



BULLETIN



Spring 2007

**OUR LADY OF THE
ASSUMPTION**

**BRITISH PROVINCE OF
CARMELITES**



41 No. 1

Rare Carmelite book of hours auctioned

A rare fifteenth century illuminated book of hours was auctioned at Sotheby's in London last December. In the catalogue it was described as a "book of hours and prayer book of Carmelite use, in Latin, illuminated manuscript on vellum" and the estimated price was £4,000-£6,000. It is pocket-sized (111 mm. by 87 mm.) and contains 242 leaves, probably missing about 20 based on the contents page.

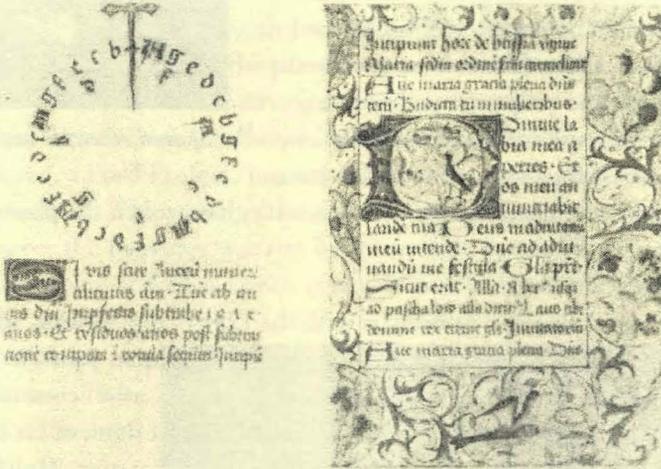
It seems to have been compiled in France, possibly in Paris around the year 1480, based on the styles of the script and the illumination. Since the Litany includes many West German saints, as well as those of Carmelite use, the suggestion is that a German friar visiting Paris, where the Carmelite convent was in the Place Maubert, took the chance of ordering or even making a book while there. Additions to the Calendar include Saints Erhard, Kunegund, Heinrich, Boniface, and others, showing that the book was soon back in Germany. The hand that made these additions signed fol. 65r, "*per xpistum dominum nostrum, C k l, 1500*".

Judging by the example of the illumination shown in the catalogue, it is quite exquisite. While the text is in dark brown ink, headings are in red and enlarged initials of various sizes are in dark red, blue and liquid gold on panels with delicate tracery in white and gold. The borders are formed of coloured flowers and acanthus leaves on parti-coloured liquid gold grounds with daisies, strawberries, birds, etc.

Apart from feasts familiar to us today, some interesting ones included are St. Longinus, whose lance pierced Christ's side (15th March, feast introduced in 1480), St. Martial of Limoges (7th July, a Carmelite feast, introduced in 1339) and the 11,000 Virgins (21st October, introduced into the Carmelite liturgy in 1339). The book contains the Little Office of Our Lady, followed by the Fifteen Psalms of Degree "*secundum ordinem fratrum beatissime Marie virginis de monte Carmeli*". Next are the Penitential Psalms and Litany of saints, including the prophet Elisha (introduced into the Carmelite liturgy in 1399) and saints Martial, Kylian, Edmund, Sigismund, Angelus of Jerusalem (a Jewish convert on Mount Carmel in 1203), and Albert of Sicily. There follow the Psalms of the Passion, other prayers and

the Office of the Dead. Among the prayers are the *Joys of the Virgin*, reputedly composed by St. Thomas à Becket and prayers on the relics of the Holy Lance and the Crown of Thorns, the veneration of which were elevated to Carmelite feasts in 1488.

Such books are very rare and the present one came from an owner in Wellington, New Zealand. It was purchased for £9,000 by the Carmelitana Collection in Washington, D.C., so it is now back in Carmelite hands.



Examples of illuminated text

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