



Books of Hours Books of Hope

Medieval readers and their Books of Hours

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- Examines Books of Hours, the most popular books of the late Middle Ages, which were widely owned across social classes
- Highlights the widespread ownership of these books, from dukes to merchants and servants, in both Latin and vernacular languages, and in varied formats, from simple to luxurious
- Provides a unique sociological analysis of the role and significance of Books of Hours, beyond their decorative aspects
- Investigates intriguing questions, such as the book's name ("Book of Hours"), its readership, and its repeated appearance in Flemish portraits of the time
- Explores the use and meaning of these books in daily life and medieval society, filling gaps in existing literature
- Published to accompany the exhibition *Pride and Solace: medieval Books of Hours and their readers* at the Groeningemuseum in Bruges from 4 April until 7 October 2025

Books of Hours were the bestsellers of the late Middle Ages. From dukes to merchants to servants, this book found its way into nearly all levels of society, both in Latin and the vernacular, in luxurious and simple versions, and among both women and men. Much has been written about the decoration or illumination of *Books of Hours*. However, information about their use and significance is scarce.

Who were the readers, what do the texts cover, why is it referred to as a 'Book of Hours,' and why do they appear time and time again in portraits in Flanders during the late Middle Ages? This publication provides an in-depth sociological perspective on Books of Hours and their depiction in portraits by the Flemish Primitives, focusing on the internationally renowned collection of Musea Brugge.

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