BIBLIOCLASM & DIGITAL RECONSTRUCTION

ELEVEN SCATTERED MANUSCRIPTS DIGITALLY REASSEMBLED THROUGH THE WAYBACK RECOVERY METHOD©

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Selection of leaves from the Research Centre for European Philological Tradition manuscript collection

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WAYBACK RECOVERY METHOD©

RECEPTIO ACADEMIC PRESS
This special issue is dedicated to the memory of Prof. Erik Drigsdahl
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The Whitney Hours.
A Book of Hours, use of Rouen, with illuminated pearls and gems

Nancy Impellizzeri

Book of Hours, use of Rouen, illuminated in Rouen by Robinet Boyvin and his pupils, c. 1490–1510. Quarto-format parchment manuscript featuring eight full-page miniatures with architectural borders; the first calendar leaf with a complete illuminated border featuring dragons; each calendar page illuminated with two border miniatures depicting the activity of the month and the zodiacal sign, along with an ornamental panel containing an abstract/plant-themed border design: January: feasting and Aquarius; February: warming by the fire and Pisces; March: pruning grape vines and Aries; April: a courting couple (man offers woman flowers) and Taurus; May: courting couple (riding together on a horse) and Gemini; June: sowing the field and Cancer; July: harvesting grain and Leo; August: gathering seed and Virgo; September: stamping on grapes in a barrel and Libra; October: sowing seeds and Scorpio; November: tending swine and Sagittarius; December: butchering swine and Capricorn; calendar text in French with entries in red and blue, and major feast days in gold, with some spaces left blank (calendar includes feast days that pertain to Rouen); no catchwords; seventy five leaves (of seventy-nine? lacking: ii 1, ii 9, iv 5, and vii 6). Auctioned at Skinner, June 2, 2017. Consisting of only 79 leaves at the time of the auction (160 by 115 mm), 25 lines of text in angular gothic bookhand. Price realised: $24,600.

In April 2022, while working on some practical exercises that Professor Rossi assigned us as part of our Fragmentology course, I examined a leaf from the RECEPTIO collection (Fig. 1 and 2).
Fig. 1. The Whitney Hours, leaf from our Research Centre's manuscript collection.
Fig. 2. The Whitney Hours, leaf from our Research Centre’s manuscript collection, verso.
Fig. 3. The Whitney Hours, fol. 26r, Crucifixion
Fig. 4. The Whitney Hours, fol. 19r, Visitation
Fig. 5. The Whitney Hours, fol. 37r, Flight into Egypt.
I began reconstructing the parent manuscript through the WBRM [1].

During the examinatio phase, I studied all the codicological characteristics of the leaf in the RECEPTIO collection, such as its dimensions, 160 x 115mm, and the number of lines per page (25, in a brown ink, with smaller colored and gilt initials).

Based on the information obtained during the examinatio, by searching various sales and auction databases, including that of the research centre itself, I was able to retrieve many other digital fragments from the same manuscript.

Fig. 6. The Whitney Hours. Digital reconstruction.

In the second phase of the recensio, called repertum, which involves searching for the parent manuscript, I identified a Book of Hours produced in Rouen that matched all the characteristics I was looking for.

It was auctioned in Skinner's rooms in May 2017, in Marlborough. This discovery allowed me to move on to the restitutio and acquire a number of useful pieces of information, such as the number of leaves (79) the codex consisted of at the time of the auction and the presence of 8 large illuminated miniatures, as follows: folio 19r, Visitation; folio 26r, Crucifixion; folio 27r, Pentecost; folio 28r, Nativity; folio 34r, Adoration of the Magi; folio 37r, Flight into Egypt; folio 39r, Coronation of the Virgin; and folio 43r, King David kneeling in prayer.

The miniatures are characterised by architectural and arch-topped borders that feature decorated and fanciful columns sometimes terminating in clawed feet, executed in a markedly russet palette with warm browns and deep oranges accented in gold; the border designs found on each text leaf include the often seen fruit, acanthus, and flower motifs, along with repeated use of painted pearls and grotesque dragon-like creatures. According to the catalogue, the manuscript was bound in an early 19th century blind- and gilt-tooled calf skin binding, with parchment pastedowns and fly leaves, the front board had been detached. The handwritten ex libris, with a gift inscription dated January 17, 1818, gave us the opportunity to name this manuscript after its 19th-century owner: Henry A. Whitney, a Liverpool gentleman with a passion for medieval manuscripts.

This Book of Hours raises interesting questions regarding its first owner (certainly a high-ranking figure), the workshop in which it was illuminated, and subsequent changes of ownership. Questions that I will try to answer in the edition to be published in 2023.
Fig. 7. The Whitney Hours. Digital reconstruction. Please note, that the leaf from the RECEPIIO collection found its proper place within our virtual restauration.
Currently, thanks to the WayBack Recovery Method, I have been able to recover:

- 35 type I digital fragments;
- 10 type II digital fragments;
- 30 type III digital fragments;

This allowed me to reconstruct about 75% of the entire manuscript. However, I am counting on recovering more within the next working year.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Professor Rossi, who has granted me the enormous privilege of working on the Biblioclasm & Digital Reconstruction project and to make my own contribution in trying to save and protect, at least digitally, our immense Western cultural heritage endangered by unscrupulous vandals.

The digitally (partially) reassembled manuscript can be browsed at the following link:
https://www.receptioacademic.press/whitneyhours
DOI: 10.55456/whitneyboh