



The Hours of Marie de' Medici: A Facsimile

Eberhard König

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At the turn of the fifteenth century, private devotionals became a speciality of the renowned Ghent-Bruges illuminators. Wealthy patrons who commissioned work from these artists often spared no expense in the presentation of their personal prayer books, or 'books of hours', from detailed decoration to luxurious bindings and embroidery.

This enchanting illuminated manuscript was painted by the Master of the David Scenes in the Grimani Breviary (known as the David Master), one of the renowned Flemish illuminators in the sixteenth century. Every page of the manuscript is exquisitely decorated. Fine architectural interiors, gorgeous landscapes and detailed city scenes, each one depicting a narrative, form the subjects of three full-size illuminations and forty-two full-page miniatures. There are floral borders on a gold ground or historiated borders in the Flemish and Italian style on every page. It is one of the finest examples of medieval illumination in a personal prayer book and the most copiously illustrated work of the David Master to survive.

The manuscript owes its name to the French Queen, Marie de' Medici, widow of King Henri IV. For a time she went into exile in Brussels, where she is thought to have acquired the manuscript before moving again to Cologne. An inscription in English states that she left the book of hours in this city, and it is here that an English manuscript collector, Francis Douce, may have acquired the book and eventually donated it to the Bodleian Library.

Together with a scholarly introduction that gives an overview of Flemish illumination and examines each of the illustrations in detail, this full-colour facsimile limited edition, bound in linen, faithfully reproduces all 176 pages of the original manuscript. It is beautifully presented in a slipcase with a photographic reproduction of the original, delicately embroidered velvet binding.

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