



Marking the Hours: English People and Their Prayers, 1240-1570

Eamon Duffy

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In this richly illustrated book, religious historian Eamon Duffy discusses the Book of Hours, unquestionably the most intimate and most widely used book of the later Middle Ages. He examines surviving copies of the personal prayer books which were used for private, domestic devotions, and in which people commonly left traces of their lives. Manuscript prayers, biographical jottings, affectionate messages, autographs, and pious paste-ins often crowd the margins, flyleaves, and blank spaces of such books. From these sometimes clumsy jottings, viewed by generations of librarians and art historians as blemishes at best, vandalism at worst, Duffy teases out precious clues to the private thoughts and public contexts of their owners, and insights into the times in which they lived and prayed. His analysis has a special relevance for the history of women, since women feature very prominently among the identifiable owners and users of the medieval Book of Hours.

Books of Hours range from lavish illuminated manuscripts worth a king's ransom to mass-produced and sparsely illustrated volumes costing a few shillings or pence. Some include customized prayers and pictures requested by the purchaser, and others, handed down from one family member to another, bear the often poignant traces of a family's history over several generations. Duffy places these volumes in the context of religious and social change, above all the Reformation, discusses their significance to Catholics and Protestants, and describes the controversy they inspired under successive Tudor regimes. He looks closely at several special volumes, including the cherished Book of Hours that Sir Thomas More kept with him in the Tower of London as he awaited execution.

Marking the Hours: English People and Their Prayers, 1240-1570 Details

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From Reader Review Marking the Hours: English People and Their Prayers, 1240-1570 for online ebook

John Osman says

Duffy explores not just late-medieval English prayer books but, more importantly, the markings made by the users of the prayer books.

Duffy reiterates that it was not the text but the illuminations which attracted people to these books. As such, these prayer-books stand between the age of stain glass windows and the age of the printed text.

And what is fascinating about these books is how they were customized during production AND during usage, from the inclusion of the users name in the prayer text to illuminations of the users in prayer, All of which assisted the users in their spiritual journey and made the prayer book - and thus the prayer experience - a very intimate and individualistic moment. Some have even claimed that these prayer-books contributed to an increase in individualism in prayer - with its inward focus on the individual as opposed to an outward focus on God. This is aptly dubbed "Spiritual whining."

In this book the reader will learn, among other things, the origins of the book of hours, the main contents or prayer text of the book of hours, how many of these books were made for women, the importance of image over text, the importance of the prayer books for social status, how they kept family histories and genealogies well before the Bible, and Duffy's most important focus, how they were personalized.

This book is a great read

Margaret Sankey says

While Eamon Duffy researched *_The Stripping of the Altars*, he noticed that personal Books of Hours were often annotated, defaced, customized and censored. Coming back to these manuscripts, he analyzes the marginalia--tracking how they were inherited within families and recorded births and marriages (sometimes with chains of dead husbands and children to be prayed for), customized with the addition of favorite saints or collected prayers for specific events (lost keys, fevers, to prevent children falling out of windows), autographed with greetings or prayers by people they encountered (this was apparently a common favor by high-ranking people, signing prayer books with good wishes), purged (half-heartedly or ruthlessly) of mentions of the pope, Thomas Becket or demoted famous people, or used as a handy, always carried around record of local business transactions. With many illustrations and a case study of the cheap printed prayer book Sir Thomas More took with him to the Tower and annotated in his last days. Duffy amusingly recounts that the librarians from whom he requested these materials often apologized for the "vandalism," when that was precisely what he was looking to find.

Adam says

This is an excellant study of late medieval Book of Hours from England (both manuscript and print). Building on his argument in the Stripping of the Altars, Duffy demonstrates that late medieval piety was not marked by individualism or a trend toward "Protestantism" but that late medieval Christians (whether Richard III or Thomas More) interiorized a communal often conventional devotional life firmly established a liturgical context. He is able to demonstate the very slow acceptance of Reformed theology through the way that book owners edited their Book of Hours to conform with royal decree. Excellant read.

Conor says

In typical Duffy fashion this book is well written and keeps you engaged and interested from start to finish. A wonderful book!

Kara says

The kind of satisfyingly choc-full-of-cool-stuff history book you just want to chew on and savor as Duffy teases out an entire lost world, brought to life from literally (heh!) the margins.

Fay says

Interesting points of view of the Book of Hours (particularly their role in the protestant reformation of England) from a catholic point of view.

Drew Darby says

Picking up a certain avenue of investigation that arose in his Stripping of the Altars, Eamon Duffy once again did a great job of drawing me in to the world of Pre-Reformation English Christianity.

The two strongest points of the book were Duffy's insightful considerations of the personal prayer books he examined, as well as the annotations of the owners which they bore, as well as the abundance of illustrations the book has.

Perhaps my expectations were too high (based on The Stripping of the Altars), but while the material that is there is most illuminating, I finished the book with the sense of wishing there were more to it. In other words, too short!

Nevertheless, it provided a wonderful peek into the popular piety of the time.

Tom says

Good review in America: <http://www.americamagazine.org/content/2013/03/07/review-of-the-book-of-hours>

Sounds like strong mix of writing and art. Might have to break my current ban on buying new books for this one.

Elizabeth Judd Taylor says

This is a beautifully illustrated book about the prayer books known as the Book of Hours. The text and photos go together pretty much seamlessly; if the author is talking about a specific Book of Hours then an illustration will be right on the same page with it, or have a dedicated photo page right after (in fact, my only real issue with the book is that I found my eyes jumping to the photo captions, which made reading the main text feel a bit disjointed at times; but having the photo with the text outweighs that distraction in my mind).

The author's intent here is to show how these Books of Hours were used not just as prayer books, but how people added to--marked--the books with family records, notes on prayers, etc.; and how things like superstition and the changes brought on by the English Reformation made a mark on the books. The role of these books in women's lives is also discussed at length.

This is a lovely, interesting book which delves into English medieval and Tudor history, social history, religion, and art; highly recommended to people interested in any or all of those topics.

AskHistorians says

A beautifully illustrated (and surprisingly cheap) study of Books of Hours, the medieval precursor to the modern Book of Common Prayer.
