

NEWBERRY LIBRARY MS 53:
UNLOCKING THE SECRETS OF A LATE MEDIEVAL BOOK OF HOURS

by

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ABSTRACT

NEWBERRY LIBRARY MS 53 UNLOCKING THE SECRETS OF A LATE MEDIEVAL BOOK OF HOURS

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This thesis investigates a manuscript in the Newberry Library collection, Newberry Library MS 53, a Book of Hours for the Use of Rome made around 1470 in Bruges, Flanders, and thought to be connected to the circle of Willem Vrelant (d. 1481), one of the most prolific Flemish illuminators of his time. The manuscript itself has received little scholarly attention, and the present study reconstructs its history by identifying elements within the manuscripts that demonstrate a connection to Vrelant and his associates, describing the production process used for smaller, less expensive Books of Hours, identifying its likely audience, and comparing it to other similar manuscripts in the Walters Art Museum collection and in particular to Walters W 180, a Book of Hours that present a remarkable resemblance to Newberry Library MS 53.

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In memory of

Nonna Ninetta, Nonna Giovanna,
Nonno Totò, and Nonno Raffaele.

DE FORTI DULCEDO

*

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INTRODUCTION

Researching medieval manuscripts, be they large-sized liturgical books, precious illuminated Bibles or pocket-sized Psalters and Books of Hours made for private devotion, is not an easy task even under the best of circumstances, when the volume examined has attracted considerable scholarly attention and/or presents clear evidence of its production, patronage or provenance. A scholar who decides to work on a little-known manuscript such as the subject of the present study, Newberry Library MS 53, with the idea of reconstructing its history in precise detail and identifying authorship and patronage beyond any possible doubt, is therefore setting themselves up for failure, or at the very least a good amount of frustration.

Nevertheless, interrogating a smaller, lesser-known Books of Hours such as Newberry Library MS 53 represents a worthwhile endeavor. While a complete reconstruction might not be possible in the circumstances described above, it is important to note that manuscripts of this sort still contain a treasure trove of information about creation and use. Unlocking their secrets, even if only partially, can be extremely rewarding.

This study takes a closer look at a manuscript that has so far been overlooked by most scholarship, with the exception of its inclusion in lists of works attributed to Bruges illuminator Willem Vrelant (d. 1481) or one of his associates (or to be excluded from such association). I seek to extract as much information from this manuscript as possible. To achieve this end, I have focused on both miniatures and text, and identified and analyzed other Books of Hours that present close similarities to it. While I have, of course, relied on available scholarship, particularly for information on the manuscript market in late

medieval Flanders, I have also made use of the evidence I have uncovered while analyzing Newberry Library MS 53 (and particularly the miniatures it contains) to reexamine, and sometimes question, some scholarly hypotheses about Willem Vrelant, his associates and his commercial practices.

This thesis is divided into three parts. The first chapter contains a detailed description and analysis of the manuscript itself, a discussion of the scholarship regarding the Bruges workshop of Willem Vrelant (which produced manuscripts very similar to Newberry Library MS 53), and a presentation of the evidence in support of a possible attribution of the manuscript to one of his associates. In the second chapter I examine the socio-economic environment in which Willem Vrelant and his associates operated and in which Newberry Library MS 53 and other similar works were produced, marketed, and sold. Finally, the third chapter focuses on placing Newberry Library MS 53 within the production context associated with the Vrelant workshop by comparing it to other manuscripts with similar characteristics, with a particular focus on four Books of Hours in the Walters Art Museum manuscript collection. It also lists evidence from the manuscripts examined therein that can be used to piece together fragments of information about the first owner of Newberry Library MS 53.

CHAPTER 1

1.1 Newberry Library MS 53: an overview

At first glance, Newberry Library MS 53 does not appear to be a particularly remarkable work among the many manuscripts contained in the Newberry Library collection. The volume, definitely completed after 1450 (since the feast of St. Bernardino of Siena, who died in 1444 and was canonized in 1450, is included in the calendar), is a Book of Hours for the Use of Rome, comprising 234 folios of rather diminutive size (109 x 74mm).¹ The manuscript is Flemish in origin and contains sixteen miniatures, placed at the beginning of each section of text, and painted in demi-grisaille. The images are framed by acanthus leaf borders in grisaille, with small details in gold leaf and ultramarine and containing only vegetal motifs, with no marginal figures of any kind [fig. 1]. Each miniature page faces a similarly framed text page with a richly decorated initial in gold leaf and black ink, in which entwined clover motifs are accentuated by white contours.

Newberry Library MS 53 presents visible traces of use, particularly evident on the miniature and initial pages. Conversely, the pages containing only text appear to be for the most part in excellent condition, which indicates that the people carelessly handling the volume were most likely later collectors interested in the miniatures rather than devout faithful reading through the Offices and prayers. The damage ranges in type and extent, from fingerprints and smudging, to cracking and flaked paint on the miniatures, to worn or missing sections of gold leaf (with only traces of glue “bole” remaining in their place).

¹ Paul H. Saenger and Newberry Library, *A Catalogue of the Pre-1500 Western Manuscript Books at the Newberry Library* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 90.

The parchment is of uneven quality and thickness, and it presents tears on some of the thinner folios (specifically fols. 24 and 221) and a missing section in the upper part of fol. 233 that was repaired by inserting an appropriately shaped piece of parchment as a patch. Quire XXII presents evidence of water damage near the upper corners of every single folio, and the absence of any such signs of damage on the last folio of the preceding quire and the first folio of the following signature indicates that this damage might have occurred when the manuscript was disbound for a rebinding, perhaps to add the more recent red velvet cover in which the volume is currently bound, or to add new text to the last folio of the quire.

Several new prayers were added by a later hand, specifically on folios 194r, 194v, and 233r. The additions were made with great care, if by a less accomplished scribe than that of the original text of the manuscript. There is an evident attempt to imitate the hand of the original scribe and to add initials in red ink (these do not match the original ones), so it is safe to hypothesize that these additions were included relatively early on, at a time in which it was still possible to find a scribe with the skill to imitate the original script. Even more notably, fol. 13v. [fig. 1] sports the addition of a coat of arms, now no longer visible in its entirety, but possibly including as its most basic elements *gules, a chief argent, a fess argent* or maybe *sable, a chief argent, a fess argent*: the tincture is hard to identify, as the coat of arms was indeed painted in red, but with an ink so viscous and thickly applied that it now appears to be black. The coat of arms partially covers the acanthus leaf border, and was painted so clumsily that the opposite page was also stained. The image was further modified at a later time, in a slightly less heavy hand, by painting a second, circular symbol, with a gold water wheel on a gold and azure *bendy* field (i.e. with

gold and blue diagonal stripes), on top of the original image, with the new paint applied over the cracks that had formed in the older, thicker layer of ink. The initials V. V. F. V. (perhaps intended to be W. F. V., as the first two Vs are positioned one above the other) appear to have been painted on the lower margin of the folio, below the frame, at the same time as the older coat of arms, as the last V was painted in the same reddish-black ink.

While Newberry Library MS 53 has certainly seen better days, and is not in such an excellent state of conservation as other comparable manuscripts, it was still conceived as a high-quality artifact. If the small size and the uneven thickness and quality of the parchment might give the impression of a relatively low budget work, or indicate that the volume was likely not intended for a member of a royal family or the highest ranks of nobility, abundant use of gold leaf, the high level of detail of the miniatures relative to their diminutive size, and the use, however scant, of ultramarine ink on some details and initials show that the patron of Newberry Library MS 53 was certainly a person of means, possibly belonging to the growing merchant class residing in the region.

1.2 Text and miniatures in Newberry Library MS 53

Newberry Library MS 53 includes for the most part typical contents for a Book of Hours for the use of Rome, and the masculine endings indicate that the manuscript was likely made for a male owner. Saenger identifies the calendar, which does not contain any obits, as following that for the city of Tournai, albeit with some uncertainty. While I have not found elements to place the calendar in a specific geographic area, some of the feast days it lists, along with other textual elements (like the inclusion in the Litany of the

Saints of the then-recently canonized Nicholas of Tolentino, or the presence on fol. 230v-233r of a prayer attributed to St. Augustine, preceded by a lengthy introduction in red ink), are perhaps indicative of devotional preferences of the original owner of the manuscript. I will discuss some of these elements in further detail in the third chapter of this thesis, as they are relevant to my comparison of Newberry Library MS 53 to other similar manuscripts. Here I will focus on other textual peculiarities, like the inclusion within the volume of a set of Eucharistic prayers (there are four, from fol. 224r to fol. 225v: *O Sacrum Convivium*, *Ave Verum Corpus*, *Ave Caro Christi Cara*, *Anima Christi*), likely to be prayed silently during the Consecration and/or Elevation of the Host, or after receiving Communion, thus functioning as an aid to meditation. While it is not uncommon for Books of Hours to include one or more such prayers, these are not as omnipresent as others (e.g. the Marian prayers *Obsecro Te* and *O Intemerata*, which are generally paired together), and might represent an indication of an interest on the patron's and/or owner's part in the Eucharistic devotion, whether personal or as part of a larger devotional movement.² The inclusion of an oration and collect for the feast day of St. Sebastian on fol. 223 is a clearer indication of personal taste, with its likely importance to the original owner underlined by the fact that the text is preceded by a miniature portraying the saint's martyrdom. Whether the owner was named after St. Sebastian, was born or lived in a town (or frequented a parish) that had him as its patron saint, or preferred him for other reasons, possibly because of his profession (fletcher, archer...) or to protect himself from

² See Roger Wieck, *Painted Prayers: the Book of Hours in Medieval and Renaissance Art*. (New York: George Braziller, in association with the Pierpont Morgan Library, 1997), 86-87 for more details.

the plague, is difficult to tell with the information currently available, and these hypotheses remain equally likely for the time being.

Equally interesting are the later additions on fol. 194 and 233. The former presents three prayers: *Pro Uno Famulo*, for the soul of a defunct servant of God, *Pro Patre et Matre*, for the souls of one's parents, and *Pro Anniversario*, to be prayed on the anniversary of a loved one's death. It is interesting to note that these are all intercessory prayers for one or more specific souls, which indicates that the later owner responsible for these additions must have had very personal reasons to select these devotions. While we do not have any indication of who this new owner might have been (although, considering that the additions to the text were made not long after the manuscript itself was produced, it is not unlikely that they might have been a relative of the original owner), there is at least one indication of their possible age. The prayer included on fol. 233, the last folio of the manuscript, is the Apostles' Creed: the selection of a prayer that most Catholics learn during their childhood, and that contains the most basic tenets of the Faith, might indicate that this new owner must have received the manuscript at a rather young age. However, it is also entirely possible that these additions might have been made or commissioned by the original owner himself some time after purchase.

The miniature program in Newberry Library MS 53, which as mentioned is composed of sixteen images, appears rather ordinary in both its themes and composition. All miniatures have been painted on folios cut separately and from thicker parchment than the rest of the manuscript, and inserted later by attaching the loose folio onto one of the bifolios prior to binding. The images appear on the verso of the folio on which they were painted, with the recto left blank. Each miniature is contained inside an arch-shaped gold

leaf frame, approximately 58x34mm, that separates it from the decorated borders. Each of the images serves to introduce a different section of the text. The first eight miniatures (Annunciation, Visitation, Nativity, Annunciation to the Shepherd, Adoration of the Magi, Presentation to the Temple, Massacre of the Innocents and Flight to Egypt) form a complete cycle for the Hours of Our Lady, with each corresponding to one of the liturgical hours. The Coronation of Mary as Queen of Heaven introduces the Office for Advent, while the Resurrection of Lazarus precedes the Office of the Dead. A left-handed St. Jerome (probably a result of tracing the image from a pattern in reverse), a King David in Penitence, a Crucifixion and a Pentecost introduce respectively the Psalter, the Penitential Psalms, the Hours of the Cross and the Hours of the Holy Spirit, while Mary Enthroned precedes the Mass of Our Lady. Finally, an image of Saint Sebastian, as previously mentioned, is positioned before the Antiphon and Oration for the saint's feast day.³

The quality of the miniatures, despite the damage that has occurred over time, is rather good when considering their small size, and a closer inspection reveals the presence of very fine details both on the figures and, even more prominently, in the backgrounds, which feature carefully crafted landscapes and buildings, and interiors showing in some cases (most prominently in the Pentecost and Annunciation miniatures [fig. 5 and 1, respectively]) a degree of effort in the representation of depth. The palette balances the predominance of greys with details in very vivid colors, particularly fleshy pink, azure, gold and red. Greens are, however, entirely absent, with the vegetation rendered in shades of grey. This color choice appears to have been a fashionable one:

³ Saenger, *A Catalogue of the Pre-1500 Western Manuscript Books*, 91.

two of the other manuscripts I will discuss in chapter 3, Walters W 180 and Walters W 196, were both made around the same time as Newberry Library MS 53 and by the same circle of artists. They present a grisaille palette, the former in all of its miniatures, while the latter alternates demi-grisaille with full color illustrations.⁴

While Paul Saenger's detailed catalog of manuscripts in the Newberry Library collection does not identify with certainty a specific workshop responsible for the production of Newberry Library MS 53, a catalog for an exhibition that took place at the Newberry Library in 1969 and other sources attribute the miniatures to an illuminator that was either part of or close to the circle of the Dutch painter Willem Vrelant, the master of one of the largest, most prominent and most prolific manuscript workshops in Bruges. I will discuss this attribution, and my reasons to support it, below; first, it is important to discuss the figure of Willem Vrelant in more detail.⁵

1.3 Willem Vrelant: biographical notes

Compared to the scant information available about most other master illuminators of the time, a surprising amount of documentation concerning Willem Vrelant survives.

⁴ For more in-depth information on the use of grisaille and demi-grisaille in Medieval miniatures see Gloria König Fiero, "Devotional Illumination in Early Netherlandish Manuscripts: a Study of the Grisaille Miniatures in Thirteen Related Fifteenth Century Dutch Books of Hours" (PhD diss., Florida State University, 1970), in which the author examines a group of manuscripts with similar characteristics.

⁵ For the 1969 exhibition, see University of Chicago. Division of the Humanities, and Newberry Library. *French and Flemish Illuminated Manuscripts from Chicago Collections* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 29. It is worth noting that Saenger does mention a connection between MS 53 and the style associated with the Vrelant workshop, albeit without attributing the manuscript to Vrelant's circle. Cf. Paul H. Saenger and Newberry Library, *A Catalogue of the Pre-1500 Western Manuscript Books at the Newberry Library* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 90-96. Furthermore, Newberry Library Ms 53 appears in the list of manuscripts attached to the biography of Willem Vrelant in Georges Dogaer, James H. Marrow, and Friedrich Winkler. *Flemish Miniature Painting in the 15th and 16th Centuries*, (Amsterdam: B.M. Israël, 1987), 103. Finally, see Bernard Bousmanne, *Item a Guillaume Wyelant Aussi Enlumineur": Willem Vrelant : Un Aspect De L'enluminure Dans Les Pays-Bas Méridionaux Sous Le Mécénat Des Ducs De Bourgogne Philippe Le Bon Et Charles Le Téméraire*. (Bruxelles: Bibliothèque royale de Belgique, 1997), 61 for a more skeptical opinion on the manuscript's attribution

The earliest mention of his name is generally considered to be an entry in the records of the city of Utrecht, made in 1440, indicating that Willem, son of Jacob Backer, had moved into the city from the nearby village of Vredelant (also spelled Vrederlant, now Vreeland).⁶ The name of his home town was given as his last name in later documents, which are mainly found in his adoptive city of Bruges. In 1454, Vrelant's name appears for the first time in the records of the Guild of St. John the Evangelist, the organization that gathered together the bookmakers and miniature painters active in the city.⁷ Vrelant is recorded as having paid his membership dues to the guild. It appears that Vrelant soon became a prominent member of the guild, to the point that, when a commission for an altarpiece for the guild's chapel was awarded to Hans Memling, portraits of both Vrelant and his wife were included.⁸ Vrelant continued to pay his dues to the guild every year, except for the period between May 6th, 1456 and June 8th, 1459, until his death in 1481. Beginning in June, 1481, the first of a two-decade long series of annual Masses was celebrated for his soul by the religious confraternity of Our Lady of the Snow, of which he was also a prominent member. The records for this event indicate that Willem Vrelant was Jacob's illegitimate son, that his wife was named Marye, and that he might have had several illegitimate or adopted children.⁹

After Willem's death, Marye appears to have taken control of the family business. While her name does not appear in the records of the illuminators' guild until 1482, it

⁶ Thomas Kren, Scot McKendrick, J. Paul Getty Museum, and Royal Academy of Arts. *Illuminating the Renaissance: the Triumph of Flemish Manuscript Painting in Europe* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2003), 117.

⁷ Bousmanne, *Item a Guillaume Wyelant*, 36. Also Kren and McKendrick, *Illuminating the Renaissance*, 117. I will discuss Vrelant's relationship with this organization in more detail in chapter 2.

⁸ Bousmanne, *Item a Guillaume Wyelant*, 52-53. The altarpiece was sold in 1624 to finance a new organ for the chapel, and is now lost.

⁹ Bousmanne, *Item a Guillaume Wyelant*, 50.

appears likely that she might have collaborated with her husband, and she certainly continued to pay her dues for at least ten years after he died.¹⁰ This was by no means an unusual occurrence, as records in Bruges and elsewhere show that women frequently worked as illuminators with their husbands and could inherit the family workshop after their spouse's death.¹¹ Vrelant's legacy also survived in his apprentices, of whom at least four are recorded in the documents of the guild.¹² Each apprentice likely trained for two years, and two of the three for whom we have names later became full members of the Guild of St. John the Evangelist and remained associated with Vrelant. At some point in the 1460s, Vrelant introduced into the guild of St. John an unnamed female apprentice. In 1464 he did the same for a woman named Matkin, who appears to have been a trained illuminator already, and in 1467 it was the turn of the unnamed daughter of Lodovic Breyels. During the following decade, he would also sponsor Betkin (i.e. Elizabeth) Scepens and Adrien de Raet (introduced into the guild respectively in 1473 and 1475), who would later become full members of the guild and illuminators in their own right. It is even possible that they might have been his illegitimate children, married to his children, or were adopted into the family, as in later entries they are also listed as Betkin and Adrien Vrelant.¹³ Furthermore, there is evidence that Betkin Scepens, and more occasionally Adrien de Raet, kept working with Vrelant after they became full guild members (in 1478

¹⁰ James Douglas Farquhar, *Creation and Imitation: The Work of a Fifteenth-Century Manuscript Illuminator*, (Fort Lauderdale: Nova/Nyit University Press, 1976), 27.

¹¹ See Farquhar, *Creation and Imitation*, 27-28 for Bruges, and Richard H. and Mary A. Rouse. *Manuscripts and their Makers: Commercial Book Producers in Medieval Paris, 1200-1500*. (Turnhout: H. Miller, 2000), 237-260 for a closer look at a similar phenomenon in France.

¹² Contradicting previous scholarship, Anne Van Buren counts five in Anne H. Van Buren, "Willem Vrelant: Questions and Issues." *Revue Belge D'archéologie Et D'histoire De L'art* (1999): 22.

¹³ Bousmanne, *Item a Guillaume Wyelant*, 50. See also James Weale, "Documents inédits sur les enlumineurs de Bruges", *Le Beffroi*, II (1865): 301.

and 1480, respectively), and later with his wife Marye after their mentor's death (in the case of Betkin, likely until 1489).¹⁴

Along with guild and city records, the most important source of information about Willem Vrelant is two payment notes, for two separate manuscripts: one for the second volume of the *Chroniques de Hainaut* (Bruxelles, Bibliothèque Royale Albert 1er, MS 9343), which he illuminated for Charles the Bold, Duke of Burgundy, and one for a *Vita Christi* which Bernard Bousmanne claimed to be no longer extant, but which has since been identified as a *Miroir d'Humilité* that likely constituted the second volume of a pair along with a *Vita Christi* (Valenciennes, Bibliothèque Municipale MS 240).¹⁵ Along with these manuscripts for which we have documental evidence for a precise attribution, Anne Van Buren mentions the existence of about 100 other volumes that can be traced in some way to Vrelant and his associates, most of them Books of Hours.

1.4 The Vrelant circle

While there is abundant evidence to demonstrate that Vrelant and his associates were not involved in the production of entire books, as the appearance of the text varies wildly and appears to be the product of different scribes and workshops, it is true that, as Anne Van Buren phrases it, “a successful artist needs a shop”.¹⁶ As previously mentioned, Willem Vrelant could normally count on the help of his wife, at least one registered apprentice (whose training lasted for two years), one or two more collaborators

¹⁴ Van Buren, “Willem Vrelant”, 22

¹⁵ Bernard Bousmanne, “*Item a Guillaume Wyelant Aussi Enlumineur*”: *Willem Vrelant: Un Aspect de l'Enluminure dans les Pays-Bas Meridionaux Sous le Mecenat des Ducs de Bourgogne Philippe le Bon et Charles le Temeraire* (Bruxelles: Bibliotheque Royale de Belgique, 1997), 35. See also Van Buren, “Willem Vrelant”, 8.

¹⁶ Van Buren, “Willem Vrelant”, 21.

(particularly when he was older) and an unspecified number of journeymen offering occasional services. Each person could be tasked with working on a number of smaller miniatures, or care of specific aspects of production depending on their skill level and the size of the commission. While the Vrelant “workshop” might not have necessarily been a physical place where all or even most of his associates gathered on a daily basis to work together, the existence of such a chain of production and the division of labor would have likely have made even a large workload sustainable, provided it was well managed.¹⁷ Furthermore, one of the most interesting characteristics of the production of manuscripts attributed to the Vrelant circle is the use of patterns.¹⁸ Model sheets crowded with figures ready to be traced or copied were not uncommon, but Vrelant and his associates made great use of them, to accelerate production, but also, most likely, as aids in the training of apprentices and to ensure that their work, and that of hired journeymen, would be consistent with the style associated with the workshop. This seems to have been a successful strategy that resulted in manuscripts made by different people with slightly different styles that still presented a strongly consistent appearance.

Despite the documents seemingly proving Vrelant’s prominence and activity, his place within the history of Flemish illuminators has not remained uncontested. In particular, during the 1970s James Farquhar went so far as to publish first an article, and later an entire volume, intending to demolish all that was until then believed to be true about Willem Vrelant, his life and his work. Farquhar opens his argument by questioning the existence of a Vrelant workshop, claiming that the guild documents published by

¹⁷ For more information on how illuminators managed and divided their workload, see Rouse and Rouse, *Manuscripts and their Makers*.

¹⁸ Kren and McKendrick, *Illuminating the Renaissance*, 117.

Weale did not, in fact, constitute proof of its existence.¹⁹ In his opinion, the many manuscripts attributed to Vrelant and his associates were too numerous and heterogeneous to have a common origin, and the guild documents were proof that Vrelant had too few apprentices to be able to sustain such a massive production. Lastly, Farquhar identifies French influences within a manuscript traditionally attributed to Vrelant, Arsenal 575, as proof that its illuminator (to whom he refers simply as Master of Arsenal 575) was not Flemish, but French, and therefore that manuscripts associated with the one he examined had to have been produced in France by a French artist.²⁰ He even went so far as to claim that the Guillaume Wyelant mentioned in the note for the payment of the second volume of the *Chroniques de Hainaut* could not be identified with Willem Vrelant. Farquhar argued that Wyelant was a common last name and that, considering the phonetic differences between the two, it was impossible for the latter spelling to have simply been a failed attempt by a French-speaking clerk to transcribe a Dutch name.²¹

Farquhar's argument contesting the possibility that Vrelant and Guillaume Wyelant were the same person fails to convince. Aside from the obvious similarity between the names, if this Guillaume Wyelant was not Willem Vrelant, but was indeed well known and skilled enough to work on such an important commission for Charles the Bold (for a substantial sum of money, no less), why has no scholar connected this person to any other name contained within the records of a guild, in Bruges or elsewhere? It is hard to believe that, in such a strictly regulated market, Guillaume Wyelant would have plied his trade at such a high level without paying his dues. Even less credible is the idea that the

¹⁹ Farquhar, *Creation and Imitation*, 29-30.

²⁰ Farquhar, *ibid.*, 132.

²¹ Farquhar, *ibid.*, 31.

Duke of Burgundy, with so many skilled illuminators to choose from within his domains, would have requested the services of a painter who was working illegally. Others have also found fault with Farquhar's hypothesis, for example by pointing out, like Bousmanne does, that even in the guild's records Vrelant's name was misspelled several times, in eleven different ways.²² Furthermore, again according to Bousmanne, dividing the works attributed to Vrelant and associates into subgroups based on their appearance and characteristics does not exclude the existence of a single sphere of influence, and taking inspiration from French works and styles does not indicate French production.²³ Furthermore, Anne Van Buren points out that most of the Books of Hours Farquhar presented to support his thesis presented calendars for the city of Bruges, and therefore were likely not produced in France; she also notes that the number of apprentices Vrelant introduced into the guild was typical and that journeymen were not usually included in guild records. Farquhar's claim that Vrelant's workshop was too small for its production, therefore, does not hold water.²⁴ However, the effect of his publications remains, and many institutions have since modified the attribution of manuscripts once seen as directly related to Vrelant, identifying them instead as a product of his circle or as being painted in his style. While this is technically correct, in light of what the information reported above regarding the Vrelant workshop's methods of production and the information we have about his collaborators, I believe placing too much distance between the production associated with the circle and Willem Vrelant himself would also be a mistake. Considering the similarities in style between the many manuscripts attributed to the

²² Bousmanne, *Item a Guillaume Wyelant*, 39.

²³ Bousmanne, *ibid.*, 38.

²⁴ Van Buren, "Willem Vrelant", 4-5 and 22.

workshop, along with the widespread use of the same pattern sheets for miniatures, I believe there are elements to argue that someone was directing the production with a specific idea in mind and with an interest in offering a homogeneous artistic output, one immediately recognizable by the public. In other words, if Vrelant cannot be separated from his associates, it is also true that the figure of the master himself should not be ignored when discussing the manuscripts associated with his circle. In what follows, I will discuss in detail other elements that, along with supporting the possibility of a direct relationship between Newberry Library MS 53 and the Vrelant workshop, can also help demonstrate the existence of a central creative idea in the circle's production.

1.5 Willem Vrelant and Newberry Library MS 53: evidence for attribution

Like other, similar manuscripts, Newberry Library MS 53 has been variously attributed, either to Vrelant's "circle" or, as Bousmanne claims, to an unrelated imitator.²⁵ However, as previously mentioned, I have reason to believe that the manuscript examined in this thesis can in fact be attributed to one of his apprentices, and that its production might have been overseen by Vrelant himself.

Anne Van Buren describes Vrelant's style as presenting "unmixed blues with little modeling" and "forms edged in black ink".²⁶ Thomas Kren and Scot McKendrick are not as generous; they describe his lack of interest in creating light effects, "airless landscapes" and "stiff, frequently expressionless figures".²⁷ His human figures are indeed quite doll-

²⁵ Bousmanne, *Item a Guillaume Wyelant*, 61. Bousmanne categorically excludes any possibility of attribution to Vrelant and his closest circle of associates, claiming instead that his work and style were "copied".

²⁶ Van Buren, "Willem Vrelant", 17.

²⁷ Kren and McKendrick, *Illuminating the Renaissance*, 117.

like, with heavy eyelids that give the round, otherwise inexpressive faces a somewhat melancholic appearance. Backgrounds tend to be flat but detailed, with exterior landscapes presenting a very high horizon line often obstructed by prominent architectural elements, and shallow, cluttered interiors. While the miniatures in Newberry Library MS 53 do not appear to have been painted by the same hand as the much larger illustrations in the second volume of the *Chroniques de Hainaut* and in the *Miroir d'Humilité* attributed to Vrelant, they do match all the criteria described above, and there is indeed a resemblance between their diminutive figures and the smallest ones depicted in some of the miniatures of the latter manuscripts (e.g. the smaller figures of angels on fol. 50r of the *Chroniques*).

Furthermore, the frequent use of patterns, which is another hallmark of Vrelant's modus operandi, is fairly evident in Newberry Library MS 53. Not only do some of the miniatures closely resemble others found in similarly attributed manuscripts (I will discuss this further in chapter 3, when comparing Newberry Library MS 53 to Walters W 180), but some figures appear more than once within the manuscript itself, particularly one bearded, kneeling man depicted several times, with slight changes in the clothing and pose, as St. Joseph (fol. 48v [fig. 2]), one of the Magi (fol. 60v [fig. 3]), King David (fol. 170v [fig. 4]) and St. Peter (fol. 203v). Even more interestingly, the Annunciation on fol. 13v [fig. 1] resembles the composition of Jan Van Eyck's 1434 Annunciation, and Vrelant's knowledge of and interest in Flemish oil painting are documented by both Van Buren and, more in detail, Bousmanne.²⁸

²⁸ See Van Buren, "Willem Vrelant", 6 and Bousmanne, *Item a Guillaume Wyelant*, 98-103.

Finally, Van Buren makes mention of an interesting detail, namely Willem Vrelant's habit of retracing and modifying the contours of some of the figures painted by his apprentices, redefining their shape with black ink.²⁹ This occurs at least once in Newberry Library MS 53, specifically on the Adoration of the Magi on fol. 60v [fig. 3]: the tiny figure of Jesus presents contours that are thicker and darker than those of the other characters around him. Upon closer inspection, it is evident that the right thigh has been redrawn with a thinner, more slender shape, with the original contour still visible about a millimeter above the new one.

While none of these elements represent incontrovertible evidence for an attribution of Newberry Library MS 53 to the Vrelant circle, their validity is reinforced by the available information about Willem Vrelant's associates and production. Similarly, while further research might be required to remove any trace of doubt, I am convinced that Bousmanne's exclusion of Newberry Library MS 53 from the list of works that can be attributed to Vrelant's associates should at this point be put into question. For the purposes of this thesis, I will therefore consider Newberry Library MS 53 as a likely product of the Vrelant workshop, perhaps (considering elements like the simplicity of the figures and the extensive use of patterns) made by an apprentice during their training period.

²⁹ Van Buren, "Willem Vrelant", 24

CHAPTER 2

2.1 Newberry Library MS 53 and its historical context

Newberry Library MS 53 does not particularly deviate from the common characteristics of the Book of Hours of its time. As mentioned in the description contained in the previous chapter, the prayers follow the Use of Rome, and the non-standard content (not counting the parts of the text that were added at a later date by a different scribe) is essentially limited to the presence of some Eucharistic hymns and to an antiphon and an oration to St. Sebastian. The style of the illustrations and borders, aside from the use of demi-grisaille in place of full color (which, as I will discuss in chapter 3, might in fact have been in fashion around 1450-1470), is also fairly typical for a manuscript made in Flanders towards the end of the fifteenth century. In short, it appears to be a rather standard product of the historical and cultural context in which its makers and patron lived. In this chapter, I will discuss the cultural and economic environment in which the Vrelant atelier operated, that made possible the production of Newberry Library MS 53 and similar manuscripts like the ones described in chapter 3.

As mentioned, Willem Vrelant was mainly active as an illuminator in the city of Bruges, where he likely moved before 1456 (the date of the first mention of his name in an official document in the city) from the city of Utrecht.³⁰ Bruges, like the rest of the Flanders region, was during this time under the political rule of the Dukes of Burgundy, who belonged to a cadet branch of the Valois monarchs of France and who were

³⁰ Thomas Kren, Scot McKendrick, J. Paul Getty Museum, and Royal Academy of Arts. *Illuminating the Renaissance: the Triumph of Flemish Manuscript Painting in Europe* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2003), 117. Documents show that Vrelant was not originally from Utrecht, but moved there and registered as a citizen in 1449, changing his last name from Backer to that of his town of origin, Vredelant.

renowned for being great patrons of literature and art. The city was known for playing a crucial role in Flemish trade, international banking and, naturally, in the production of works of art, including commercially produced illuminated manuscripts. The advantageous geographic position of Bruges placed it at the center of important land, river and sea routes, which made it an excellent hub for both local and international trade (particularly Venetian and Genoese), as well as the northernmost outpost for Italian bankers, whose activities only added to the city's wealth.³¹ All these factors made Bruges an extremely desirable environment for many professional illuminators in which to live and work, with patrons coming from all parts of Europe to commission Books of Hours and other types of manuscripts.

Saenger dates Newberry Library MS 53 to the mid-1470s,³² which would place its production chronologically during a very complex political period, that of the transition between the rule of the third Valois Duke of Burgundy, Philip the Good (b. 1396, Duke of Burgundy from 1419 to his death in 1467), and that of his son Charles the Bold (b. 1433, reigned from 1467 to his death in 1477). According to Valentijn Vermeersch and Erik Aerts, this time period also coincides with the decline of the city of Bruges as a commercial hub, particularly in terms of sea trade. This was on account of the growing importance of Bruges' rival city, Antwerp, and to the silting of the Zwin, the natural tidal inlet that connected the once-landlocked Bruges to the North Sea and that allowed ships sailing to the city from as far as Italy to enter its port.³³ Wim Prevenier and Willem Blockmans do not agree with this opinion, denying the supposed hostility between Bruges and Antwerp

³¹ Wim Prevenier and Willem Blockmans. *The Burgundian Netherlands*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 20 and 113.

³² Saenger and Newberry Library, *A Catalogue of the Pre-1500 Western Manuscript Books*, 90.

³³ Valentijn Vermeersch and Erik Aerts, *Bruges and Europe*, (Antwerp: Mercator, 1992), 33.

and stating that the two cities functioned, in fact, as parts of an “economic and infrastructural whole.”³⁴ Whatever the actual dynamics of the relationship between Bruges and Antwerp might have been, it is undeniable that the end of the fifteenth century represented a time of important social and economic changes for the Burgundian Netherlands in general and for Bruges in particular.

One important factor, among others, that contributed to the growth of the manuscript industry in the city of Bruges was the increased social flexibility in the society of the mid-to-late fifteenth century. The bourgeoisie, having acquired immense wealth by participating in the city’s intense commercial activities, had begun to take advantage of its ever-increasing economic power to acquire the social prestige associated with joining the ranks of the nobility, and the privileges (and, more pragmatically, the exemption from taxation) that accompanied it.³⁵ Along with the wealth and the titles also came the desire to imitate and assimilate the customs of the aristocracy, which in turn fueled the manufacture and trade of all sorts of luxury goods, from jewelry to fabrics, to works of art. This desire to display newly-acquired wealth, of course, almost always included the purchase of the status symbol (and favorite devotional text) *par excellence* of the time: the Book of Hours.

While at this point in time the printing press, and therefore the printed book, was already a reality, that cheaper and more automated method of production had not yet replaced the many manuscript workshops dedicated to the creation of volumes copied and illustrated by hand. The production of religious texts had turned from a devotional activity for monks into a profitable commercial endeavor for skilled lay craftsmen already

³⁴ Prevenier and Blockmans, *Burgundian Netherlands*, 19.

³⁵ Prevenier and Blockmans, *ibid.*, 136-39.

a few centuries prior to the time period here discussed, but the popularity of manuscript books was now at its peak. The number of people able to purchase (and peruse) such objects was now greater than ever, as was the number of workshops catering to all sorts of audiences and tastes with volumes of various size, quality and level of decoration, some of which could be sold at relatively affordable price points. But how were these books produced, and how would a potential customer go about securing one of these precious volumes for themselves? In his *History of Illuminated Manuscripts*, Christopher de Hamel offers a detailed description of the process, and while his work is mainly centered on France it is easy to imagine that things in Flanders were likely not very different:

“The customer would discuss which texts he wanted added to the basic core of the Book of Hours. He would perhaps choose a script from a sheet of sample handwritings [...]. Some quires were sent out to one illuminator and some to another. [...] Some weeks later, when these were done, the bookshop collected up the separate sections, paid the artists, tidied up and bound the leaves [...] and then presented the book to the customer, with an invoice.”³⁶

The illuminations in a manuscript were often, therefore, the result of a very organized process that involved several craftsmen, not necessarily communicating with one another but all tied to a bookshop that would commission the work and coordinate

³⁶ Christopher de Hamel, *A History of Illuminated Manuscripts*. (London: Phaidon Press, 1986), 176-178.

the effort. This was, of course, particularly true of those volumes that contained a large amount of illustrations. If we also take into account the work done by apprentices, scribes, book binders and other craftsmen in the bookmaking industry, it appears very clear that manuscripts were the result of the work of an entire team of people, most of whom remain entirely anonymous and uncredited due to the scarcity of sources mentioning them and to the common art-historical practice to attribute a manuscript's authorship exclusively to the illuminators or to their workshops. In light of this information, therefore, Willem Vrelant and his associates are in no way unusual in their production or organization, and differ from most of their still anonymous colleagues only due to the fact that their names, along with some biographical information about them, still survive.

2.2 Guild and Confraternity

In many places (and Bruges was no exception), the production of most goods was strictly regulated by the guild system, as described in detail by Prevenier and Blockmans in their volume *The Burgundian Netherlands*. According to their description, the trade organizations now commonly known as guilds were known in Bruges by the word *ambocht*, while the word *gilde* actually indicated a religious confraternity that was affiliated to an *ambocht* and that regulated the spiritual life of its members, but that was also accessible to non-members known as "brothers of devotion". These would join out of devotion to the saint to whom the *gilde* was dedicated, contributing with the payment of a fraction of a full member's regular fee.³⁷ Depending on a particular craftsman's situation and status, their place as a master in an *ambocht* could in some cases be pretty much

³⁷ Kren and McKendrick, *Illuminating the Renaissance*, 18.

guaranteed from birth, while in others it could be almost impossible to achieve without many years of work under an established master. Prevenier and Blockmans present the interesting example of the system of fees within the *ambocht* of cabinet makers, which was very likely not too different from the one implemented by the *ambocht* of painters.³⁸ The latter institution also included cloth painters, saddlers, mirror makers and glaziers, as the number of painters in the city of Bruges was not sufficient for them to form a guild of their own.³⁹ A citizen of Bruges who was not the son of a guild member with the rank of master had to pay eleven times the amount of money compared to the fee for someone who was fortunate enough to be born into the guild. The fee raised to fourteen times as much for someone who was from Flanders but not Bruges, skyrocketing to twenty-one times that amount for a foreigner. This system had been conceived to maintain what Prevenier and Blockmans refer to as a “labor aristocracy,” i.e. to ensure that each craft would remain solidly in the hands of those families that were already practicing it. The rules were designed to protect local, established craftsmen from competition, particularly from craftsmen coming from outside the city and attempting to breach the local market with foreign craftsmanship or, even worse, lower prices.

While it may seem obvious that the answer would be a positive one, considering his prominence and commercial success, it is worth asking whether Willem Vrelant was, in fact, a member of the painters’ *ambocht* in Bruges or not, particularly in light of the information reported above regarding guild fees. As mentioned before, Vrelant was not originally from Bruges, having immigrated there from Utrecht at some point around 1456; this circumstance would have likely made the cost of *ambocht* membership prohibitive.

³⁸ Prevenier and Blockmans, *Burgundian Netherlands*, 163.

³⁹ Kren and McKendrick, *Illuminating the Renaissance*, 17.

Curiously enough, however, there is evidence that Vrelant started producing books independently almost immediately after his recorded move to Bruges. For instance, Elizabeth Morrison and Thomas Kren mention a *Vie de Sainte Catherine* in demi-grisaille commissioned from Willem Vrelant by the Duke of Burgundy Philip the Good and completed in 1457, only a year after the first mention of his name in an official document.⁴⁰ How did he manage to establish his workshop in a new city not only in such a short time, but also with enough success to obtain commissions from the Duke of Burgundy himself? As a newly established illuminator that had come from a different city only a short time before, earning an amount of money that would be sufficient for him to pay the mastership fees would have likely required many years of work as a journeyman for a guild master. During such a time, Vrelant would not have had the freedom to work independently, especially not for such an important patron, and would still have been required to pay a membership fee, albeit not as high as the one required of a foreign master.

One possible answer to the question might lie in the fact that, starting in 1444, painters who were working in the service of the Duke of Burgundy were not required to join the painters' guild or pay the related fees. It is worth mentioning that the Dukes of Burgundy in general, and Philip the Good in particular, were among the most important and most generous patrons for Flemish illuminators due to their great interest in collecting books.⁴¹ The exemption from guild fees, however, was only in effect for journeymen, so it does not provide a plausible explanation for Vrelant's situation.⁴² It is, of course, possible that Vrelant might have saved a sufficient amount of money in the seven years

⁴⁰ Elizabeth Morrison, Thomas Kren, J. Paul Getty Museum, and Courtauld Institute of Art. *Flemish Manuscript Painting in Context: Recent Research*. (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2006), 13.

⁴¹ Prevenier and Blockmans, *Burgundian Netherlands*, 308.

⁴² Kren and McKendrick, *Illuminating the Renaissance*, 17.

he was in Utrecht (from 1449 to 1456), but I believe there might be a different explanation, one that sheds some light on the way craftsmen and tradesmen organized themselves when their interest in plying their trade without the sometimes suffocating restrictions imposed by a guild trumped their need for protection from the competition of outsiders and fellow citizens alike.

To find a possible solution to the mystery it is necessary to look back to the first document that records the presence of Willem Vrelant in Bruges. The document indicates him as one of the earliest members, and possibly one of the founders, of the Confraternity of St. John the Evangelist.⁴³ This organization was not, of course, the painters' *ambocht*, and neither was it the *gilde* attached to it. It was an independent religious confraternity and civic organization founded not by painters, but by people working in the book industry, that served to gather together people working in similar professions but that did not regulate the market in the way an *ambocht* would.⁴⁴ This is the reflection of an anomaly in the city of Bruges (when compared to other Flemish cities, in which illuminators were considered painters and thus had to officially join the painters' guild to ply their trade), where, despite one failed attempt in 1426 to obtain control of the category (by having them pay at least half the normal fee), illuminators managed to remain independent from the painters' *ambocht*, save from the obligation to pay a one-time registration fee for their product's mark.⁴⁵ As an early member of the Confraternity, and perhaps one of his founders, Vrelant may not have been considered an outsider, and

⁴³ Kren and McKendrick, *ibid.*, 21.

⁴⁴ Kren and McKendrick, *ibid.*, 20.

⁴⁵ Kren and McKendrick, *ibid.*, 21.

therefore would not have been subject to the usual restrictions reserved to members with no connections to an organization.

This information would also offer the solution for a second question, that of Willem Vrelant's female apprentices. As mentioned in chapter 1, sources indicate that he registered at least four apprentices: two (or possibly three) unknown women in the 1460s, and then two more people, Adrien de Raet (a man) and Betkin Scepens, in the following decade.⁴⁶ It is very important to note that the Confraternity of St. John the Evangelist placed almost no restrictions on female membership. This was a much more liberal approach than that of the painters' *ambocht*, which drastically limited women's activity and career and essentially prevented them entirely from achieving mastership and working independently (or even using oil paint!).⁴⁷ The choice to allow women to not only join, but to obtain full membership, was likely due to the practice of widows taking control of ownership and production, that was well-established among illuminators. This information paints an interesting portrait of Willem Vrelant as a man with a great talent for business, capable of manipulating practices and institutions to his own economic advantage.

2.3 The market for Vrelant's miniatures in Flanders and beyond.

As discussed in the previous chapter of this thesis, the number of manuscripts attributed to Willem Vrelant, even by the scholars using the most conservative methods of attribution, is exceptionally high. Meeting such a high demand would have required an

⁴⁶ Kren and McKendrick, *ibid.*, 117.

⁴⁷ Kren and McKendrick, *ibid.*, 22.

extremely well organized, almost serial method of production, and there is evidence, as mentioned before and as I will discuss in greater detail in chapter 3, that the Vrelant atelier made a particularly liberal use of pre-made templates and apprentice work for its miniatures, especially during the production of smaller or cheaper volumes made for a more general public, of which Books of Hours are a typical example. It is also extremely likely that the simplicity of the design used by the atelier to depict human figures, which were often described by later critics as inexpressive, rigid or spindly, might have been another way for Vrelant to make his apprentices' work faster to complete, as these simpler figures are easy and quick to copy or trace. It appears, as previously mentioned, that he also made great use of pattern books (largely from France), which was certainly not an uncommon practice for manuscript illuminators, as well as drawing inspiration from contemporary oil painters, namely Van Eyck.⁴⁸ When comparing the Annunciation image in the Llangattock Hours, also attributed (with greater certainty) to Vrelant (Getty Museum, Ms. Ludwig IX 7, fol. 53v.), and which is very clearly modeled on Van Eyck's 1434 Annunciation, to the same scene on fol. 13v. of Newberry Library MS 53 [fig. 1], the similarities are fairly evident. In particular, the pose of the figures in Newberry Library MS 53 appears more similar to that in the Getty manuscript, while the background architecture bears a closer resemblance to Van Eyck's painting itself. I will analyze these similarities more in depth later on, as there is much more to be said about this particular miniature, but they are worth mentioning here as an example of Vrelant's models and sources of inspiration.

⁴⁸ Kren and McKendrick, *ibid.*, 88 and 117.

Regardless, the immense popularity of the manuscripts in the workshop's style, both in Flanders and abroad, certainly represents a testament to Willem Vrelant's great skill as a businessman, as well as to his ability to meet the demands of all kinds of patrons. Most notably, over the course of his career, from the 1450s to his death in 1481, he received commissions not only from the Dukes of Burgundy and their court, but from royalty and aristocrats across Europe.⁴⁹

Philip the Good, third of the Dukes of Burgundy descended from the French Valois dynasty, was, without a doubt, the most important patron for Vrelant's career. Not only did the Duke of Burgundy commission a great number of works from Vrelant and his workshop, but his patronage was likely instrumental in helping Vrelant to establish himself as an illuminator in Bruges and expand his circle of clients beyond the borders of Flanders. One of the earliest works commissioned by Philip the Good from Vrelant's workshop was, as mentioned before, a *Vie de Ste. Catherine* illustrated with demi-grisaille miniatures, but it is worth mentioning that many of the most important (and voluminous) ducal commissions presented secular themes. The Duke had a predilection for historical and chivalric literature in the vernacular: another very early work that he commissioned from Vrelant was a series of miniatures illustrating the life of Alexander the Great, one of Philip's favorite historical figures.⁵⁰

While Charles the Bold, Philip the Good's son and successor, commissioned some works from Willem Vrelant, most notably 60 illuminations for the second volume of the *Chroniques de Hainaut*, a twelfth-century historical account by Gilbert of Mons, it appears

⁴⁹ Kren and McKendrick, *ibid.*, 117.

⁵⁰ See Morrison and Kren, *Flemish Manuscript Painting*, 27-39 for an in-depth analysis of Philip the Good's interest in Alexander the Great and its impact on manuscript production.

that Willem Vrelant did not succeed in captivating his interest and tastes.⁵¹ Charles seems to have preferred more detailed miniature styles with more expressive and dynamic scenes, and did not favor Vrelant's simplicity and the lack of expressivity of his figures. However, Willem Vrelant's workshop remained successful until his death in 1481. During this period, the Vrelant atelier continued to attract patrons old and new, including a number of prominent Flemish and Burgundian courtiers and many foreign aristocrats. While it is important to note that patronage is rarely established with complete certainty (not only in the case of Vrelant, but for the majority of illuminated manuscripts), his long list of aristocratic patrons features many important names, indicating that his popularity extended beyond the borders of Bruges and Burgundy. To list only a few examples, the consort of Juan II of Aragon, Juana Enriquez, commissioned a Book of Hours from the Vrelant workshop (Madrid Palacio s.n.); Cardinal von Hohenems, a German prelate wielding great power within the Roman Curia, purchased a Book of Hours now in London (Victoria and Albert Museum, L. 2393-1910); finally, Eleanor of Portugal is indicated by Bousmanne as having commissioned Lisbon Illum. 165 (again, a Book of Hours), but, according to an inscription within Walters W 196, she might have also been the patron of the latter manuscript, a larger-sized, lavishly decorated prayer book also attributed to the Vrelant circle, which I will compare to Newberry Library MS 53 in chapter 3.⁵²

While Vrelant's name was, as mentioned, certainly not unknown among the upper crust of society, many of the manuscripts connected to his workshop or style, particularly the ones smaller in size and presenting more standardized contents, were likely

⁵¹ Kren and McKendrick, *Illuminating the Renaissance*, 117.

⁵² Bousmanne, *Item a Guillaume Wyelant*, 43. Considering the fact that the latter two manuscripts listed here, like most others attributed to Vrelant and associates, were made around 1470, the Eleanor of Portugal in question is to be intended as Eleanor of Viseu, born in 1458.

purchased by wealthy members of the bourgeoisie. While illuminated prayer books were once exclusively made for and purchased by royalty and nobility, with the rise of the merchant bourgeoisie the demand for such objects, which were seen as symbols of status and prestige as much as tools for personal devotion, was on the rise, along with a growing interest in relatively affordable luxury items in general. As already mentioned, the consequence was that the traditional model, which saw the patron commission a work of art directly from the workshop, to their own preferences and specifics, was now being replaced by serial production of more-or-less standardized manuscripts.⁵³ These could be customized to a certain degree during or after production, with the insertion of coats of arms or specific prayers, or simply purchased ready-made, either by the final consumer or by a reseller who would export and sell them at a profit, as rare items, in other parts of Europe. Scribes could now copy the text for a Book of Hours without leaving space for the miniatures, which were painted on loose leaves of parchment by one or more illuminators while the text was being transcribed. Furthermore, as seen in the previous chapter, some masters, and Vrelant in particular, would train their apprentices in painting in their style, thus meeting the increasing demand for miniatures painted in the master's "signature" style and offering a homogeneous artistic output without sacrificing, and indeed improving, their efficiency. The increase in production speed resulted, therefore, in an increase in production volume, and in greater profits for all the craftsmen involved.

Even the way manuscripts were being sold had radically changed: while scribes and illuminators were still taking commissions for customized works, ready-made

⁵³ De Hamel, *A History of Illuminated Manuscripts*, 194-198. See also Kate Challis, "Things of Inestimable Value: Deluxe Manuscript Production and the Marketing of Devotion in Late Southern Netherlandish Illumination" (PhD diss., University of Melbourne, 2003), 224-227 for more details.

volumes could be purchased at the local *pandt*. The *pandt* was an open structure, similar to a cloister, made to host an open-air market for luxury goods during a city fair and offer a privileged setting for local craftsmen to sell their products and compete against foreign merchants entering the city only during the fairs. The earliest known example was built in Antwerp in 1455, but Bruges soon followed suit. A visitor to a *pandt* could expect to find all sorts of goods for sale in the stalls, at varying degrees of quality and price points, from jewelry to paintings, all the way to fabrics and, of course, manuscripts.⁵⁴ Considering the contents of Newberry Library MS 53, and the other elements presented in Chapter 1, I would not exclude the possibility that the book itself might have been intended as a ready-made manuscript, to be sold at a *pandt* or in a similar setting. It certainly was not a fully customized product commissioned by a patron in the traditional way. Kate Challis' PhD dissertation on manuscript production and marketing divides late medieval Flemish manuscripts into four categories, depending on how and for whom they were produced: ready-made manuscripts, for example, present a highly formulaic text content and no signs of ownership (coat of arms, patron portraits, obits, personalized prayers), while manuscripts commissioned by a patron, or in general with a specific user in mind, present the opposite characteristics.⁵⁵ Newberry Library MS 53 might also be placed in a third category, that of manuscripts with standardized contents and imagery, but that offered the option to be customized to a certain degree during production, as the presence of the

⁵⁴ Jean C. Wilson, "Marketing Paintings in Late Medieval Flanders and Brabant", in *Artistes, Artisans Et Production Artistique Au Moyen Âge: : Colloque International; Université De Rennes Ii - Haute-Bretagne, 2 - 6 Mai 1983*. (Paris: Picard, 1990), 623. While Wilson's article focuses mainly on the sale of paintings, she does mention that manuscripts were offered for sale in the various *pandt* much in the same way.

⁵⁵ Challis, "Things of Inestimable Value", 227. The table present on the page cited here is an excellent summary of the differences between manuscripts created for different markets and customers.

miniature and prayers for St. Sebastian and some of the calendar entries would seem to suggest. I will elaborate further on this hypothesis at the end of chapter 3.

CHAPTER 3

3.1 Newberry Library MS 53 in the production of the Vrelant atelier

Newberry Library MS 53 does not constitute an *unicum* among the manuscripts attributed to the Vrelant atelier. In fact, there are several other Books of Hours attributed to the same circle that appear to be related to it in some way, whether due to the use of the same demi-grisaille palette, to evidence that the same person might have painted the miniatures, or to the use of the same pattern sheets to compose figures and scenes. One example as yet not discussed by scholarship in relation to Newberry Library MS 53 is Free Library of Philadelphia MS Widener 5, a French Book of Hours in the Use of Paris made around 1425, but which contains seven miniatures inserted a few decades later, likely around 1470, which are attributed to Willem Vrelant or one of his collaborators.⁵⁶ Two miniatures in particular, on fol. 13v. and fol. 24v. (depicting Saint Anne and the Holy Trinity, respectively), present the same demi-grisaille palette as those of Newberry Library MS 53 on both the miniatures themselves and their decorated borders (which also present a great similarity to those in Newberry Library MS 53), lending further support to the idea that the demi-grisaille miniatures might have been popular during that period. Furthermore, some of the miniatures in Yates Thompson MS 4, also known as the Hours of Jacques de Bregilles, which is one of the manuscripts Bousmanne includes in his list of works that can be attributed with a good degree of certainty to Vrelant and his associates, also present similar features.⁵⁷ Jacques de Bregilles was a member of the

⁵⁶ Free Library of Philadelphia. Rare Book Dept. "*Book of hours: Use of Paris*". <https://know.freelibrary.org/Record/1471764>

⁵⁷ Janet Backhouse, *The Illuminated Page: Ten Centuries of Manuscript Painting in the British Library* (London: British Library, 1997), no. 165 p. 188. A digitized version of the manuscript is available



Fig. 7. Yates Thompson MS 4, fol. 27r.
Image credit: The British Library.

court of Philip the Good, where he held the title of *garde-joyaux*. The manuscript contains a Crucifixion (fol. 27r.) and a Pentecost (fol. 35r.) that show a great resemblance to the miniatures in Newberry Library MS 53, in the style of the border, the color scheme and the features of the figures depicted. The Crucifixion in particular [fig. 7] is reminiscent of that on fol. 195v. of Newberry Library MS 53 [fig. 5], both in the rendition of Christ and the cross and in the composition of some groups of characters, especially the fainting Mary on the left part of the image and the

feminine figure supporting her. It is highly likely that a similar pattern was used for both. The typical Vrelant-style figures with rigid bodies, oval faces, heavy eyelids and rosebud mouths appear much more detailed on Yates Thompson MS 4, but that might be due to the larger size of the miniature as much as to the fact that the image might be the work of a different person.

While many collections around the world contain manuscripts attributed, with varying degrees of certainty, to the Vrelant circle (the most notable being the British Library, as mentioned above, and the Royal Library of Belgium), to find a good number of comparable volumes that could help shed more light on the provenance and the

online at British Library, "Detailed record for Yates Thompson 4." <https://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/record.asp?MSID=8134&CollID=58&NStart=4>. For Bousmanne's list, see Bousmanne, *Item a Guillaume Wyelant*, 42-43.



Fig. 8. Walters W 197, fol. 19r, detail.
Image credit: The Walters Art Museum

production of Newberry Library MS 53 the best place to look is probably the collection of the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore. My comparison here will largely focus on a small group of Books of Hours with similar features made during the same time frame (around 1470), with a particular emphasis on any elements that might indicate a relationship in the production of the miniatures.

The first manuscript in this group is Walters W 197, a rather large Book of Hours (21.5x14.6cm, which makes it much bigger than Newberry Library MS 53) for the Use of Rome,

which the catalog entry lists as attributed to the circle of Willem Vrelant and having likely been made for a female patron or user around 1460; the volume is also included in the above mentioned list by Bousmanne.⁵⁸ The miniatures on this manuscript are very large, of extremely high quality and in full color, presenting a much higher level of detail compared to those in Newberry Library MS 53, which is not surprising considering that the latter's pages are only about a quarter of the size of those in Walters W 197. However, I believe at least some of them present evidence that might point towards a relationship with the Newberry manuscript, particularly when examining details like the treatment of the drapery and the smaller figures in the images. As an example, fol. 19r [fig. 8] contains

⁵⁸ Lillian Randall, *Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts in the Walters Art Gallery. Vol. 3. Belgium, 1250-1530*. (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press in association with the Walters Art Gallery, 1989), 251-262. See previous footnote for Bousmanne. All the manuscripts from the Walters collection mentioned in this chapter are also available online in digitized form.

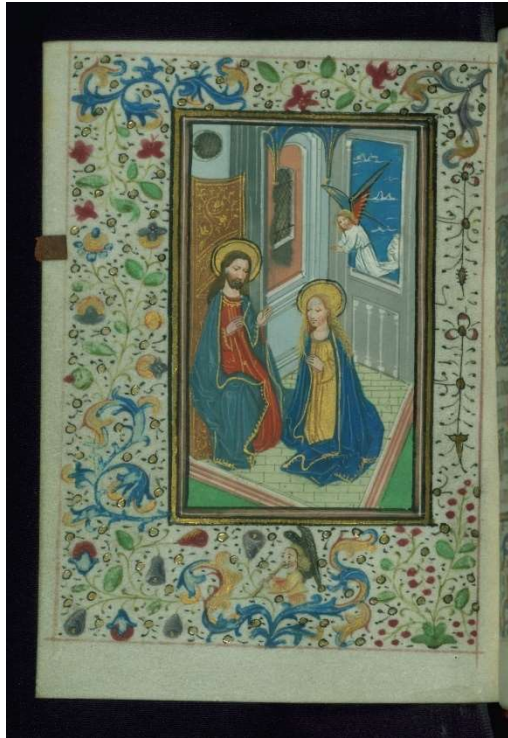


Fig. 9. Walters W 177, fol. 102v.
Image credit: The Walters Art
Museum.

an image of Saint Nicholas of Myra resurrecting the three murdered youths. The three figures are standing in a tub and appear disproportionately small compared to the saint at the center of the painting, but their faces bear a notable resemblance to the figures of angels presented in some of Newberry Library MS 53's miniatures, like the ones depicted on fol. 208v (the Coronation of Mary in Heaven).

Two more manuscripts, Walters W 177 and Walters W 196, also present many elements in common with Newberry Library MS 53. The

former, a Book of Hours also attributed to the circle of Willem Vrelant, made circa 1460-70 and even smaller than Newberry Library MS 53, also presents miniatures in full color, with rich borders containing both foliage and images of colorful birds, angels, musicians and curious human-beast hybrids [fig. 9].⁵⁹ However, as the manuscript is much closer to the size of Newberry Library MS 53 than the volume described previously, the resemblance between the figures appears actually much more marked, with the use of similar models for the figures and a closely related treatment of faces, eyelids, clothing and details of the environment. Walters W 196, once again attributed to Vrelant's circle and made for a female owner, perhaps Eleanor of Portugal, around 1470,⁶⁰ despite being

⁵⁹ Randall, *Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts*, 275-278.

⁶⁰ Randall, *Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts*, 318-326. The hypothesis on the manuscript's patronage derives from an inscription in the inner cover of the volume, not dated but clearly added at a later time, which reads "Este livro foi da rainha dona Lianor/nao se pode dar de fora so pena de escomunhao"



Fig. 10. Walters W 196, fol. 78v.
Image credit: The Walters Art
Museum.

much larger than the previous manuscript (19.6x12.7cm) also presents many of these characteristics among the smaller figures (along with the same expensive materials as Walters W 197, with an even greater use of ultramarine), but it alternates full color and demi-grisaille miniatures, with the latter, once again, bearing a striking resemblance to those in Newberry Library MS 53. Both Walters W 177 and W 196 also contain some textual evidence which, I believe, can offer the key to unlocking some of the secrets of the Newberry manuscript. I will discuss this particular evidence, and a possible conclusion, in the

last part of this chapter.

Walters W 180 presents the closest resemblance with Newberry Library MS 53 of any Vrelant-related manuscripts I have studied so far. Its miniatures are entirely in demi-grisaille and, along with the design of the borders and many other elements, appear to have a very close relationship with those included in the Newberry manuscript. The similarity is close enough to require a more detailed comparison.

It is interesting to note that the production of many of these manuscripts, particularly those that present a demi-grisaille palette, seems to be concentrated, at least according to the respective catalog entries, within a rather short time frame, specifically

(This book belonged to the queen Lady Eleanor/it cannot be given out under pain of excommunication). As mentioned in a previous note, the inscription, if authentic, does not refer to the Queen of Portugal, Eleanor of Aragon, who died in 1433, before Vrelant was active in Bruges, nor to her homonymous daughter, who was Holy Roman Empress and died in 1467, but to Eleanor of Viseu, born in 1458.

around 1470, which would indicate that the combination of grey clothing and details in bright colors was rather popular among the clients of the Vrelant atelier at that point in time. Without further documentation, it is hard to explain precisely the reason for this popularity. I would, however, exclude the hypothesis that this kind of Book of Hours might have been sold at a lower price: the amount of work required to make these manuscripts, to include the details and quality of the miniatures, the lavishness of the decoration, and particularly the relatively abundant use of gold leaf, appears to be comparable to those of their full color counterparts, characterizing them as luxury objects. Furthermore, when considering the case of Walters W 196, alternating color and demi-grisaille miniatures, with a generous use of gold leaf and ultramarine, in such a large (and therefore expensive) manuscript, and one that was evidently made for a very prestigious patron (whether it was Queen Eleanor or not), constitutes further evidence of the fact that the use of demi-grisaille miniatures was not a way to cut corners during production, or to make a manuscript cheaper for a less wealthy patron, but a precise stylistic choice. The use of a demi-grisaille palette would seem therefore to stem from a matter of taste and fashion rather than an economic or production issue.

I have mentioned earlier how the demi-grisaille miniatures in Walters W 180 appear to be very similar to those of Newberry Library MS 53, I would like to propose that these two manuscripts were in fact painted by the very same hand.⁶¹ However, the similarities are not limited to these two features: the two manuscripts bear a striking resemblance to one another, in many other ways. A more in-depth comparison and analysis of these common features might, I believe, help bring to light some elements that

⁶¹ For more information on Walters W 180 see Randall, *Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts*, 298-301.

could help trace the history of Newberry Library MS 53, or at the very least point towards a possible path to follow for further, more detailed research.

Newberry Library MS 53 and Walters W 180, again also attributed to the Vrelant circle, are very similar in size, with the former being only marginally larger than the latter (10.1x7.4cm and 9.2x6.2cm, respectively). The difference is further reduced when considering the size of the written surface, which is 5.8x3.4cm on Newberry Library MS 53 and 5.1x3.6cm on Walters W 180. The contents of both manuscripts follow the Use of Rome. Each page of Newberry Library MS 53 contains fifteen lines of text, while pages on Walters W 180 only have thirteen, resulting in a greater number of leaves (268, while Newberry Library MS 53 only has 234) and slightly larger letters that are easier to read. Furthermore, abbreviations are sometimes marked differently in the two manuscripts and seem to be more frequent in Newberry Library MS 53. Most importantly, despite the greater number of folios, the text contained in Walters W 180 is noticeably shorter: its content ends after the Gospel sequences, which are followed only by blank pages and some much later annotations. By contrast, the Gospel sequences on Newberry Library MS 53 are followed by only two blank pages, and then by a miniature of St. Sebastian by the same painter, in the same style and with the same kind of border as the previous ones, which introduces the text of the collect and oration for the saint's feast day. After that, as mentioned in the first chapter, Newberry Library MS 53 includes two typical Marian prayers (*Obsecro Te* and *O Intemerata*), four Eucharistic hymns (*O Sacrum Convivium*, *Ave Verum Corpus*, *Ave Caro Christi Cara*, *Anima Christi*), perhaps indicating a specific devotional interest on the patron's part, or at least a devotional trend within the community, and a prayer attributed to St. Augustine, along with several later additions.

Newberry Library MS 53 presents therefore a greater amount of customization than Walters W 180, which despite the greater number of pages only contains the “bare essentials”: Calendar, Hours of the Virgin, Offices of the Dead, of the Cross and of the Holy Spirit, Penitential Psalms, Litanies, Mass of the Virgin, Gospel sequences. Interestingly enough, no Psalter is present in Walters W 180: in its place, the *Obsecro Te* and *O Intemerata* are positioned between the Hours of the Holy Spirit and the Penitential Psalms, along with a prayer dedicated to St. Jerome. These prayers are then followed by an oddly large number of ruled pages (twelve) with no text save for a later inscription, perhaps marking the place where the Psalter was once inserted or was supposed to be transcribed. Furthermore, unlike Newberry Library MS 53 (in which the only possible indication of provenance remains the unidentified coat of arms on fol. 13v. [fig. 1]), Walters W 180 contains a dedication on fol. 195v. (one of the twelve blank pages described above), which was written in a rather imperfect Italian and in a different but not much later hand, indicating that the book was at some point gifted to one Madonna Angora Gentili (perhaps a misspelling of the name Angela or Angiola) by her female cousins.⁶²

When comparing the two manuscripts, it would be very hard to ignore the striking similarities between the miniatures they contain. The fact that the miniatures appear to have been painted by the same artist, along with the use of an almost identical palette, set these two manuscripts apart from other related works.

⁶² See also Walters Art Museum, “Walters MS W180, Grisaille Book of Hours.” <http://www.thedigitalwalters.org/Data/WaltersManuscripts/html/W180/description.html>. The dedication is wrongly described to have been made by one Italian lady to her cousin, while it translates in fact as “To Madonna Angora Gentili, is (i.e. belongs) this book - remember your beloved (female) cousins who always recommend themselves to you” (likely meaning that they recommend her to pray for them when reciting the Hours using the book they gave her).

The miniature program of the two Books of Hours can be compared according to the following scheme:

Newberry 53	Walters 180
13v. Annunciation	17v. Annunciation
34v. Visitation	45v. Visitation
48v. Nativity	48v. Nativity
54v. Annunciation to the Shepherds	69v. Annunciation to the Shepherds
60v. Adoration of the Magi	76v. Adoration of the Magi
66v. Presentation	66v. Presentation
72v. Massacre of the Innocents	Missing
81v. Flight to Egypt	101v. Flight to Egypt
87v. Coronation of the Virgin	108v. Coronation of the Virgin
97v. Resurrection of Lazarus	121v. Funeral
148v. St. Jerome	Missing
170v. David in penitence	200v. David in penitence
195v. Crucifixion	230v. Crucifixion
203v. Pentecost	240v. Pentecost
208v. Mary and Child enthroned	240v. Mary and Child enthroned
222v. St. Sebastian	

As the table above demonstrates, when comparing the sixteen miniatures in Newberry Library MS 53 with the corresponding thirteen still extant in Walters W 180 (with two more once present but now missing: the one for the Office of the Virgin's Vespers, likely a Massacre of the Innocents, and one preceding the suffrage to St. Jerome, which might have been similar to the one preceding the Psalter on Newberry Library MS 53), the subject is the same in twelve occasions, the sole difference being the opening miniature of the Office of the Dead. Within the comparable images, many of the figures, the composition of several scenes and even some elements of the environment appear to have been copied, with few modifications, from the same pattern sheets. The similarity



Fig. 11. Left: Walters W 180, fol. 17v. Image credit: The Walters Art Museum.
 Right: Newberry Library MS 53, fol. 13v. Courtesy The Newberry Library, Chicago. Call # Case MS 53

between the two Annunciations, respectively on fol. 13v. (Newberry Library MS 53) and fol. 17 v. (Walters W 180) [fig. 11], is particularly striking, especially in the face and pose of the Archangel, in the tiny figure of God the Father in the upper left corner, and in details like the golden vase containing a lily on the floor and the pattern of the small altar in front of which Mary is kneeling. Both miniatures present a resemblance with the Annunciation included in the Llangattock Hours [fig. 6], which as mentioned above was modeled after a painting by Van Eyck. Even more evident is the resemblance between the kneeling David preceding the Penitential Psalms on fol. 170v. of Newberry Library MS 53 and the one on fol. 200v. of Walters W 180 [fig. 12]. The two figures appear almost identical in facial features, hair, expression and pose, and were almost certainly traced from the same pattern sheet and differentiated by modifying details of their clothing.



Fig. 12. Left: Walters W 180, fol. 200v. Image credit: The Walters Art Museum. Right: Newberry Library MS 53, fol.170v. Courtesy The Newberry Library, Chicago. Call# Case MS 53

Newberry Library MS 53 and Walters W 180 appear even more closely related when looking at the initials within the text, which, while in general appear fairly typical for the production of the Vrelant workshop of the time (similar initials can be found in the other Walters manuscripts mentioned above), present perfectly identical characteristics in both manuscripts [fig. 13]. The larger ones, painted at the beginning of each hour and in general facing one of the miniatures, present a motif of intertwined clover leaves, colored in dark blue ink with white details, and a very generous use of gold leaf. The medium-sized ones marking the beginning of prayers within the Offices alternate red and blue as the dominant color, but still use gold leaf for the letters themselves and white for the details, while the smaller ones at the beginning of each verse alternate gold leaf with black ink flourishes and blue ink with red flourishes. These two latter types of initials

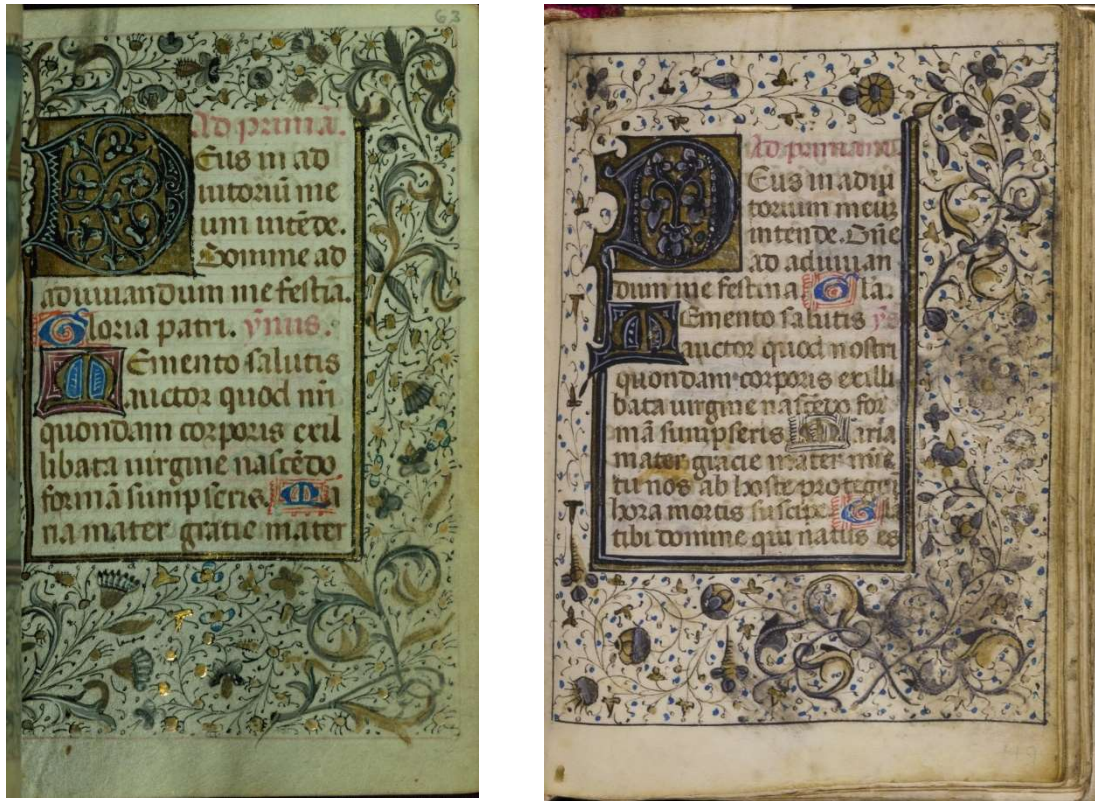


Fig. 13. Left: Walters W 180, fol. 63r. Image credit: The Walters Art Museum. Right: Newberry Library MS 53, fol. 49r. Courtesy The Newberry Library, Chicago. Call # Case MS 53

extend the flourishes to the margins when they are closer to the border (as opposed to being placed in the middle of a block of text). While the initials in other manuscripts indicated as having similar characteristics to Walters W 180, namely Walters W 179 and Walters W 183, present as mentioned before some similarities with those in Walters W 180 (and therefore with Newberry Library MS 53), particularly in the alternation of red and blue, these appear to have been painted by a different, possibly less skilled and less precise artist than those in the former two manuscripts.⁶³

Despite the many similarities between the two Books of Hours compared here, their calendars in particular present some interesting differences, which are outlined as

⁶³ Compare with the list contained in the description of Walters Art Museum, “Walters MS W180, Grisaille Book of Hours”. The difference is just as evident when examining the miniatures contained in Walters 179 and 183, which are therefore to be considered only tangentially related to Walters 180.

follows (only saints present exclusively in one or the other manuscript, or whose feast day is marked in a different color, are listed):

Newberry 53	Walters 180
January	
Identical	
February	
Blaise	Brigid
Apollonia	Amand (red)
	Scholastica
March	
Identical	
April	
Identical	
May	
Apparition of St. Michael	Potentiana (Pudentiana)
Bernardine	Desiderius
Germanus	Petronilla
June	
Basil (black)	Basil (red)
John and Paul, martyrs	Commemoration of St. Paul
July	
Visitation (red)	Dispersion of the Apostles
Martin, bishop	
Amalberga	
August	
Peregrine	
September	
Protus and Hyacinth	Marcellus, martyr
October	
Mark, pope	
November	
Livinus	Martin, pope
Machutus, bishop	
December	
Ambrose (black)	Ambrose (red)

As mentioned in chapter 1, the calendar on Newberry Library MS 53 is listed by Paul Saenger as possibly from Tournai, but with some unusual elements; the calendar on Walters W 180 is described by Randall as including “contents from Bruges”.⁶⁴ Both list some Flemish saints, but not always the same ones, with Amalberga of Temse being present only in Newberry Library MS 53 and Amand of Maastricht only in Walters W180. It is also interesting to note that many of the saints listed in Walters W180 but missing in Newberry Library MS 53 are Roman martyrs (Petronilla, Pudentiana, Marcellus), and that the saints present in Newberry Library MS 53 but not in Walters W 180 are largely male (while the latter manuscript mentions a slightly greater number of female saints). Saints John and Paul, martyrs are present in the calendar for Newberry Library MS 53, while in Walters W 180 they are listed within the Litany of the Saints (which in turn are essentially identical to those on Newberry Library MS 53). Furthermore, the presence of some feast days marked in different colors, notably that of St. Ambrose, could indicate that the two manuscripts were made for patrons who lived in different cities (or intended for resale in specific regions), but could also simply represent evidence of different preferences in personal devotion.

The differences listed above might perhaps exclude an extremely close connection between the two manuscripts, e.g. the possibility that, as was my first thought, they might have been commissioned together and intended as a set, perhaps as a luxury gift for a newlywed couple. However, it is my belief that there might be a sufficient amount of notable elements to hypothesize a connection which could tie both Newberry Library MS

⁶⁴ See Saenger and Newberry Library, *A Catalogue of the Pre-1500 Western Manuscripts*, 90 and Walters Art Museum, “Walters MS W180, Grisaille Book of Hours.”

53 and Walters W 180 to another, very similar manuscript which is also in the Walters collection, Walters W 177.

The miniatures in Walters W 177, despite many similarities, do not appear to have been painted by the same artist responsible for Newberry Library MS 53 (and therefore, by the same person who worked on Walters W 180), and the images in the former are painted in full color rather than demi-grisaille. However, the initials in Walters W 177 appear very closely related to those in the two manuscripts described above, and the manuscript is listed as having been made during the same time period.⁶⁵ All three manuscripts use the same kind of script, identified by both the catalog for the Walters Art Museum and that for the Newberry Library as Italianate Gotica Rotunda. The script is mentioned within the description of Walters W 177, along with the indication of a later Italian provenance, as evidence that the manuscript was probably commissioned for a member of the Italian merchant community in Bruges. This puts it in direct connection with Walters W 180, which as mentioned also contains a dedication in Italian with the name of one of the manuscript's early owners (along with evidence that the previous owners were also Italian).

The question, at this point, is how Newberry Library MS 53 might be connected to an Italian patron. The answer, I believe, is to be found within the manuscript's calendar, specifically on the page for the month of May. As reported in the table of comparison between the calendar in this manuscript and that in Walters W 180, for the date of the 8th of May the calendar lists an unusual feast day, that of the *Apparitio Michaelis*. This is a largely Southern European feast, celebrating the first of a series of apparitions of Saint

⁶⁵ Walters Art Museum "Walters MS W177, Book of Hours, Use of Rome", <http://www.thedigitalwalters.org/Data/WaltersManuscripts/html/W177/description.html>

Michael the Archangel on Mount Gargano, in Apulia, Italy. According to the traditional accounts, this supernatural event occurred around the fifth or sixth century on the site of what is now a shrine dedicated to the saint, as well as a pilgrimage destination that remains popular to this day. The feast does not appear to be commonly listed in Flemish manuscripts: of the Books of Hours previously mentioned, the only one that includes it in its calendar is Walters W 196, which as mentioned might have been made for Eleanor of Portugal. It is reasonable to hypothesize that this particular feast day was included in Newberry Library MS 53 to accommodate the specific preference of a Southern European, or possibly Southern Italian, patron or intended owner. This would also explain the absence of this feast from the calendar in Walters W 180: the abundance of Roman martyrs might indicate a patron whose family traces its origins further north, to Rome or perhaps, considering the fact that Saint Ambrose's feast day is marked in red, Milan or its surroundings. More evidence points to a different hypothesis, specifically the presence of two elements: the inclusion in the Litany of the Saints of the recently canonized Nicholas of Tolentino (who became a saint in 1446), and the inclusion of a prayer attributed to St. Augustine. These elements both point to a possible connection with the Augustinian order, as St. Nicholas of Tolentino was an Augustinian friar. The presence of an annotation in red for St. Ambrose, seen in this context, might lend strength to this hypothesis, considering that St. Augustin was Ambrose's disciple. However, the fact that the feast day for St. Augustine himself is marked in black would seem to exclude, or at the very least significantly weaken, this possibility, and Augustinian prayers were in fact not an uncommon addition for Bruges manuscripts: Walters W 197, for example, also presents a similarly attributed but different prayer on fol. 215r.

While it is impossible at this stage to identify the owner of Newberry Library MS 53, and many questions remain open in regards to whether some of the prayers included reflect a personal preference or a general trend (which would also depend on the degree to which the manuscript was customized, with the miniatures and prayers in honor of St. Sebastian being the most likely reflection of personal taste), I believe the manuscript still allows to trace a profile, however imperfect, of its first owner. He would most likely have been a man, and a man of means, but not wealthy or prestigious enough to be able to afford a larger, more customized volume. He most likely belonged to either the lower ranks of nobility or, more likely, to the rising bourgeois class. Considering that manuscripts with very similar characteristics (Walters W 180 and Walters W 177) seemed to circulate among the powerful Italian merchant community in Bruges, it is not unlikely that the first owner of Newberry Library MS 53 might have been of Italian origin. Whoever it was, he was a reader and a man of faith, but also a consumer of the new, serially made manuscripts that were becoming common in the second half of the fifteenth century, and an active participant in the changing social, religious and economic landscape of Europe in the late 1400s.

Were these hypotheses, which are indeed not easy to confirm with certainty, to prove inaccurate, I remain convinced that a comparison with the manuscripts mentioned in this chapter and other similar volumes might indeed represent a useful way to interrogate Newberry Library MS 53, both in order to uncover more details about the manuscript itself and to shed more light on the production and business practices of Willem Vrelant and the artists that gravitated around his workshop.

CONCLUSION

As mentioned in the introduction, Newberry Library MS 53 is not an easy manuscript to study. The present thesis is to be read as a first step in what is hopefully the right direction rather than as a complete, all-encompassing analysis of the manuscript, and necessarily leaves the reader (as well as the writer) with more questions than answers. A great number of issues, including who exactly purchased the manuscript, which of Vrelant's many collaborators (provided the manuscript was indeed a product of his atelier) might have painted the miniatures, when and by whom the volume was modified with the addition of a coat of arms and new prayers, who was responsible for transcribing the text, and too many others, remain for now unanswered. It is my hope to return to these questions in the future and to attempt to provide satisfying answers, armed with more time, better tools and greater knowledge and experience. Should I not be granted this chance, I hope to have at least traced a path for others to follow, however imperfect.

However, I believe my research succeeds in at least two ways: it identifies Newberry Library MS 53 as a typical product of its historical, cultural, and above all socio-economic context, and it demonstrates the existence of a "twin" for Newberry Library MS 53 in Walters W 180. The stunning resemblance between these two manuscripts is, in my opinion, an important discovery in itself, definitely worthy of more attention and further research. Furthermore, while the problem of the attribution of this and other manuscripts to the Vrelant circle is indeed not something I have been able to resolve, I believe I have at least established a connection between Newberry Library MS 53 and other works, by

comparing their style and, even more importantly, the patterns, materials and methods used in their production. I have found evidence of a similarity, if not a direct correlation, between these elements and what is known about Vrelant and his associates. Similarly, I believe I have gathered sufficient information to trace a reasonably accurate profile of the kind of customer who would have purchased Newberry Library MS 53, based on the evidence present in the manuscript itself and on the information scholarship has thus far offered regarding the changes in the manuscript market, and society in general, during the Fifteenth century.

In summary, this thesis attempts to establish or reinforce several hypotheses about Newberry Library MS 53, and answers with reasonable certainty at least three fundamental questions: how it was produced, how it was marketed, and what kind of person purchased it. While much remains to be discovered, my hope is to have shed at least some light on a manuscript that has so far been undeservedly overlooked.

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APPENDIX

Newberry Library VAULT Case MS 53⁶⁶

Book of Hours, Use of Rome

Flanders, c. 1475

1. fol. 1r-13v: Calendar of Tournai(?) in black with major feasts in violet. Feast days include: Bernardini confessoris (20 May), Basillii episcopi (14 June), Eligii episcopi (25 June, in violet), Amelberge virginis (313 July), Clare virginis (12 August), Bertini abbatis (5 September), Lamberti episcopi (17 September), Bavonis et Remigii (1 October, in violet), Francisci confessoris (4 October), Donatiani episcopi (14 October, in violet), Livini episcopi et martiris (12 November), Eligii episcopi (1 December, in violet); fol. 13r: blank and unruled; fol. 13v: miniature for the following text.
2. fol. 14r-87v: "[in violet] Incipit officium beatae Mariae virginis secundum usum romanae curiae." Nine psalms at matins with rubrics for the days of the week; prayers for protection, to All Saints, for peace, at the end of each hour from lauds through compline. fol. 87r: blank and unruled; fol. 87v: miniature for the following text.
3. fol. 88v-97v: "[in violet] Incipit officium gloriosae virginis Mariae quod dicitur per totum adventum." fol. 97: blank and unruled; fol. 97v: miniature for the following text.
4. fol. 98v-148v: "[in violet] Incipit vigiliae mortuorum." Use of Rome; fol. 148r: blank and unruled; fol. 148v: miniature for the following text.
5. fol. 149r-170v: "[in violet] Incipit psalterium sancti Ieromini." Followed by the usual prayer "Omnipotens sempiterne deus clementiam tuam suppliciter deprecor ut me famulum tuum... fol. 169v: blank; fol. 170r: blank and unruled; fol. 170v: miniature for the following text.
6. fol. 171r-183v: Seven Penitential Psalms.
7. fol. 183v-194r: "[in violet] Letaniae." Nicholas of Tolentino (canonized 1446) and Alexius among the holy monks and hermits; Elizabeth among the virgins. Followed by the ten standard collects as in the Roman breviary.
8. fol. 194r (addition): "[rubr.] Pro uno famulo oratio. [text] Inclina domine aurem tuam ad preces nostras ... ut animam famuli tui ... et sanctorum tuorum iubeas esse consortes."

⁶⁶ The information contained in this appendix was obtained from Saenger, *A Catalog of Pre-1500 Manuscript Books*, 90-91. I have applied some minor modifications to the Latin transcriptions in the original catalog entry.

9. fol. 194r (addition): "[rubr.] Pro patre et matre. [text] Deus qui nos patrem et matrem honorare praecepisti ... gaudio fac videre."
10. fol. 194v (addition)-195v: "[rubr.] Pro anniversario. [text] Deus indulgentiarum [sic], domine ... beatudinis luminis claritatem." fol. 195r: blank; fol. 194v: miniature for the following text.
11. fol. 196r-203v: "[in violet] Incipit officium de sancta cruce." Short Hours of the Cross. fol. 203r: blank and unruled; fol. 203v: miniature for the following text.
12. fol. 240r-208v: "[in violet] Incipit officium de sancto spiritu." Short Hours of the Holy Spirit. fol. 208r: blank and unruled; fol. 208v; miniature for the following text.
13. fol. 209r-215v: "[in violet] Incipit missa beatae Mariae virginis. [text] Salve sancta parens ..."
14. fol. 215v-222r: Gospel sequences; fol. 221v: blank; fol. 222r: blank and unruled; fol. 222v: miniature for the following text.
15. fol. 223r-223v: "[in violet] De sancto Sebastiano antiphona. [text] O beate Sebastiane, magna est fides tua ... tuis precibus liberari ... [in violet] Oratio. [text] Omnipotens sempiternus deus, qui meritis beati Sebastiani gloriosi martiris tui quendam generalem pestem ... in corpore liberemur. Per Christum dominum nostrum. Amen."
16. fol. 224r-224v: "[in violet] De sancto sacramento. [text] O sacrum convivium in quo Christus sumitur ... nobis pignus datur ... [in violet] Oratio. [text] Deus qui pro nobis sub sacramento mirabili passionis tuae ... ut redemptionis fructum in nobis iugiter sentiamus. Per Christum dominum nostrum. Amen."
17. fol. 224v-225r: "[in violet] Alia oratio de eodem. [text] Ave Verum Corpus natum de Maria virgine .. O clemens, o pie, o Ihesu fili Marie, miserere nobis. Ave caro Christi cara, immolata crucis ara, redemptoris hostia ... fac redemptos luce clara, tecum frui gloria. Amen."
18. fol. 225r-225v: "[in violet] Oratio. [text] Anima Christi, sanctifica me ... ut cum angelis laudem te, in secula seculorum. Amen."
19. fol. 226r-229v: "[in violet] Devota oratio de domina nostra. [text] Obsecro te, domina sancta Maria, mater dei ... Et michi famulo tuo ... Mater Dei et misericordiae. Amen."
20. fol. 230r-230v: "[in violet] Alia oratio de sancta Maria. [text] O Intemerata sancta dei genitrix, obsecro te ut in hora exitus mei ex hac dulcissimam consolationem et visionem tuam [sic] atque ... sine fine letari. Per Christum dominum nostrum. Amen."
21. fol. 230v-233r: "[in violet] Beatus Augustinus sequentem orationem scripsit et revelata fuit ei a spiritu sancto, ut quicumque eam qualibet die dixerit bono corde vel supra se portaverit, inimicus ei nocere non poterit, in illa die in igne non peribit nec in aqua nec in bello nec veneno mortifero morietur. Et si quod iustum a domino petierit

impetrabit, et non morietur morte subitanea et anima eius in infernum non appropinquabit; Oratio.

22. fol. 233r-234v (addition): "Credo in Deum Patrem omnipotentem creatorem coeli et terrae ..." fol. 234r-234v: blank.

Sixteen full-page grisaille illuminations with pastel blue, pink, and gold (on inserted sheets with no writing on the recto) accompanied by full blue-grey acanthus frame; full matching margins also on the opposite page separated from text by gold and blue baguettes: fol. 13v (the Annunciation, Virgin reads from the banner held by angel), fol. 34v (the Visitation), fol. 48v (the Nativity), fol. 54v (the Annunciation to the Shepherds in the field), fol. 60v (the Adoration of the Magi), fol. 66v (the Presentation in the Temple), fol. 72v (the Massacre of the Innocents), fol. 81v (the Flight into Egypt, Roman columns in the background), fol. 87v (the Coronation of the Virgin), fol. 97v (Jesus raising Lazarus), fol. 148v (Jerome as cardinal writing with left hand on a roll in his study; made from reversed tracing), fol. 170v (King David in prayer, a harp at his side), fol. 194v (the Crucifixion), fol. 203v (Descent of the Holy Spirit), fol. 208v (the crowned Virgin with Child accompanied by two angels, one playing the harp), fol. 222v (Sebastian). Gold, black, and white illuminated initials 4 lines high on folios facing the illuminations; gold, black, and white dentelle initials on grounds of blue with white patterning throughout; alternating blue initials with red flourishes and gold initials with black flourishes also throughout.

Parchment, 234 leaves; 1-2⁶ 3⁹⁽⁺¹⁾ 4⁸⁽⁻⁵⁾ 5^{10(±4)} 6⁸ 7^{10(+2, 8)} 8⁹⁽⁺⁴⁾ 9^{10(+1, 7)} 10⁸⁽⁺⁵⁾ 11⁹⁽⁺⁴⁾ 12⁴ 13⁹⁽⁺¹⁾ 14-15⁸ 16⁸⁽⁻⁸⁾ 17⁸ 18¹⁰ 19¹¹⁽⁺²⁾ 20⁸ 21⁴ 22⁹⁽⁺¹⁾ 23-24⁸ 25^{10(+1, 9)} 26⁷⁽⁺⁴⁾ 28⁸ 28¹⁹⁽⁺³⁾ 29⁶; catchwords surrounded by four flourished points. Ruled in violet ink. Written in Italian style gothic textualis rotunda media in 15 long lines. Headings in violet in script of text. f. 194-194v, headings in additions in red.

Bound in modern red velvet decorated with ten enamel roundels of the Crucifixion and the Seven Sorrows of the Virgin set in brass frames; one brass clasp wanting.

Written in Flanders, approximately 1475; shows similarity to the style of Willem Vrelant. The manuscript postdates the canonization of Bernardino (1450) mentioned in the calendar. Prayers in texts 5, 18, 19 and 21 in masculine form. f. 13v, unidentified arms painted over original arms and initials; "V. F. V." in lower margin. Acquired by the Newberry from Edward E. Ayer, 1920



Fig. 1 – fol. 13v-14r, The Annunciation and incipit of Matins of the Hours of the Virgin.
 Courtesy The Newberry Library, Chicago. Call # Case MS 53.



Fig. 2 – fol. 48v-49r, The Nativity and incipit of Prime of the Hours of the Virgin
 Courtesy The Newberry Library, Chicago. Call # Case MS 53.



Fig. 3 – fol. 60v-61r, The Adoration of the Magi and incipit of Sext of the Hours of the Virgin.
 Courtesy The Newberry Library, Chicago. Call # Case MS 53.



Fig. 4 – fol. 170v-171r, David in penitence and incipit of the Seven Penitential Psalms.

Courtesy The Newberry Library, Chicago. Call # Case MS 53.



Fig. 5 – fol. 195v-196r, the Crucifixion and incipit of the Hours of the Cross.

Courtesy The Newberry Library, Chicago. Call # Case MS 53.



Fig. 6 – MS Ludwig IX 7 (Llangattock Hours), fol. 53v, the Annunciation.
Digital image courtesy of the Getty's Open Content program.