following the commandments and sins are the articles of the faithful. Some of the subsections here are simply listing what the contents are, with no description. This is seen most easily in the subsection on the theological virtues. After the heading it simply says “Faith. Hope. Charity.” (*Fides. Spes. Caritas*). There is no further explanation of these virtues (c.3-c.4). The articles of the faithful ends with the formula for confession, telling how one should approach confession, what to say both in general confessions and how to articulate more specifically for the individual, and in what manner to think about confession (c.4-c.4v).

The *Speculum Conscientie* continues a literary tradition begun in the early thirteenth century of using the mirror as a metaphor for contemplation. There are several examples of devotional writing encouraging the mirror as a tool for reflection in more than the physical sense, including the *Speculum Conscientie Devotorum* and *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*.¹ The *Speculum Conscientie* is the next logical step from using a mirror to reflect on the lives of others and an individual’s response to them, to self-reflection and introspection. This follows a growing trend of the laity’s interest in devotional and contemplative literature.²

The inclusion of the *Speculum Conscientie* in this Book of Hours is intriguing, as it was not one of the more regularly included sections in a Book of Hours.³ It is especially of note as it is only preceded in the book by the calendar and computistical tables, which gives it a

¹Paul J. Patterson. “The Book and Religious Practice in Late Medieval England.” *Religion & Literature* 37, No. 2 (2005). 1-8. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40059984>.

²Hilary M. Carey. “Devout Literate Laypeople and the Pursuit of the Mixed Life in Later Medieval England.” *The Journal of Religious History* 14, 4 (1987). 361-381.

³Laura Sterponi. “Reading in Meditation in the Middle Ages: *Lectio Divina* and Books of Hours.” *Text & Talk* 28, 5 (2008): 667-689. DOI 10.1515/TEXT.2008.034.

prominent position. There is some evidence that it is an adaptation from Edmund Rich's *Speculum Ecclesiae*, which also contains the seven mortal sins, the ten commandments, theological and cardinal virtues, and the seven sacraments.⁴ The *Speculum Ecclesiae* is an early thirteenth-century text that is an exemplar for an entire genre of mirror-metaphor works, specifically relating to virtues and vices.⁵ It is reasonable to suspect that the popularity of this genre led to the inclusion of a similar section, the *Speculum Conscientie*, in the Kerver *Book of Hours*, answering the apparent demand for mirror-metaphor ecclesiastical self-reflection.⁷

The title, *Speculum Conscientie*, is also compelling, as it links the section to a common visual artistic phenomenon at the time. Artistic imagery often shows a mirror with a skull looking back out at either a subject within the work or at the viewer of the work themselves. This demonstrates that human mortality was a focus of thought at the time and that people were preoccupied with the contemplation of their mortality.⁸ We see this reflected in the Kerver *Book of Hours*, with its prominent position of the *Speculum Conscientie* and the extensive *Danse Macabre* which spans a much larger section of the book than is typical.

Just as Books of Hours bridged the gap between the laity and the monastic orders, the inclusion of the *Speculum Conscientie* seems to work in a similar fashion for the artistic and literary advances that had been made since books of hours had begun to appear.⁹ The inclusion of it in a printed book of hours emphasizes the evolving needs of the people purchasing them. It

⁴Herbert Grabes. *The Mutable Glass: Mirror-Imagery in Titles and Texts of the Middle Ages and The English Renaissance*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1973.

⁵ Ibid, 53.

⁶ Ibid, 242.

⁷ Ibid, 54.

⁸James H. Marrow. "Symbol and Meaning in Northern European Art of the Late Middle Ages and the Early Renaissance." *Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art* 16, No. 2/3 (1986). 150-169. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3780635>.

⁹ Laura Sterponi, "Reading in Meditation," 674

seems Kerver was attempting to address an as yet unmet need in the literary market. There is little evidence the *Speculum Conscientie* was included in Books of Hours prior to this composition, reinforcing its connection to the development of the idea of self-reflection seen in the art and literature at the time.¹⁰

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¹⁰ Ibid, 675-676