

Sing a New Song
*The Psalms in
Medieval Art and Life*

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COMPOSING THE PSALMS

Open at the Book of Psalms, known in Hebrew as *Tehillim* (Praises), this Hebrew Bible reminds us that the sacred songs originated in the culture and beliefs of the ancient Israelites. Made in or near Avignon, the manuscript features ornamented panels that set off opening words, and foliate borders incorporating dragons and birds. It was made for the Jewish physician Vidal Astruc de Carcassonne and copied by the scribe Simon ben Rabbi Samuel, who completed the work in December 1422. In times of political upheaval and persecution books were vulnerable to censorship and destruction; relatively few Hebrew manuscripts survive from the Middle Ages. This precious example attests to a thriving Jewish community in southern France in the fifteenth century.

***Tehillim* (Praises)**

Bible, in Hebrew

**Written by Simon ben Rabbi Samuel for Vidal Astruc
de Carcassonne**

France, probably Avignon, 1422

The Morgan Library & Museum, ms G.48, fols. 438r–437v |

Gift of the Trustees of the William S. Glazier Collection, 1984

COMPOSING THE PSALMS

This panel by Lorenzo Monaco depicts David holding a stringed instrument known as a psaltery. Lips parted, poised to utter the divinely inspired words of the psalms, David tunes a string in anticipation, gently turning the peg with his left hand. By presenting David with a crown, royal robes, and psaltery, the painting not only alludes to his kingship and musical abilities—it also highlights his role as a prophet. It is, in fact, part of a set of four paintings showing the Hebrew prophets Noah, Abraham, and Moses. Each figure has a meticulously ornamented halo, advertising his sanctity and assimilation by Christians.

Lorenzo Monaco (Piero di Giovanni)

King David as Psalmist

Tempera on wood, gold ground

Italy, Florence, ca. 1408–10

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Gwynne

Andrews and Marquand Funds, and Gift of Mrs. Ralph J.

Hines, by exchange, 1965; 65.14.4



Lorenzo Monaco (Piero di Giovanni), *Noah, Abraham, and Moses*, Florence, ca. 1408–10 (details). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; 65.14.2; 65.14.1; 65.14.3. Photos: © The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Image source: Art Resource, New York.

LIFE OF DAVID

These scenes from David's eventful life are part of a group of forty-six leaves depicting various Old Testament stories.

Created in thirteenth-century Paris, almost certainly for a royal patron, the paintings take their subjects from the biblical Books of Samuel, which offer the fullest description of David's life.

Originally the pictures had no texts. The accompanying inscriptions in Latin, Persian, and Judeo-Persian, dating from the fourteenth to the seventeenth century, were added in three separate campaigns. These texts demonstrate the relevance of the narratives for disparate audiences and the sustained engagement with the images from medieval to early modern times.

Although at present unbound, collectively the leaves are referred to as the Crusader Bible. The title reflects the bellicose nature of numerous images and the traditional association of the volume with King Louis IX of France (1214–1270), who led two military expeditions to the Holy Land. Given the emphasis on David's life, to which forty percent of the pictures are devoted, it is possible that the leaves were designed as part of a luxurious Book of Psalms, many of which open with prefatory cycles of full-page images for the reader's contemplation.

LIFE OF DAVID

Conveying David's meteoric rise from shepherd boy to king, these scenes show him being anointed by the prophet Samuel. At the upper right, God gazes down from heaven as oil flows onto David's head and he receives the spirit of the Lord. At the lower left, a distraught King Saul tears at his cloak as the dove representing that same spirit flies away and a demon prepares to invade his heart. The final scene shows Saul's men, having heard of David's musical prowess, summoning him to play his harp to soothe the troubled ruler. Destined to become the greatest king of Israel, David was also celebrated as a prolific composer of sacred songs—the psalms.

David Anointed

Leaf from the Crusader Bible

France, Paris, ca. 1244–54

The Morgan Library & Museum, ms M.638, fol. 26r |

Purchased by J. P. Morgan Jr., 1916

LIFE OF DAVID

The scenes depicted in the Crusader Bible leaves are based on biblical narratives, but, as usual in medieval art, the figures are shown in contemporaneous dress. Here, David battles Goliath who wears chain mail and a distinctive helmet—a kettle helm—worn by infantrymen in many parts of medieval Europe. Its wide brim was ideal for deflecting blows and arrows, but it fails to protect the giant from the stone hurled by David that strikes him between the eyes. Goliath's sword also proves ineffectual but is wielded expertly by David, who uses it to decapitate his foe. Having presented the giant's head to King Saul, David is rewarded with a gift from Saul's son, Jonathan, who gives him the clothes off his back.

David Slays Goliath

Leaf from the Crusader Bible

France, Paris, ca. 1244–54

The Morgan Library & Museum, ms M.638, fol. 28v |

Purchased by J. P. Morgan Jr., 1916

LIFE OF DAVID

The biblical David is a complex character: exultant victor and mournful parent, benevolent monarch and ruthless warrior, righteous king and penitent sinner. These scenes illustrate the most notorious episode in his life: his adulterous affair with Bathsheba. As shown at the top, King David, from the roof of his palace, spies a beautiful woman at her bath. Overcome with lust, he sends a messenger to discover her identity. Despite learning that she is the wife of his soldier Uriah the Hittite, David summons Bathsheba and sleeps with her. When she becomes pregnant, he arranges for Uriah to be sent to the front lines of battle—thus ensuring his death and enabling David to take Bathsheba as his wife.

David and Bathsheba

Leaf from the Crusader Bible

France, Paris, ca. 1244–54

The Morgan Library & Museum, ms M.638, fol. 41v |

Purchased by J. P. Morgan Jr., 1916

LIFE OF DAVID

Scenes from David's life are the focus of this exceptional frontispiece from a luxurious English Bible illuminated around 850 years ago. His famous victory over the giant Goliath is shown at the top, and in the middle he plays his harp for King Saul and is anointed by the prophet Samuel as a sign of God's favor. The story then skips ahead to David's reign during which his rebellious son, Absalom, attempted to seize the throne. Absalom, fleeing on horseback from David's men, is apprehended and killed, and when word reaches David of his son's death, he weeps inconsolably, burying his face in his cloak. The psychological depth suggested by this image of David is in keeping with his portrayal in the Bible.

Scenes from the Life of David

Leaf from the Winchester Bible

England, Winchester, ca. 1160–80

**The Morgan Library & Museum, ms M.619 | Purchased by
J. Pierpont Morgan, 1912**

DAVID AS ANCESTOR OF CHRIST

The conviction that the historical King David was Christ's royal ancestor inspired a popular motif known as the Tree of Jesse. The image functions as a genealogical diagram showing Jesse at the base, David higher up, and Mary with the infant Christ at the top, occupying the place of honor. In this book the Tree of Jesse faces an Annunciation. Linking the two motifs are the words purportedly uttered by the angel Gabriel to Mary, announcing the news of Jesus's birth: "He [Christ] shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the most High; and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of David his father" (Luke 1:32).

Tree of Jesse and Annunciation

Book of Hours, in Latin and French

Illuminated by Robert Boyvin

France, Rouen, ca. 1495–1503

The Morgan Library & Museum, ms M.261, fols. 25v–26r |

Purchased by J. Pierpont Morgan before 1913

TRANSLATING THE PSALMS

St. Jerome (ca. 347–420), a monk and prolific scholar, translated the entire Bible from Greek into Latin (known as the Vulgate). Amazingly, he translated the Book of Psalms itself three times. Known as the *Romanum*, *Gallicanum*, and *Hebraicum*, these translations had remarkably different fates. (His *Gallicanum*, for example, remained in use by the Catholic Church until 1965.) Jerome's fame as a translator and interpreter of scripture grew steadily over the centuries. By the late Middle Ages artists began depicting him as a scholar in his study, often with the distinctive red hat of a cardinal. This example shows him pausing from his work to tend the injured paw of a lion—a famous legend associated with the saint.

Jerome in His Study

Book of Hours, in Latin

Illuminated by the Fastolf Master

England, ca. 1440–50

The Morgan Library & Museum, ms G.9, fols. 160v–161r | Gift of the Trustees of the William S. Glazier Collection, 1984

TRANSLATING THE PSALMS

Part of a much longer literary scroll, this fragment preserves three hymns relating to the New Year's celebrations of an ancient Jewish community in southern Egypt. One hymn is a prototype of Psalm 20—the earliest version of any biblical psalm. The two other hymns, however, ultimately would not be included in the authoritative text of the Hebrew Bible, and thus their presence complicates the notion of an “original” text. Various sets of songs, in different versions, circulated across ancient Jewish communities. It was only gradually that the psalms were codified into a standard set and sequence.

New Year's hymns

Literary scroll, in Aramaic with Demotic script

Egypt, fourth century BC

The Morgan Library & Museum, Amherst Egyptian Papyrus

63.5 | Purchased by J. Pierpont Morgan, 1912

TRANSLATING THE PSALMS

This manuscript contains ninety-five extracts from the Book of Psalms, known as *hermeneia*, which were used in the daily chanting of the Divine Office. Like many Coptic manuscripts from this period, the texts here are largely bilingual, appearing in both Egyptian and Greek. This cultural syncretism is echoed by the manuscript's magnificent frontispiece, which depicts the Virgin Mary nursing the Christ Child and bears similarities to images of the Egyptian goddess Isis nursing her son Horus. For medieval Coptic viewers, this blending of Byzantine iconography with traditional ancient Egyptian imagery emphasized Christ's divine nature.

Virgin Mary Nursing the Christ Child

***Hermeneia*, in Coptic and Greek**

**Written and illuminated by the Deacon Basili and
his son Samouel**

Egypt, Touton, 897–98

The Morgan Library & Museum, ms M.574, fols. 1v–2r |

Purchased by J. Pierpont Morgan, 1911

TRANSLATING THE PSALMS

By the sixth century Ethiopian scholars had translated the Greek Septuagint version of the Psalms into Ge'ez, which became the language and script of Ethiopian liturgical texts. Psalters such as this one were among the most frequently copied texts in Ethiopia and were one of the few books owned by private individuals. The first owner of this eighteenth-century manuscript is unknown, but according to an inscription it was copied by the “illustrious Walda Aragawi, who looked after the parchments.” The manuscript preserves its original leather satchel (*mahdar*), which enabled it to be carried safely or hung from a peg for storage.

Psalter, in Ge'ez

Written by Walda Aragawi

Ethiopia, eighteenth century

The Morgan Library & Museum ms M.678, fols. 146v–147r |

Purchased by J. P. Morgan Jr., 1923

TRANSLATING THE PSALMS

In the third and second centuries BC, an influential Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible emerged. Known as the Septuagint (meaning “seventy,” referring to the purported number of translators involved), this version quickly became the most common biblical text for the substantial Greek-speaking Jewish diaspora and eventually for early Christians as well. This leaf belongs to one of the best-preserved examples of a Greek Psalter from late-antique Egypt. Manuscripts such as this were produced not only by the Jewish diaspora in Egypt but also by nascent Christian communities, which would come to be known as the Copts.

Psalter (Bodmer 24), in Greek

Egypt, ca. 225–325 AD

The Museum of the Bible, Washington, DC, ms 170.18

THE PSALMS ACROSS CULTURES

The earliest Psalters from medieval England often contain English glosses to help readers understand the Latin poetry. These translations suggest that the books functioned in part as Primers, introducing novices to the language of the psalms. Glossed Psalters constitute an important source for understanding the early history of the English language.

Here, Psalm 80 begins with an artful rendering of the first two words, “Exultate Deo” (Rejoice to God), featuring tangles of interlace, ornament, and snapping beasts. Between the lines, a later scribe added a few of the manuscript’s nearly five thousand vernacular glosses. The Latin *exultate* and *iubilare*, for instance, have been translated as *blissiaþ* (rejoice) and *singap* (sing), respectively.

Psalm 80: “Exultate Deo” (Rejoice to God)

Blickling Psalter, in Latin with English glosses

England, ca. 730

The Morgan Library & Museum, ms M.776, fols. 39v–40r |

Purchased, 1932

THE PSALMS ACROSS CULTURES

In the mid-fourteenth century, the mystic author and hermit Richard Rolle composed a popular translation and commentary on the Book of Psalms in Middle English. The numerous surviving manuscripts of Rolle's English Psalter generally make a clear visual distinction between its three main components. Here, passages of the authoritative Latin text are written in a larger script and underlined in red ink. Each of these passages is followed by Rolle's English translation, which begins with a red paraph, and his commentary, signaled by a colon. In such a way, readers could switch comfortably between Latin and English and thus engage more intimately with the sacred text.

David Harping (Psalm 1)

Richard Rolle's Psalter, in Latin and English

England, ca. 1400

Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge,

Massachusetts, Richardson MS 36, fols. 1v–2r

THE PSALMS ACROSS CULTURES

In the mid-ninth century, the psalms were among the earliest biblical texts that the missionary saints Cyril and Methodius translated into Church Slavonic, the traditional liturgical language of the Eastern Orthodox Church. Frequently copied and quoted, the Slavonic Psalter was a foundational text for Orthodox Christian communities in the Middle Ages, including those in the region of Moldavia (present-day Romania), where this manuscript was created. Inscriptions link this Psalter to the Putna monastery, which housed an important scriptorium during the time of its founder and patron, Prince Stephen the Great (r. 1457–1504).

Psalms with commentary, in Church Slavonic

Romania, Putna, ca. 1470

The Morgan Library & Museum, ms M.695, fols. 109v–110r |

Purchased, 1925

THE PSALMS ACROSS CULTURES

Psalters from Jewish communities in Europe are extremely rare, in part because Hebrew books were intentionally destroyed in persecutory campaigns over the centuries. Scholars estimate that up to 95 percent of medieval Hebrew manuscripts have perished.

This exceptional survival contains the biblical books of Psalms, Job, and Proverbs, whose Hebrew names form an acronym for “truth,” hence the name “Books of Truth.” It was made for Jacob, son of Rabbi Benjamin of Montalcino, the patriarch of a leading Jewish family in Renaissance Tuscany. Remarkably, a nearly identical manuscript was produced by the same scribe and artist for the great Renaissance patron Lorenzo de’ Medici. Both patrons were likely drawn to the Books of Truth for scholarly, more so than devotional, reasons, as their authors—David, Job, and Solomon—were regarded by Jewish and Christian scholars alike as the ancient predecessors of all philosophers.

David and Goliath

Books of Truth (*Sifrei Emet*), in Hebrew

Written by Isaac ben Ovadiah and illuminated by

Mariano del Buono

Italy, Florence, 1467

**Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Yale University,
New Haven, ms 409, fols. 2v–3r**

THE PSALMS ACROSS CULTURES

Byzantine artists developed an elaborate tradition of illustrating the Psalter that involved painting scenes in books' margins. These so-called marginal Psalters contain hundreds of images linked to their corresponding textual passages by graphic signs and lines. Akin to footnotes, these scenes function as pictorial glosses, providing a visual commentary. Here, Psalm 77 features David gesturing to the plagues of Egypt below. Two personifications of rivers pour streams of water down the left margin, circling blighted crops and terminating near a vignette depicting the pharaoh and his men in distress. On the facing page, the pharaoh's army drowns in the Red Sea. A line links this scene to the "enemies" of Psalm 77:53.

Plagues of Egypt and Crossing of the Red Sea

Marginal Psalter, in Greek

Byzantium (Eastern Mediterranean), ca. 1300

The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, ms w.733, fols. 41v–42r

THE PSALMS AND PRINTING: A SERIES OF FIRSTS

In 1457 the archbishop of Mainz commissioned Johann Fust and Peter Schoeffer to create a deluxe edition of the Book of Psalms using the printing press recently invented by their former partner, Johann Gutenberg. The historic edition was the first to use two sizes of type and multiple colors of ink (black, red, and blue) in one pull of the press.

A second edition, seen here, appeared two years later, revised and expanded to suit the needs of monastic communities. Larger and more elaborate, it used the same innovative technology to produce multicolor decorative initials and rubrics. Only the musical notation needed to be added by hand. As a further sign of prestige, all known copies of both editions were printed on parchment rather than paper.

Psalm 101

Mainz Psalter, in Latin

Mainz: Johann Fust and Peter Schoeffer, 1459

The Morgan Library & Museum, PML 14, fols. 67v–68r |

Purchased by J. Pierpont Morgan, 1900

THE PSALMS AND PRINTING: A SERIES OF FIRSTS

Although Jewish printers in Italy began producing books just a few years after the new technology was introduced there in the 1460s, a complete Hebrew Bible was not printed until 1488. The delay was caused in part by the considerable technical challenge of adding vowel points (*niqqud*) to unvocalized Hebrew text.

Representing an important step, this Psalter is among the very first printed books of the Hebrew Bible. Nevertheless, *niqqud* are not included after the first few pages, presumably because it was still too difficult. Like many Jewish books, copies of this Psalter were destroyed or censored by Christian inquisitors. The volume's lengthy colophon (printer's statement) specifies that three hundred copies were made—of which fewer than ten percent have survived.

Psalms with commentary of David Kimhi, in Hebrew
Bologna: Hayyim Mordecai and Hezekiah de Venturo, 1477
The Morgan Library & Museum, PML 75567, fols. 2v–3r |
Purchased, 1978

THE PSALMS AND PRINTING: A SERIES OF FIRSTS

In 1481 the Italian scholar Johannes Crastonus worked with the Milan-based printer Bonus Accursius to produce a bilingual edition of the Psalms—the earliest printing in Greek of any biblical book. Aiming to produce a tool for students learning Greek, they made considerable changes to both the form and content of the text to aid their readers' comprehension. The Greek text avoids abbreviations and is closely aligned to the corresponding Latin translation—often following the same word breaks. Crastonus also adapted the grammar and syntax of the Latin to reflect a more literal rendering of the Greek. His didactic approach to the book continued the medieval tradition of using the Psalter as a Primer.

Psalm 1

Psalter, in Greek and Latin

Milan: Bonus Accursius, 1481

**The Morgan Library & Museum, PML 39414, fol. Ai recto |
Purchased, 1947**

MONASTIC AND CLERICAL LEARNING

Christian interest in the original language of the Psalms—Hebrew—increased the demand for copies of Jerome’s *Hebraicum*, his translation from Hebrew into Latin. That version, prized for study, is found in this lavishly illuminated Bible, made by and for monks, possibly at the Abbey of Fleury in Saint-Benoît-sur-Loire, northeast France. On the left, the initial *Q* for Psalm 52 in the Hebraic numbering (“Why do you glory in malice, you who are mighty in iniquity?”) shows Christ confronting the treacherous Old Testament figure Doeg, depicted as a French knight. The initial *D*, on the right for Psalm 53 in the Hebraic numbering (“The fool said in his heart: There is no God”) portrays King David with a “fool,” a court jester / atheist, a conventional motif for this psalm.

A Malicious Knight and Fool

Bible, in Latin

**France, Saint-Benoît-sur-Loire, possibly Abbey of Fleury,
ca. 1260**

**The Morgan Library & Museum, ms M.110, fols. 64v–65r |
Purchased by J. Pierpont Morgan, before 1913**

MONASTIC AND CLERICAL LEARNING

This precious manuscript once belonged to Augustinian canons, clergy living communally who followed the rule developed by St. Augustine. This same rule is adhered to by the recently elected pope, Leo XIV. The manuscript contains an early version of the *Glossa ordinaria*, a standard commentary compiled by scholars in the circle Anselm of Laon (d. 1117), master at the cathedral school in that northern French city. The biblical text, in larger script, occupies the center of the page, indicating its primacy. Each psalm opens with a large initial, with smaller red initials marking the verses. Arranged in columns, the commentary flanks the biblical text and appears in between the lines, giving readers simultaneous access to gloss and psalm within a single page. Handy bookmarks, the knotted leather tabs indicate particular psalms.

Psalm 26, with the *Glossa ordinaria* (Standard Gloss)

Rebdorf Psalter, in Latin

Germany, Rebdorf near Eichstätt, mid-twelfth century

The Museum of the Bible, Washington, DC, ms.000852,

fols. 25v–26r

MONASTIC AND CLERICAL LEARNING

An angel and a demon encroach on a bishop seated at his desk. This is Peter Lombard, master at the cathedral school of Notre-Dame, Paris. Extending a blessing hand toward the master, the angel also points at the scowling demon, who flees. Has the angel vanquished the evil one? Perhaps, but it seems more likely that our episcopal author has done so, using his pen and erudition. The scene is set within the C that starts the sentence “Cum omnes prophetas” (With all the prophets), the opening words of the prologue to Peter Lombard’s Great Gloss on the Psalms, one of the most widely read, cited, and copied biblical commentaries of the Middle Ages, which is preserved in over eight hundred manuscripts.

Peter Lombard at Work

Peter Lombard, *Magna glossatura in psalmos* (Great Gloss on the Psalms)

Copied and illuminated by Rufillus of Weissenau

Germany, Weissenau, ca. 1200–1215

Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, ms Ricketts

20, fols. 1v–2r | Acquired with the Ricketts Collection, 1961

MONASTIC AND CLERICAL LEARNING

Covering the entire Bible, the *Glossa ordinaria* (Standard Gloss) consists of quotations from and paraphrases of writings by esteemed scholars, including Jerome and Augustine. Surviving in thousands of manuscripts and in printed books such as this set, the *Glossa ordinaria* was one of the twelfth century's greatest intellectual achievements. It also had a revolutionary impact on the appearance of the medieval book. By combining text and commentary on a single page, first scribes, and later printers, changed how readers interacted with the text. Here, double columns of psalm text, starting with the large *B* for *Beatus* (Blessed), are bracketed by the gloss. Remnants of chains show that these volumes, the earliest Latin Bible printed with glosses, were once fastened to shelves or desks—a common means of deterring thieves.

Psalm 1: “Beatus vir” (Blessed is the man)

**Bible with the *Glossa ordinaria* (Standard Gloss), in Latin
France, Strasbourg: Adolf Rusch, for Anton Koberger at
Nuremberg, not after 1480**

**The Morgan Library & Museum, PML 26673, fols. e1v–e2r,
26672, 26674, and 26675 | Purchased by J. P. Morgan Jr., 1929**

EARLY CHURCH FATHERS

This imposing painting, the central panel of an altarpiece made in Bruges around 1490, depicts five scenes from the life of St. Augustine of Hippo (354–430). After being ordained as priest, as shown in the upper left, Augustine, ensconced in a pulpit, preaches to his congregants, including his bishop and his mother, Monica, who clasps her rosary. The central scene shows his later consecration as bishop of Hippo, North Africa, an office he occupied for over three decades. On the right Augustine converses with other scholars. He is possibly discussing the mystery of the Trinity, depicted in the allegorical scene above. Allegory permeates Augustine's writings and was the basis of his interpretation of the psalms.

Master of Saint Augustine

Scenes from the Life of St. Augustine of Hippo

Oil, gold, and silver on wood

Belgium, Bruges, ca. 1490

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Cloisters

Collection, 1961; 61.199

EARLY CHURCH FATHERS

Augustine was a phenomenal preacher. Of the estimated eight thousand sermons he delivered, approximately one thousand survive. His sermons on the psalms were the basis of his lengthiest work, *Expositions on the Psalms*. For ease of use, this widely read work was generally split into three or more volumes. This manuscript contains Augustine's expositions on the Gradual Psalms (Psalms 119–133). Also known as the Songs of Ascent, these psalms are traditionally associated with pilgrims and priests climbing the mount to the Temple in Jerusalem and ascending its steps (*gradus* in Latin). The manuscript also includes Augustine's *Enchiridion* (Greek for "handbook"), a summary of Christian doctrine.

Expositions on Psalms 125 and 126

Augustine of Hippo, *Enarrationes in psalmos*

(Expositions on the Psalms), in Latin

Spain, Santa María de Benevívere near Palencia,

late twelfth century

Rare Book Department, Free Library of Philadelphia,

Lewis E 22, fols. 68v–69r

MONASTIC AND CLERICAL LEARNING

Designed for study, this Bible contains a full scholarly apparatus and finding aids, including extensive marginal glosses, multiple prologues, notes of concordance, chapter summaries, page headings, and chapter numbers. The “double Psalter,” with Jerome’s *Gallicanum* and *Hebraicum* side-by-side, facilitated textual comparisons, as demonstrated by this page for Psalm 101, *Domine exaudi* (Hear, O Lord). In the right column, the *Hebraicum*, an illumination shows Christ in Majesty, surrounded by the symbols of the four evangelists, holding a scroll inscribed, “Beati pauper spiritu” (Blessed are the poor in Spirit). In the left column, the *Gallicanum*, are suppliants, some half naked, the poor in Spirit about to be blessed. Fittingly, this scholarly book was made in Oxford, home to England’s first university.

Poor in Spirit Beseech Christ

Lothian Bible, in Latin

England, Oxford, ca. 1220

The Morgan Library & Museum, ms M.791, fols. 194v–195r |

Gift of Philip Hofer, 1935

WOMEN AND LEARNING

The French commentary preserved in this elegant manuscript was written for the noblewoman Laurette d'Alsace (d. 1175), daughter of Count Thierry of Flanders. In the initial for Psalm 13 (which Psalm 52 repeats)—“The fool said in his heart: There is no God”—the traditional subject of a fool is replaced by Adam, whose foolish disobedience damned humanity. Pointing to a tree, God informs Adam that he can eat the fruit of all the trees in Eden apart from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, a message inscribed on his scroll. A stream of water gushes from the vessel upended by the figure in the commentary initial. This is Physon, one of the rivers of Paradise, irrigating the Garden.

God Commanding Adam and River of Paradise

**Psalms, in Latin with interlinear French translation and
commentary by Simon de Tournai**

Illuminated by the Ingeborg Psalter Workshop

Belgium, Tournai, ca. 1200

The Morgan Library & Museum, ms M.338, fols. 41v–42r |

Purchased by J. Pierpont Morgan, 1908

WOMEN AND LEARNING

The proliferation of texts in everyday languages offered women new ways to engage with books and to participate more fully in literary culture. This Psalter, part of a compendium of Bible stories in French, has a frontispiece showing David confronting Goliath. The illuminations have been attributed to the Parisian workshop of Richard and Jeanne de Montbaston, a husband-and-wife team known for their riotous colors and clumsy yet charming figures. The arms of the book's first owner, a member of the Rochechouart family, are emblazoned on the evil giant's shield. No negative connotation was intended; this was simply the most prominent place to put them. A later inscription records that on January 8, 1466, Cardinal Jehan Rolin, bishop of Autun, gave the manuscript to his niece, Jehanne Roline.

David and Goliath

***Bible historiale*, in French**

Illuminated by the workshop of Richard and

Jeanne de Montbaston

France, Paris, ca. 1325

The Morgan Library & Museum, ms M.323, fols. 1v–2r |

Purchased by J. Pierpont Morgan, 1907

CHILDREN AND LEARNING

A young Benedict of Nursia (480–547), founder of the Benedictines and champion of the psalms, is shown on his first day of school in this appealing manuscript. At the upper left, Pope Gregory writes his famous biography of Benedict. Below, Benedict's mother instructs his nurse to accompany him to school in Rome. She obliges, taking along a book—undoubtedly a Psalter—for his studies. In the next scene he reads aloud from the book in the schoolroom, impressing all present. Finally, having gained piety and wisdom, an adolescent Benedict leaves Rome, seeking spiritual enlightenment. His early education is encapsulated by his reading aloud from the Psalter, a practice that lay at the heart of pedagogy in the medieval West.

Education of St. Benedict

Life and Miracles of St Benedict, in Latin

Austria, Abbey of St. Florian, early fourteenth century

The Morgan Library & Museum, ms M.55, fols. 1v–2r |

Purchased by J. Pierpont Morgan, 1902

CHILDREN AND LEARNING

The motif of St. Anne teaching her daughter, Mary, to read emerged in fourteenth-century England and gradually spread throughout Europe. This illustration from a French Book of Hours shows the two in a bright classroom. Anne offers encouragement as Mary kneels and reads from the book on her mother's lap. It is a scene that no doubt reflects the way some medieval and Renaissance mothers instructed their children.

The lower border shows a three-year-old Mary being taken to the Temple to be educated, an incident recounted in the apocryphal Gospel of James. As the high priest prepares to greet her, Mary ascends the fifteen steps, symbolizing the fifteen Gradual Psalms, poems infused with messages of joy and hope.

St. Anne Instructing the Virgin

Hours of Henry VIII, in Latin

Illuminated by Jean Poyer

France, Tours, ca. 1500

The Morgan Library & Museum, ms H.8, fols. 186v–187r |

Gift of the Heineman Foundation, 1977

CHILDREN AND LEARNING

An essential book for young children was the Primer, which often contained some psalms or excerpts, as well as basic prayers. Prayers for Mass and Graces for Meals were common components. The Grace shown here is illustrated by a young woman at table. Raising her right hand in a blessing gesture, she prepares to recite the opening words, “Benedicite Dominus nos . . .” (Bless us, O Lord, and these your gifts which we are about to receive from your bounty, through Christ our Lord. Amen.) Although she is depicted as an adolescent, the owner of the book would have been a child of about five years old. In Primers children were frequently portrayed as young adults who had attained literacy, reached puberty, and entered into society.

Girl Praying Grace Before Meals

Primer, in Latin

Illuminated by the Master of the Ghent Gradual

Belgium, probably Ghent or Tournai, 1460s

The Morgan Library & Museum, ms M.1241, fol. 1r |

Purchased as the gift of Virginia M. Schirrmeister and the Driver Family Foundation, 2023

PREFATORY CYCLES: NEW TESTAMENT

The Eadwine Psalter is one of the most complex and richly illuminated manuscripts of twelfth-century England. It contains 5 versions of the psalms, in 3 languages. It also features 166 colored drawings, over 500 decorated initials, and a (now separated) 8-page prefatory cycle (of which the Morgan owns 4) comprising over 130 small scenes from the Old and New Testaments. The grid-like scenes imitate those in a Gospel Book brought to England by St. Augustine of Canterbury on his mission to convert the island to Christianity in 597.

Shown here are scenes from the life of Christ, starting with Christ Healing Two Blind Men and ending with the Parable of the Prodigal Son.

Scenes from the Life of Christ

Single leaf from the Eadwine Psalter

England, Canterbury, 1155–60

**The Morgan Library & Museum, ms M.521r | Purchased by
J. Pierpont Morgan, 1911**

PREFATORY CYCLES: NEW TESTAMENT

This manuscript is widely considered the greatest Gothic Psalter in North America. The book's lush decoration consists of an illustrated calendar, a prefatory cycle of forty-eight scenes, and, in the Psalter section, illuminated initials (many historiated) marking each of the 150 psalms.

The prefatory miniatures focus on the lives of Christ and the Virgin, culminating with the Last Judgment. Here we see Pilate washing his hands, Christ carrying the Cross, the Crucifixion, and the Deposition. The elegant style of the images features figures dressed in flowing drapery and a delicate palette dominated by blue, pink, and burnished gold.

Scenes from the Passion of Christ

Lewis Psalter, in Latin

Illuminated by the Leber Group

France, Paris, ca. 1225–30

Rare Book Department, Free Library of Philadelphia,

Lewis MS E 185, fols. 14v–15r

PREFATORY CYCLES: OLD TESTAMENT

Prefatory cycles are one of the glories of illuminated Psalters. Situated at the front of the volume, these suites of pictures act as elaborate frontispieces to the psalms. This manuscript's prefatory cycle contains eighty scenes. Since the Book of Psalms appears within the Old Testament, other Old Testament texts frequently inspired these prefatory cycles (or parts of them). Here we see scenes from Genesis, including God's cursing Cain and Cain's accidental killing by Lamech, who is blind. Below, Noah builds the ark. On the right, Noah receives the dove, and, below that, his nakedness is covered by two of his sons, Shem and Japheth, but mocked by the third, Ham.

Scenes from the Old Testament

Huntingfield Psalter, in Latin, English, and French

England, Oxford, ca. 1210

The Morgan Library & Museum, ms M.43, fols. 8v–9r |

Purchased by J. Pierpont Morgan, 1902

PREFATORY CYCLES: LIVES OF THE SAINTS

In addition to depicting biblical narratives, prefatory cycles sometimes illustrate saints' lives. This Psalter was made for the English abbey of Ramsey (the Morgan owns the prefatory cycle, while the rest of the book is in St. Paul in Lavanttal, Austria). Concluding its prefatory cycle of eleven miniatures are scenes related to the abbey. Below an image of the 1170 murder of Thomas Becket, archbishop of Canterbury, are a bishop and an abbot—probably the abbey's founders: Oswald, archbishop of York, and Ednoth of Ramsey. Their feet rest on the institution's symbols, a ram (punning on the abbey's name) and a bull (according to legend, the altar was built where a bull bedded for the night). On the right are scenes from the lives of Benedict, one of the abbey's patron saints, and St. John.

Scenes from the Lives of Saints

Ramsey Psalter, in Latin

England, Ramsey, ca. 1300–1310

The Morgan Library & Museum, ms M.302, fols. 4v–5r |

Purchased by J. Pierpont Morgan, 1907

PREFATORY CYCLES: NEW TESTAMENT

Created in the thirteenth century, like many of the French and English illuminations in this room, these miniatures stand out for their typically Germanic zig-zag style (*Zackenstil*), marked by sharp, dangerous-looking drapery folds. Along with six other miniatures, they once constituted a complete prefatory cycle from a Psalter now in the University of Innsbruck, Austria. The cycle began with the Annunciation and ended with Pentecost.

Nativity and Ascension

Single leaves from the Innsbruck Psalter

Southern Germany, 1235–50

The Morgan Library & Museum, MSS M.698 & M.699 |

Purchased, 1925

LITURGICAL DIVISIONS: PSALM 26

Psalm 26 was the first of a group of psalms recited at Matins on Mondays and was thus a frequent liturgical division. It was normally accompanied by an image of David pointing to his eyes, a response to its opening verse, “The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear?”

In this miniature, David, kneeling in a landscape, points to his eyes while looking up toward God the Father, who bestows a blessing upon him.

David Pointing to His Eyes

Psalter-Hours, in Latin and French

France, Bourges, ca. 1455–60

The Morgan Library & Museum, ms M.67, fols. 48v–49r |

Purchased by J. Pierpont Morgan, 1911

LITURGICAL DIVISIONS: PSALM 52

Psalm 52, the first recited at Matins on Wednesdays, opens, “Dixit insipiens in corde suo” (The fool said in his heart, there is no God). The literal program of illustration used a medieval fool at this division—sometimes with David, sometimes alone.

This fifteenth-century Psalter-Hours shows a fool dancing at the front of the picture, his foot balanced on the frame, as if he is about to step out into the viewer’s space. Dressed as a court jester, in a parti-colored outfit with donkey ears and many bells, he plays a recorder and waves a bladder on a stick—traditional attributes of a fool.

Dancing Fool

Wingfield Psalter-Hours, in Latin

**Belgium, Bruges, ca. 1440, and England, London, ca. 1450s
and ca. 1470**

New York Public Library, Spencer 3, fols. 37v–38r

LITURGICAL DIVISIONS: PSALM 68

Illustrations for Psalm 68, the first psalm at Matins on Thursdays, reflect the aquatic theme of its opening words, “Salvum me fac . . .” (Save me, O God: for the waters are come in even unto my soul). Like most fifteenth-century English codices, this Psalter-Hours followed this literal tradition. Here, however, the customarily simple iconography is greatly expanded. A broad river flows in the foreground, in which sits a phlegmatic David, fully dressed and hands joined in prayer, watched by two men in fifteenth-century costume. David’s immersion is set in an extensive rural landscape, with a walled city, windmill, and a shepherd minding his sheep.

David in Deep Water

Beauchamp-Warwick Psalter-Hours, in Latin

England, probably London, ca. 1430–45

(later additions Italy, 1482)

The Morgan Library & Museum, ms M.893, fols. 158v–159r |

Purchased, 1958

LITURGICAL DIVISIONS: PSALM 80

The opening of Psalm 80, which commences the group recited at Matins on Fridays, paints a very musical picture: “Rejoice to God our helper: sing aloud to the God of Jacob. Take a psalm, and bring hither the timbrel: the pleasant psaltery with the harp. Blow up the trumpet. . . .”

Following the literal tradition, illustrations of Psalm 80 often depict King David playing a cymbala, a set of beehive-shaped bells hung on a frame. Such depictions were perhaps inspired by the memory of a classical instrument rather than an actual medieval apparatus. The images suggest David as the personification of music—an ideal musician playing an ideal instrument.

David Ringing Bells

Psalter of Richard of Canterbury, in Latin

England, London or Canterbury, ca. 1310–20

The Morgan Library & Museum, ms G.53, fols. 73v–74r | Gift of the Trustees of the William S. Glazier Collection, 1984

PREFATORY CYCLES: NEW TESTAMENT

This single leaf and six others in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, once formed part of an elaborate prefatory cycle in a deluxe Psalter. They are attributed to the best-known thirteenth-century English artist, William de Brailes. Documented in Oxford from 1230 to 1260, de Brailes had a distinctive—at times folksy—style.

Shown here are the Journey of the Magi, the Adoration of the Magi, and, at bottom, the Massacre of the Innocents and the Flight into Egypt. The framing medallions contain prophets, among other motifs.

Scenes from the Life of Christ

Single leaf from the William de Brailes Psalter

England, Oxford, 1230–60

The Morgan Library & Museum, ms M.913 | Gift of the Fellows, 1963

LITURGICAL DIVISIONS: PSALM 97

Cantate Domino canticum novum—"Sing to the Lord a new song." This psalm, 97, began the division sung at Matins on Saturdays. It was traditionally illustrated with an image of clerics chanting.

In this initial C, the monumental figures of four tonsured clerics cluster beneath the arches of a church, lamps dangling from the ceiling. They gaze in different directions. The figure at the front grasps a music manuscript that rests on an elaborate lectern, its support in the form of a fish. Two other clerics peer over his shoulder, while a fourth, at back, seems to know text and music by heart—his eyes are closed but his mouth open in song.

Clerics Singing

Windmill Psalter, in Latin

England, London, late thirteenth century

The Morgan Library & Museum, ms M.102, fols. 99v–100r |

Purchased by J. Pierpont Morgan, 1902

LITURGICAL DIVISIONS: PSALM 1

Psalters used decoration to highlight particular psalms at what are called liturgical divisions, which sometimes varied depending on time and place. In thirteenth-century Paris, for example, Psalms 1, 26, 38, 52, 68, 80, 97, and 109 were singled out. These introduce the blocks of psalms recited throughout the week at Matins (the first of the canonical hours, around 2 a.m.) and Vespers (in the early evening).

All systems of liturgical division in Psalters emphasized Psalm 1, *Beatus vir* (Blessed is the man). Here, the *B* features a full-page Tree of Jesse, with the sleeping father of David at bottom and Christ at top. Prophets sit amid the foliage or in niches, and heroic scenes from the early life of David fill the *bas-de-page* (bottom of the page).

Tree of Jesse

Tickhill Psalter, in Latin

England, Nottinghamshire, Worksop Priory, 1303–14

New York Public Library, Spencer 26, fols. 6v–7r

LAY DEVOTION: PSALTER

This and the following seven manuscripts are examples of prayer books that feature psalms and were known to have been commissioned and used by lay people. Images of their patrons often appear as part of the illuminations.

This Psalter features a full-page frontispiece of the Virgin nursing the Christ Child. Kneeling at Mary's feet are the (anonymous) husband and wife who paid for and used this lushly illuminated book. On the facing page is the start of Psalm 1, whose *Beatus* initial shows David making music and the Judgment of Solomon. Fanciful creatures populate the margins.

Virgin and Child with Patrons and David with Musicians and Judgment of Solomon

Cuerden Psalter, in Latin

England, Oxford, ca. 1270

The Morgan Library & Museum, ms M.756, fols. 10v–11r |

Purchased, 1929

LAY DEVOTION: PSALTER

This deluxe Psalter contains an illustrated calendar, prefatory cycle, and many historiated initials. The prefatory cycle is devoted to the life of Christ, beginning with the Tree of Jesse and the Annunciation and concluding with the Last Judgment.

Shown here is the miniature with the Crucifixion and Three Marys at the Tomb. It is narrower than the others in the cycle so that the page can accommodate portraits of the husband and wife who commissioned and prayed from this book. The woman wears a fashionable barbette on her head. The man, however, wears the brown habit, belted by a rope, of a Franciscan tertiary—a member of a lay confraternity that followed the rule of St. Francis.

Crucifixion and Three Marys at the Tomb, with Patrons

Grosbois Psalter, in Latin and French

Belgium, Liège, 1261

The Morgan Library & Museum, ms M.440 fols. 13v–14r |

Purchased by J. Pierpont Morgan, 1910

LAY DEVOTION: PSALTER

Psalm 51, *Quid gloriaris*, is a cry of reproach against the wicked: “Why dost thou glory in malice, thou that art mighty in iniquity? All the day long thy tongue hath devised injustice: as a sharp razor, thou hast wrought deceit.”

The psalm is sometimes illustrated with evildoers or evildoing. Here we see Herod directing the massacre of all of Bethlehem’s male children under two years old, in hopes of ridding himself of a potential future rival, Jesus. At right kneels the patron of the book. A woman—perhaps a mother—she might have had special sympathy for the deaths so many innocent children.

Massacre of the Innocents, with Patron

Des Pres Psalter, in Latin

Belgium, Liège, ca. 1290–1305

The Morgan Library & Museum, ms M.155, fols. 49v–50r |

Purchased by J. Pierpont Morgan, 1902

LAY DEVOTION: BREVIARY

While Breviaries were complicated and mostly used by the ordained, some lay people—albeit those with high Latin literacy—also prayed from them, imitating the clergy. This thirteenth-century (fragmentary) Breviary was made for a queen of France, either Marie de Brabant, widow of King Philip III, or Joan I de Navarre, wife of Philip IV. A queenly portrait appears in the book's *Beatus* initial.

Shown here is Psalm 97, *Cantate Domino canticum novum* (Sing to the Lord a new song). While this psalm was normally illustrated with singing clerics, in this instance there is a Nativity. A kneeling David at the lower right looks up toward the newborn Christ—he is the “new song.”

Nativity

**Breviary of Marie de Brabant or Joan I de Navarre, in Latin
France, Paris, 1285–97**

**The Morgan Library & Museum, ms M.1042, fols. 65v–66r |
Purchased on the Fellows Fund, with the special assistance of
Mrs. W. Rodman Fay, 1983**

LAY DEVOTION: PSALTER-HOURS

Commissioned by a woman, this deluxe and expensive prayer book includes a prefatory cycle, a Psalter with multiple historiated initials, illustrated Hours of the Virgin and Hours of the Cross, and the Penitential Psalms and Office of the Dead, each with a frontispiece.

As shown here, the patron, chicly dressed and elegantly coiffed, had herself portrayed at the start of the Hours of the Virgin. This is illustrated not with the usual Annunciation, but with a touching image of the nursing Virgin. The patron might have been a mother—or was hoping to become one.

Nursing Virgin Adored by a Lady from the Guyard Family of Lorraine

Psalter-Hours, in Latin and French

France, Metz, 1370s

The Morgan Library & Museum, ms M.88, fols. 150v–151r |

Purchased by J. Pierpont Morgan, 1902

LAY DEVOTION: PSALTER-HOURS

This extraordinarily luxuriant Psalter-Hours was begun in the late thirteenth century for Comtesse de la Table, dame de Coeuvres, and then adapted by her stepdaughter, Yolande de Soissons. A devotional compendium, it contains a Psalter and many other texts, including the Hours of the Virgin, Hours of the Cross, Hours of the Holy Spirit, and Office of the Dead.

The book is open to the Hours of the Virgin, marked by the traditional Annunciation. Less traditional is the large portrait of Comtesse de la Table within her richly pinnacled private chapel. Accompanied by her manuscript and dog, she prays to a statue of the Virgin and Child that, in her mind's eye, comes to life.

The Comtesse de la Table of the Couevres Family at Prayer and Annunciation

**Psalter-Hours of Yolande of Soissons, in Latin and French
France, Amiens, ca. 1290–97**

**The Morgan Library & Museum, ms M.729, fols. 232v–233r |
Purchased, 1927**

LAY DEVOTION: BOOK OF HOURS

Books of Hours, an important genre of medieval prayer books that survive in the thousands, help reveal how the laity engaged with the psalms for over three hundred years. This example contains seventy-one psalms (the normal was sixty-eight) in the Hours of the Virgin, Office of the Cross, Penitential Psalms, and Office of the Dead. Commissioned by Catherine of Cleves, duchess of Guelders, this exceptional Book of Hours has over 150 pictures (the average was a tenth of that). Shown here is the Saturday Mass of the Virgin. At left a kneeling Catherine petitions Mary, who, bearing a breast, appeals to her crucified Son. He then appeals to his Father, who responds positively. The smaller miniature shows Mary reading while angels babysit Christ.

Virgin and the Crucified Christ Intercede for Catherine of Cleves and Virgin and Christ in a Grape Arbor

Hours of Catherine of Cleves, in Latin

Illuminated by the Master of Catherine of Cleves

The Netherlands, Utrecht, ca. 1440

The Morgan Library & Museum, ms M.917/945, pp. 160–61 |

Purchased on the Belle da Costa Greene Fund and through the generosity of the Fellows, 1963 and 1970

LAY DEVOTION: BREVIARY

While Breviaries were more commonly used by the ordained, this grand volume belonged to Queen Eleanor of Portugal (1458–1525). In the Renaissance, Iberian royalty favored manuscripts illuminated in and imported from Flanders. This book is the collaborative work of Alexander Bening (father of the more famous illuminator Simon) and Gerard Horenbout.

Shown here is the feast of All Saints (November 1). The large miniature (one of two dozen) shows a procession of thousands of saints in a landscape, led by the queen of all saints, the Virgin Mary. The idealized female faces and pastel palette are typical of Alexander Bening's style.

All Saints

Breviary of Eleanor of Portugal, in Latin

Illuminated by Alexander Bening (and Gerard Horenbout)

Belgium, Bruges, 1500–1510

The Morgan Library & Museum, ms M.52, fols. 532v–533r |

Purchased by J. Pierpont Morgan, 1905

PSALMS AT MASS: MISSAL

Missals are the liturgical service books used by priests at the altar, containing the texts they need to celebrate Mass. These include texts that were the same in every Mass and those that changed depending on the feast. The changeable parts—Introit, Gradual, and so forth—often consist of psalm excerpts, reflections of the whole psalms that were sung in the early Church.

This grand Missal, all of whose 720 pages received decoration, is open to the feast of the Birth of John the Baptist (June 24). The saint occupies the historiated initial marking the start of the Introit, the first of the Mass's changeable parts. At the bottom of the left column, a red *P* signals the component of the Introit that is the psalm excerpt.

John the Baptist

Tiptoft Missal, in Latin

England, Cambridge?, ca. 1320

The Morgan Library & Museum, ms M.107, fols. 240v–241r |

Purchased by J. Pierpont Morgan, 1902

PSALMS AT MASS: PREPARATION FOR MASS

Psalms played an important role at Mass even before the celebration began. By at least the fourteenth century (and probably earlier), priests would prepare for Mass by reciting five psalms: 83, 84, 85, 115, and 129.

The priest's *Praeparatio*, in Missals, was normally not decorated. The devotions sometimes appear in a separate volume, such as this over-the-top commission by Pope Leo X (r. 1513–21). The frontispiece features Leo, having donned his stockings, awaiting his liturgical shoes. His papal arms and personal devices decorate the borders. The facing folio starts with Psalm 83, *Quam dilecta* (How lovely). The opening initials of the psalm and its preceding antiphon contain images of Leo, two of the book's nearly thirty papal portraits.

Pope Leo X Vesting and Leo Praying

***Praeparatio ad missam* of Leo X, in Latin**

Illuminated by Attavante degli Attavanti

Italy, Rome, 1520

The Morgan Library & Museum, ms H.6, fols. 1v–2r |

Gift of the Heineman Foundation, 1977

PSALMS AT MASS: GRADUAL

Large Graduals contain the words and music for the changeable sung parts of the Mass. Used by the choir, they thus include the Introit, Gradual (the most important of the sung parts, after which the book was named), Offertory, and Communion. These texts often include psalm excerpts.

Like Missals, Graduals, when illustrated, feature images within the large initials marking the starts of Introits. Here, at the feast of Corpus Christi, the C of “Cibavit” (He fed) contains a depiction of a man taking communion, the sacrament by which men and women receive the body and blood of Christ.

Priest Giving Communion

Gradual, in Latin

Illuminated by the workshop of Pacino di Bonaguida

Italy, Florence, 1300–1332

The Morgan Library & Museum, ms M.795, fols. 173v–174r |

Purchased, 1936

PSALMS AT MASS: GRADUAL

One of the grandest Graduals ever created was made for the monastery of San Michele a Murano (outside Venice). The fourteenth-century two-volume Gradual, produced in Florence at the monastery of Santa Maria degli Angeli, was illuminated by Silvestro dei Gherarducci, who later became Santa Maria's prior.

When the monastery of San Michele was dissolved following the Napoleonic invasion of Italy in the late 1790s, its Gradual was cut up, existing today only in fragments. The Morgan owns a total of twenty-three leaves and cuttings. Shown here is the leaf for the Ascension. Its large V, for "Viri Galilei" (Men of Galilee), shows Mary surrounded by the apostles who, in contrast to her, look heavenward, astonished by Christ's miraculous ascent.

Ascension

Leaf from the Gradual of San Michele a Murano, in Latin

Illuminated by Silvestro dei Gherarducci

Italy, Florence, 1392–99

The Morgan Library & Museum, ms M.653.3 | Purchased by

J. Pierpont Morgan, 1909

MONASTIC PERFORMANCE: PSALTER

This Psalter was probably made for Baudouin II, provost of St. Martin's in Ypres (Belgium). It was a gift to sway his opinion in favor of the Franciscans who were then seeking a permanent home within the city's walls.

Shown here is a large miniature of Sts. Dominic and Francis, founders of Christianity's two great mendicant orders, both of which embraced lives of poverty. Of the two representations, that of Francis is certainly more forceful. He dramatically displays the stigmata—wounds like Christ's—he received in 1224. The facing page has, within the C for Psalm 97, *Cantate* (Sing), an apostle. Apostle portraits are characteristic of Psalters made in Flanders under mendicant influence in the 1250s: members of the orders modeled their lives on the apostles.

Seated Apostle and Sts. Dominic and Francis

Psalter, in Latin

Illuminated by the Eerst Groep

Belgium, Bruges, ca. 1255

The Morgan Library & Museum, ms M.106, fols. 103v–104r |

Purchased by J. Pierpont Morgan, 1902

MONASTIC PERFORMANCE: BREVIARY

By the thirteenth century the liturgical book called the Breviary emerged. This format was especially in demand after the founding of the Franciscans in 1209, as members of this order needed a single volume for reciting the Divine Office as itinerant preachers and missionaries. A compendium, the Breviary contained psalms, hymns, lessons, and ejaculations called antiphons, versicles, and responses. Although written in a tiny script and chockfull of abbreviations, Breviaries enabled users to recite daily the Divine Office from one book—hence its name, *breviarium* (although these fat volumes appear anything but “brief”).

While we do not know the patron of this deluxe book, it could have been a wealthy clergyman or a lay French royal. It is open to the liturgy for Trinity Sunday.

Trinity

Breviary, in Latin

Illuminated by a follower of Jean Pucelle

France, Paris, ca. 1350

The Morgan Library & Museum, ms M.75, fols. 297v–298r |

Purchased by J. Pierpont Morgan, 1902

MONASTIC PERFORMANCE: RULE OF ST. BENEDICT

Founder of the famous Benedictine monastery of Monte Cassino, near Rome, St. Benedict was the father of Western monasticism. Established in the sixth century, the Rule of St. Benedict, a practical and spiritual guide to monastic living, held sway throughout Europe for 1,500 years. The rule laid down the ordering of the offices for the canonical hours with precision. Within the daily (and nightly) services of Matins, Lauds, Prime, Terce, Sext, None, Vespers, and Compline, all 150 psalms were chanted weekly.

Shown here is an allegorical image of a towering Benedict offering protection to a group of nuns within the folds of his cloak.

Benedict Sheltering Nuns

Martyrology and Rule of St. Benedict, in Latin

Illuminated by the Maestro del Messale Orsini

Italy, Bologna, ca. 1370 and ca. 1420

The Morgan Library & Museum, ms M.829, fols. 87v–88r |

Purchased, 1948

MONASTIC PERFORMANCE: BREVIARY

The parent manuscript of this large leaf is known as a “noted” Breviary, so-called because, in addition to the standard inclusion of all the sung and spoken texts of the Divine Office, it also contains music.

Shown here is a historiated initial beginning Psalm 101: *Domine exaudi oratione[m] mea[m]* (Lord, hear my prayer). It shows a Benedictine monk praying before his monastery. Note the birds atop the roof and door of the church; they allude to those mentioned in verse seven of the psalm: “I am become like to a pelican of the wilderness: I am like a night raven in the house.”

Benedictine Monk at Prayer

Single leaf from a “noted” Breviary, in Latin

Northeastern Italy, ca. 1420

The Morgan Library & Museum, ms M.885 | Purchased, 1957

MONASTIC PERFORMANCE: ANTIPHONARY

Antiphonaries are (usually) large choir books containing the music and words for singing the Divine Office. They were often produced in multivolume sets (as was this one) because of the immense amount of music involved. It has been estimated that for the whole year there were some two thousand individual antiphons and responses alone.

The book is open to Matins for Easter. Appropriately, the large historiated initial features the Resurrection. The page also receives a full border containing the arms and monogram of the bishop who commissioned this grand set of choir books for his cathedral at Lodi: Carlo Pallavicino, marquis of Cremona.

Resurrection

Antiphonary (Lodi Choir Book), in Latin

Italy, Milan, ca. 1470–95

The Morgan Library & Museum, ms M.686, fols. 2v–3r |

Purchased, before 1921

PROTECTION

Christ overcomes the forces of evil in this outstanding piece of medieval metalwork illustrating Psalm 90:13, a verse believed to confer protection: “Thou shalt walk upon the asp and the basilisk: thou shalt trample underfoot the lion and the dragon.” Brandishing a staff and a book, Christ vigorously crushes the creatures. Hammered in silver, the late eleventh-century panel is thought to be the oldest part of the ensemble. The ornate copper and enamel frames, featuring crystals and cavities for relics, were added in the thirteenth century. Like the sacred words of the psalms, relics (items associated with Christ or saints) were believed to have healing and protective powers. The inner frame has numerous apertures for the wonder-working fragments, visible through translucent windows of thinly sliced horn.

Triumphant Christ

Reliquary panel

Belgium, Mosan workshop, late eleventh century (panel) and thirteenth century (frame)

The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, 57.519

PROTECTION

This manuscript and the silver reliquary panel displayed nearby contain comparable images of Christ Triumphant based on Psalm 90:13. In both examples, Christ with staff and book surmounts the beasts—a winged dragon on the right and defeated lion on the left. The asphyxiated creatures are shown with their tongues protruding; the beasts can no longer engender harm. Fittingly, the image of Christ conquering evil illustrates an Easter text, which begins, “God, you have given us access to eternity today through your only begotten Son, through his victory over death.” Excerpts from Psalm 90, the most common psalm inscribed on amulets, are found on countless objects, both Jewish and Christian.

Triumphant Christ

Sacramentary of Mont-Saint-Michel, in Latin

France, Mont-Saint-Michel, ca. 1060

The Morgan Library & Museum, ms M.641, fols. 66v–67r |

Purchased by J. P. Morgan Jr., 1919

PROTECTION BOOK OF HOURS (LEFT)

This image shows a contrite Jerome, the esteemed biblical translator of the early Church, accompanied by his grinning lion. Brandishing a stone, the saint beats his chest, performing penance. The illustration marks the so-called Psalter of St. Jerome, consisting of verses drawn from different psalms. According to its prologue, this “abbreviated” Psalter was specifically designed for people who were precluded from saying the full version due to illness, business, travel, or war, or because they were harassed by the devil or beset by “worldly cares.” Jerome’s Psalter was frequently included in Books of Hours, as here. Though lacking historical basis, the attribution to Jerome gave the text lasting appeal, as did its general application: it offered believers protection and salvation.

St. Jerome in Penance

Book of Hours, in Latin

Illuminated by the Master of Edward IV

Belgium, Bruges, ca. 1470–75

The Morgan Library & Museum, ms w.31, fols. 165v–166r |

Bequest of Julia Parker Wightman, 1994

PROTECTION

BOOK OF HOURS (CENTER LEFT)

This tiny Book of Hours, the smallest manuscript in the exhibition, may have been carried on the body and valued for its talismanic qualities. Psalms were a key component of Books of Hours, as demonstrated by the rubric (red heading) at the bottom of the right page, which reads “psalmus.” Similar rubrics marking psalm quotations, prayers, and other types of texts are found in the manuscript, which also contains miniatures, making it one of the smallest complete illuminated manuscripts known.

**End of Psalm 6 and rubric (*psalmus*) for Psalm 7
(Office of the Dead)**

**Book of Hours, in Latin
Belgium, Bruges, 1460–70**

**The Morgan Library & Museum, ms M.778, fols. 197v–198r |
Purchased, 1932**

PROTECTION

BOOK OF HOURS (CENTER RIGHT)

Psalms were among the most potent weapons deployed to defeat demons—rebel angels in the service of Satan, the ultimate renegade. The denizens of hell were formidable enemies, but the psalms, known by heart by priests, monks, and nuns, were a reliable repellent.

St. Anthony of Egypt (d. 356) famously used psalms to combat his spiritual foes as he meditated in the wilderness. In the foreground of this exquisite miniature by the illuminator Simon Bening, the saint stands with an open book, possibly a Psalter, accompanied by a pig, his customary companion. In the background Anthony converses with another saint, and in the most dramatic scene, framed by the upper arch, he is assailed by demons and withstands their blows.

St. Anthony

Book of Hours, in Latin

Illuminated by Simon Bening

Belgium, Bruges, ca. 1520

The Morgan Library & Museum, ms M.307, fols. 165v–166r |

Purchased by J. Pierpont Morgan, 1907

PROTECTION BOOK OF HOURS (RIGHT)

Despite its small size, this manuscript, comprising four hundred leaves, has all the requisite components of a Psalter: a calendar, various lessons (readings), and the Book of Psalms followed by prayers and the Creed.

If forming tiny letters presented a challenge for the scribe, it is not readily apparent. The script is regular and even, and the illuminator likewise adapted his working methods to the small format. Eminently portable, manuscripts like this one were not only practical but also often served talismanic functions. Carried on the body, the sacred words of scripture were deemed to bestow protection even when the book was closed. The use of manuscripts for such purposes, especially Gospel Books and Psalters, dates from the early Christian period.

Psalter, in Latin

**England, probably Winchester, second half of the
thirteenth century**

**The Morgan Library & Museum, ms M.679 | Purchased by
J. P. Morgan Jr., 1923**



Anointing of David, Psalm 26. ms M.679, fol. 69v.

INCANTATION BOWLS

Powerful and effective, psalm verses were believed to offer protection from harm. Psalms were not only quoted on amulets, but also written on incantation bowls found at various sites in Mesopotamia, with many bowls dating from the fifth to the eighth century AD. These earthenware vessels were inscribed with magical formulas and apotropaic texts before being buried facedown in the corners of houses or in other strategic spots to trap evil spirits, thereby protecting their owners. Some bowls contain spells to bind malevolent forces; others mention the names of angels, demons, Babylonian deities, rabbis, and even Yahweh or Jesus. Biblical passages in Hebrew or Aramaic are also found, and the names of individuals who commissioned the vessels as well as members of their family are normally included. The central bowl displayed here cites Psalm 121. The other two vessels, likewise adorned with incantations and images, underscore the range of approaches adopted by scribes and artists.

INCANTATION BOWLS

DEMON OF SORCERER (LEFT)

The incantations on this bowl were written in Jewish Babylonian Aramaic for its Jewish owner, Pabak bar Kufithai, and his household. Similar bowls were also made for Christians, Mandeans (Gnostics), and Manicheans, all of whom relied on forms of protective magic. The demonic forces are to be controlled by the powers of the Old Testament prophet Enoch, the seven classical planets, and the twelve signs of the zodiac. The sketch may represent a demon, although the figure is not chained or bound like most demons depicted on the bowls. It may instead be a sorcerer waving a branch to ward off evil forces.

Incantation bowl, in Jewish Babylonian Aramaic
Iraq, Nippur, ca. fifth–seventh century
Penn Museum, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia,
B2923 | Babylonian Expedition to Nippur I, 1889

INCANTATION BOWLS

CHAINED DEMON (CENTER)

This bowl, never before displayed, features a rough sketch of a chained demon. Spiraling outward from the center, the lengthy incantation in Jewish Babylonian Aramaic ends with a fragment of Psalm 121:7, a suitable verse for a charm: “The Lord will guard you from all evil; He will guard your soul.” It is one of four extant bowls made for the same Jewish patron, Dadbeh, son of Asmanducht; his wife; and their seven children. Two of the four bowls are inscribed in Syriac, the language of many early Christian texts, which reflects the mingling of religions, as does the name “Asmanducht,” which refers to a Persian deity. The makers and commissioners of these bowls did not necessarily share the same cultural backgrounds.

Incantation bowl, in Jewish Babylonian Aramaic

Iraq, Nippur, ca. fifth–seventh century

Penn Museum, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia,

B9009 | Babylonian Expedition to Nippur II, 1890

INCANTATION BOWLS

DEMON AND SORCERER? (RIGHT)

The figures painted on this bowl are particularly striking, but their identities and functions are obscure. The American scholar James A. Montgomery, who first published the Nippur bowls in 1913, suggested that the figure with bound feet is a demon and the other, a sorcerer. Employing curses to deflect malign spirits, the personalized inscription reads in part:

If you harm Abuna bar Garibta and Bayba bar Yawitay, I shall put a spell of the sea and a spell of the sea snake Leviathan upon you. If you harm Abuna bar Garibta and his spouse and his children, I shall bend you like a bow, and span you like a bowstring.

Incantation bowl, in Jewish Babylonian Aramaic
Iraq, Nippur, ca. fifth–seventh century
Penn Museum, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia,
B2945 | Babylonian Expedition to Nippur I, 1889

PROTECTION

Psalm 34, in which David exhorts God to defeat his adversaries, is inscribed on this extraordinary Byzantine amulet, accompanied by a suitably triumphant image. It shows Constantine (280–337), the first Roman emperor to profess Christianity, and his mother, Helena, holding Christ's Cross. The apocryphal story of Abgar of Edessa (4 BC–AD 50)—the king of an Upper Mesopotamian region who was supposedly the first ruler to convert to Christianity—is the longest text on the roll. Abgar was said to have written to Christ asking for healing and protection of his city; replying by return post, Christ granted Abgar's requests. As the legend of this exchange spread, Christ's letter took on the status of an apotropaic text, extending protection from a variety of hazards to people for all time.

Emperor Constantine and His Mother, Helena

Amuletic prayer scroll, in Greek and Arabic

Northeastern Turkey, Trebizond, fourteenth century

**The Morgan Library & Museum, ms M.499 | Purchased by
J. Pierpont Morgan, 1912**

PENITENTIAL PSALMS

The Seven Penitential Psalms—6, 31, 37, 50, 101, 129, and 142—appear in every Book of Hours, where they are followed by a litany and petitions. In the late Middle Ages, when lay folk received formal forgiveness from sin only once a year through sacramental confession, access to pardon via these psalms made this devotion especially treasured.

The most common subject marking this devotion was a portrait of the psalms' traditional author, David. Here he is shown as a kneeling penitent, asking forgiveness for his transgressions. One of these sins is depicted on the facing page: the murder of Bathsheba's husband, Uriah. Sent by David to the front line of battle—thus ensuring his death—the lifeless Uriah lies in the foreground.

Death of Uriah and David in Penance

Farnese Hours, in Latin

Illuminated by Giulio Clovio

Italy, Rome, 1546

The Morgan Library & Museum, ms M.69, fols. 63v–64r |

Purchased by J. Pierpont Morgan, 1903

PENITENTIAL PSALMS

Royal sin and repentance are the subjects of facing pages in the Book of Hours made for Claude I Molé, lord of Villy-le-Maréchal. Juxtaposed are a penitent David and a fully naked Bathsheba, ogled by the king. The left margin illustrates David's sins: his adultery with Bathsheba and murder of her husband, Uriah. In Renaissance France, a private prayer book could become a discreet haven for eroticism: by 1500 the bathing Bathsheba was *the* primary French vehicle for imagery of the female nude.

Bathsheba and David in Penance

Hours of Claude Molé, in Latin and French

Illuminated by the Master of Petrarch's Triumphs

France, Paris, ca. 1500

The Morgan Library & Museum, ms M.356, fols. 30v–31r |

Purchased by J. Pierpont Morgan, 1908

PENITENTIAL PSALMS

Since the Penitential Psalms were a means for seeking forgiveness from sin, they were sometimes illustrated with a Last Judgment, the moment in one's life when forgiveness (or lack thereof) determined one's eternal fate—heaven or hell.

As was traditional, a judging Christ sits on a rainbow, blessing with an upraised right hand and condemning with a lowered left, his decisions tempered by mercy (the lily) or fortified by justice (the sword). Souls rise from their graves, awakened by the angels' trumpets. The Virgin Mary and St. John act as intercessors, advocating for the souls' salvation. On the facing page, within the initial *D* of *Domine* (Lord), David plays his harp. The page's frame of dragons, necks locked together, hints at potential menace.

Last Judgment and David as Musician

Book of Hours, in Latin

Illuminated by the Master of the Morgan Infancy Cycle

The Netherlands, Delft, ca. 1415–20

The Morgan Library & Museum, ms M.866, fols. 78v–79r |

Purchased with the assistance of the Fellows, 1953

PENITENTIAL PSALMS

The artist Robinet Testard made the connection between the Seven Penitential Psalms and the Seven Deadly Sins unmistakably clear in this Book of Hours. Each psalm is illustrated by a personification of the sin it was meant to counter.

Shown here is a foppishly clad, teenaged Lust, mounted on a goat, suggestively fingering the animal's horn. He glances toward the bird he holds, possibly a nightingale—an advocate of illicit desire. The bottom border shows the demon Asmodeus urging men and women to engage in sins of the flesh.

Lust and Asmodeus Encouraging Sexual Sins

Book of Hours, in Latin

Illuminated by Robinet Testard

France, Poitiers, ca. 1475

The Morgan Library & Museum, ms M.1001, fols. 97v–98r |

Purchased on the Fellows Fund, 1979

PENITENTIAL PSALMS

The salvific role played by the Penitential Psalms in obtaining forgiveness from sin is the subject of this unique miniature, which juxtaposes depictions of Good and Bad Confession with the ensuing Good and Bad Communion. On the left, a sincerely confessed man receives communion, above which hovers a white dove. Behind him, another man makes a good confession. Depicted above them is the pair's eventual fate: their souls are borne to heaven by angels. On the right, a man makes a false confession. Behind him, another man, who also falsely confessed, receives a communion wafer marked with a scorpion. The pair's sins chain them to a demon. Above, their souls, upon death, are seized by devils.

Good and Bad Confession and Communion

Book of Hours, in Latin

Italy, Veneto, ca. 1430

The Morgan Library & Museum, ms M.1089, fols. 118v–119r |

Purchased on the Fellows Fund, with special assistance of

Mrs. Alexandre P. Rosenberg and Mr. Henry Glazier, in

memory of William S. Glazier, 1993

OFFICE OF THE DEAD

The final main devotion in Books of Hours, the Office of the Dead consists of multiple psalms. The office originated as a monastic funerary rite in which psalms were chanted during the prayerful watch over a dead body. It was deemed the most efficacious means of reducing the time one's dearly departed spent in the punishing flames of purgatory.

Here, a personification of Death marks the office. A rotting corpse, its skin peeling, stands in a tomb, fingering a gold necklace, a gesture alluding to the uselessness of vain pursuits. The jewelry and the two gaping holes where there were once breasts indicate that the corpse is a woman's. Above her, a scroll inscribed *Memento homo* cautions, "Be mindful, mankind."

Death Personified

Book of Hours, in Latin and French

France, Tours, ca. 1465

The Morgan Library & Museum, ms M.161, fols. 97v–98r |

Purchased by J. Pierpont Morgan, 1902

OFFICE OF THE DEAD

The Master of Philippe of Guelders painted a dramatic image of Death clubbing a pope in this Book of Hours. The picture begins a Dance of Death that continues in the border: death assaults a Holy Roman emperor, a cardinal, a fleeing king, and, finally, a resistant soldier.

The Dance of Death emerged in late fourteenth-century France, first in drama, then in literature and the visual arts. It represents men and women of all social stations facing the ultimate social leveler—Death—personified as a gleeful skeleton.

Dance of Death

Book of Hours, in Latin and English

Illuminated by the Master of Philippe of Guelders

France, Paris, ca. 1500–1510

The Morgan Library & Museum, ms M.117, fols. 106v–107r |

Purchased by J. Pierpont Morgan, 1906

MEMENTO MORI

Reciting the rosary and praying Books of Hours were closely related practices. Despite the ostentatious taste of the wealthy patrons who fingered these exquisitely carved beads, they were certainly well aware of the admonitory messages conveyed by this rosary. Its ivory beads, used as a memory aid when reciting prayers to the Virgin Mary, feature prosperous people on one side and skeletons on the other, an arrangement allotting equal space to life and death, and linking them inextricably. Carved in the round with great skill, two beads depict men with bifurcated heads—half skull and half rotting flesh—potent memento mori (reminders of death).

Rosary

Elephant ivory, silver, and partially gilded mounts

Germany, ca. 1500–1525

**The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, gift of
J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917; 17.190.306**

MEMENTO MORI

Meditating on life's transience gave rise to a fascination with the physical processes of bodily decay. Among the countless macabre objects that exemplify this trend is this terminal bead from a rosary, with a loving couple on one side and a skeleton, crawling with reptiles, on the other. The emerald adorning the bead offers a glimmer of hope: green symbolized life and was associated with Christ's Resurrection.

Thinking about death could lead to salvation. A popular admonishment stated, "O mortal man and reasonable being! If, after death, you do not wish to be damned you must, at least once a day, think of your loathsome end so that you may have a long life and die well."

Rosary terminal bead

Elephant ivory, with emerald pendant, silver-gilt mount

North France or Flanders, ca. 1500–1525

**The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, gift of
J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917; 17.190.305**

OFFICE OF THE DEAD

By far the most popular images marking the Office of the Dead were scenes illustrating the medieval funeral. The deathbed scene shown here depicts a priest offering a benediction of holy water to a man who has just died. The dead man's soul, in the form of an innocently nude child, has left his body. A guardian angel attempts to deliver the soul to God, fending off a demon.

Borders illustrate subsequent events of the funeral. The man's corpse is sewn into a shroud. A family member confesses—to obtain a state of grace before praying for the deceased. A funeral procession takes the man's body to the cemetery and, finally, it is buried.

Deathbed and Funeral Scenes

Book of Hours, in Latin and French

Illuminated by François Le Barbier *fls*

France, Paris, ca. 1485–90

The Morgan Library & Museum, ms M.231, fols. 136v–137r |

Purchased by J. Pierpont Morgan, 1902

OFFICE OF THE DEAD

Of all the components of the medieval funeral, the most popular episode for illustrating the Office of the Dead in Books of Hours was the praying of the office over the coffin at night. Here, at center rests a coffin covered with an expensive pall. The altar, devoid of a priest and empty of vessels, indicates that this ritual is not the funeral Mass—a fact confirmed by the clerics at right, who chant the Office of the Dead from a large Antiphonary. To the left is a group of lay mourners, the first of whom is probably the dead man's widow. A man behind her prays the office from his own Book of Hours.

Praying the Office of the Dead

Book of Hours, in Latin and French

Illuminated by the Gold Scrolls Group

Belgium, Bruges, ca. 1440

The Morgan Library & Museum, ms w.3, fols. 119v–120r |

Gift of Julia Parker Wightman, 1993

OFFICE OF THE DEAD

Twenty-first-century viewers might be surprised by the plethora of funerary scenes illustrating the Office of the Dead in Books of Hours, perhaps finding this imagery depressing. The opposite was the reaction in the Middle Ages. The office was prayed by devotees not for themselves but for their dearly departed. An image of the ideal death—one supported by the sacraments and blessings of the Church—would be a source of great comfort to the living.

The hoped-for result of praying the office is illustrated in this Book of Hours. While a burial takes place in the foreground, in the back, beyond the cemetery wall, angels rescue a naked soul from the flames of purgatory. The prayer works.

Burial

Book of Hours, in Latin and French

Illuminated by a follower of the Coëtivy Master

France, Rouen, ca. 1465–75

The Morgan Library & Museum, ms M.1055, fols. 87v–88r |

Gift of Mrs. Roy O'Connor, 1984

PROTECTION

The prayer book of Thomas More (1478–1535), statesman, author, and champion of the Catholic faith, was with him during his imprisonment in the Tower of London, following his arrest for treason in 1534. More was preoccupied with the psalms during his incarceration, especially those associated with David's ordeals and distress. His engagement with the text is attested by his Latin marginal notations in the printed Psalter, and his famous "psalm-like prayer," later known as "A Godly Meditation," written in English in the margins of the Book of Hours.

Friend of the great scholar Erasmus and of Hans Holbein, who drew the portrait of him reproduced on the wall, More was steeped in the psalms. While he awaited execution by order of Henry VIII, the sacred poems offered him intellectual stimulation and consolation alike.

"To think my most enemies my best friends . . .,"

final verses of "A Godly Meditation"

Prayer book of Thomas More

Paris: François Regnault, 1530 (Book of Hours); Paris:

Franz Birckman, 1522 (Psalter)

**Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Yale University,
New Haven, ms Vault More, fols. 25v–26r (Book of Hours
section) | Gift of Edwin J. Beinecke, Yale 1907, and
Frederick W. Beinecke, Yale 1909**

OPENING VERSES FROM THOMAS MORE'S PRAYER IN THE MARGINS OF HIS BOOK OF HOURS

Give me Thy grace, good Lord:
To set the world at naught;
To set my mind fast upon Thee,
And not to hang upon the blast of men's mouths;
To be content to be solitary,
Not to long for worldly company;
Little and little utterly to cast off the world,
And rid my mind of all the business thereof.
Not to long to hear of any worldly things,
But that the hearing of worldly fantasies may be to me
displeasant;
Gladly to be thinking of God,
Piteously to call for His help;
To lean unto the comfort of God,
Busily to labor to love Him;
To know mine own vility and wretchedness,
To humble and meeken myself under the mighty hand of God;



Scan this QR code to read the full prayer.

Hans Holbein the Younger

Sir Thomas More

Drawing with outlines pricked for transfer

England, London, 1527

Royal Collection Trust, England, RCIN 912268

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