

TCU Library Acquires Rare Medieval Book of Hours

TCU Library Special Collections is pleased to announce a significant new acquisition: a medieval *Book of Hours*, one of the most widely used devotional books of the Middle Ages.

Books of Hours were prayer books created for laypeople, containing prayers to be recited at set times throughout the day. Popular from the 14th through the 16th centuries, they typically include a calendar of feast days, psalms, Gospel readings, and other devotional texts. Many were lavishly decorated by hand, illuminated with gold leaf, and embellished with vibrant miniature paintings depicting biblical stories from the New Testament with scenes like the Crucifixion, Life of the Virgin Mary, Christ on the Tree of Life, and Mary Magdalene at the foot of the cross. Beyond their spiritual function, Books of Hours often served as personal objects of devotion and markers of social status.

The Book of Hours acquired by TCU Library was produced in Paris in the 1420s or 1430s, during the height of manuscript production in the city. Several of its illuminations are attributed to an anonymous but well-known artist identified by scholars as the *Master of the Harvard Hannibal*, a highly skilled French manuscript illuminator active in early fifteenth-century Paris. The manuscript is believed to have been owned by a woman named Anne Seurot.

With generous support from the Lesley Foundation, TCU Library purchased the manuscript from Les Enluminures, a Paris-based dealer specializing in medieval and Renaissance manuscripts.

Known as the *Anne Seurot Book of Hours*, the volume remains in its original binding. Each parchment page was written and illustrated entirely by hand using iron gall ink and decorated with gold leaf illumination. The manuscript was created approximately 130 years before the invention of the printing press, representing countless hours of skilled labor. The book also contains handwritten annotations added in 1664 and at later dates, offering insight into its continued use over time.

“We’re excited to add this landmark manuscript to our collection and look forward to sharing it through classes and exhibitions,” says Rare Books Librarian Zannah Bingham. “The Book of Hours is an indispensable resource for studying late medieval piety and prayer, as well as the art and craftsmanship of the period.”



Books of Hours typically open with a calendar marking the feast days of the Christian year. Days of particular importance were written in red or gold, giving rise to the phrase *red-letter day*, meaning a memorable or fortunate occasion. Each month was often accompanied by a zodiac sign and a miniature illustration representing seasonal labor. These calendars were usually followed by four short Gospel readings, presented in the order of John, Luke, Matthew, and Mark.

This remarkable manuscript strengthens TCU Library’s holdings in medieval studies, art history, and religious history, and will support teaching, research, and public engagement for years to come.