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# She Shall Be Saved in Childbearing: Submission, Contemplation of Conception, and Annunciation Imagery in the Books of Hours of Two Late Medieval Noblewomen

## **Abstract**

The role of the Book of Hours in female lay devotional life during the late Middle Ages has been investigated and analyzed by many scholars and art historians over the course of the past century. The general consensus has been that semi-literate medieval women valued these books greatly as instructional manuals on how to attain salvation, using the images contained within as spiritual aids meant to encourage individual contemplation and pious recitation. Prayers for mediation, protection, and guidance featured prominently within these books and many historians of both genders have come to the conclusion that Books of Hours were a source of comfort and spiritual nourishment for women living in a male-dominated and male-oriented world. [*excerpt*]

## **Keywords**

childbearing, Book of Hours, Middle Ages, noblewomen, spiritual nourishment

*“She Shall Be Saved in Childbearing: Submission, Contemplation of Conception, and Annunciation Imagery in the Books of Hours of Two Late Medieval Noblewomen”*

Dallas Grubbs

The role of the Book of Hours in female lay devotional life during the late Middle Ages has been investigated and analyzed by many scholars and art historians over the course of the past century. The general consensus has been that semi-literate medieval women valued these books greatly as instructional manuals on how to attain salvation, using the images contained within as spiritual aids meant to encourage individual contemplation and pious recitation. Prayers for mediation, protection, and guidance featured prominently within these books and many historians of both genders have come to the conclusion that Books of Hours were a source of comfort and spiritual nourishment for women living in a male-dominated and male-oriented world.

In this piece, I suggest that such books were also constructed with the intention of instilling certain virtues within the young and newly-married woman—namely, submission and a humble desire for motherhood. In addition to encouraging the owner to pray for divine aid and intercession, the Book of Hours was at times crafted in order to encourage the pious female reader to open the manual and be moved to make a humble and earnest supplication for pregnancy. The husbands of medieval women required heirs to continue their legacy and secure the family’s lineage; this was particularly true of titled noblemen. An analysis of three images of the Annunciation from two French Books of Hours—one from the first quarter of fourteenth century and another from the middle of the fifteenth century—commissioned for noblewomen by their husbands on the occasion of their weddings suggests that the gender of the book owner

influenced the visual programme to accomplish these ends. Using certain visuals included in the Book of Hours of Jeanne d'Evreux (54. 1.2) in the Cloisters Museum, New York City, and the Buves Book of Hours in the Walters Museum, Baltimore (W. 267), as evidence, I argue that a key function of the medieval Book of Hours was to provide young women with a model of humility, submission, and motherhood to direct their thoughts towards the continuation of the family line and the importance of producing a son.

Books of Hours were considered both a symbol of piety and status in late medieval Europe, making them essential items for the aristocracy and the emerging bourgeoisie. In the case of the landed gentry, it was customary for the gentleman to present a specially-commissioned book to his new wife at the time of marriage. Susan G. Bell correctly points out that, "Because of their inferior status in medieval Christian thought and their exclusion from scholarship and clerical life, women had an even greater need for the mental and spiritual nourishment offered by books than men did."<sup>62</sup> In addition to their subaltern status in society, women undoubtedly found themselves isolated and alone within the foreign household of their husbands. One can easily sympathize with the upper-class young medieval bride. It was not uncommon to be engaged by the age of twelve, married and living with her husband by the age of fourteen, and producing children by the age of fifteen.<sup>63</sup>

Once separated from her family and transplanted within her husband's estate, the young woman was typically required to live a quiet and domestic life in which the Christian virtues of devotion, humility, and obedience were stressed. Sandra Penketh, in her piece on women and

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1. Susan G. Bell, "Medieval Women Book Owners: Arbiters of Lay Piety and Ambassadors of Culture," *Signs* 7 (1982): 743.

2. For a brief and readable summary of medieval marriage laws and customs among the nobility, see: Noël James Menuge, "Female Wards and Marriage in Romance and Law: A Question of Consent," in *Young Medieval Women*, ed. Katherine J. Lewis, Noël James Menuge, and Kim M. Phillips (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 153-71.

Books of Hours, asserts that, “It would be too obtuse to claim that books of hours were brought by men to give their future wives as ‘code books of behavior’; they were, after all, religious devotional texts.”<sup>64</sup> One cannot dispute that Books of Hours commissioned by husbands for wives in late medieval Europe were, first and foremost, Christian works intended to promote religious values. But I contest Penketh’s assertion that these books were created with purely pious intentions and I do not at all believe that it would be “too obtuse” to consider the possibility that they were at times commissioned and illuminated with a more secular and domestic purpose in mind. An analysis of the visual programmes of both the Book of Hours of Jeanne d’Evreux and the Buves Book of Hours, considered within their historical context, suggests that these books were used to induce much more than pious recitations of prescribed prayers and quiet meditations upon the *vitae* of Christ and His saints.

Firstly, one must consider the importance of the Annunciation as a devotional motif and the significance of placing the book owner within the action of the scene. In the three images selected for scrutiny in this piece, the women are painted into the physical space and engage either directly or indirectly with the text and imagery of the Annunciation. In each image, the woman is depicted in the *prie-dieu*, or the act of praying. The scenes all fall within the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary, or the Hours of the Virgin, a series of prayers that were considered the centerpiece of these books. Roger S. Wieck notes that Books of Hours had evolved from earlier Marian devotional works, stating, “As the cult of the Virgin developed during the thirteenth century, this set of prayers, extracted from the breviary, grew in importance as it was embellished with other prayers and texts.”<sup>65</sup> The embellishment Wieck refers to would

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3. Sandra Penketh, “Women and Books of Hours,” in *Women and the Book: Assessing the Visual Evidence*, ed. Jane Taylor and Lesley Smith (London, UK: The British Library and University of Toronto Press, 1997), 275.

4. Roger S. Wieck, *Time Sanctified: The Book of Hours in Medieval Art and Life* (New York: George Braziller, 1988), 60.

reach its height during the late Middle Ages. Its evolution is traced in order to show that images from the life of the Virgin and the purpose and design of these books were inextricably linked.

The book owner was, of course, not painted into any random excerpt from Mary's life portrayed in the Hours of the Virgin. Their inclusion in the Annunciation scene was carefully considered and certainly meant to reinforce traditional gender roles of women. This pivotal point in the history of Christianity typically accompanies the beginning of Matins, the heart of the devotional corpus, and is recorded in Luke 1:28: "And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail Mary, full of Grace, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women."<sup>66</sup> This Biblical excerpt forms the basis of the Hail Mary, an important series of prayers which commences with the words spoken by the Angel Gabriel: *Ave Maria, Gratia Plena*. Each of the prescribed Hours begins with the Hail Mary, a prayer that reinforces the central Christian doctrine of Mary as the Theotokos, the mother of the incarnate of God. The position of Mary and the Angel Gabriel in scenes of the Annunciation included in Books of Hours and many other devotional pieces from the Middle Ages follow a definite pattern. In fourteenth-century western European works of art, Mary is shown standing while the angel kneels before her with an emblazoned scroll (*Fig. A*).

In the later Middle Ages, this typical visual programme of the Annunciation was altered to include a seated, literate Mary. She sits before a desk or lectern, reading from a Bible or Breviary, and is interrupted in her pious meditations by a kneeling Gabriel who emerges, scroll unraveled, from the opposite side of the image (*Fig. C*). Scholars theorize that the Biblical passage she is reading at the time of the angelic arrival is Isaiah chapter 11, the Old Testament prophecy of a virginal birth.<sup>67</sup> David M. Robb notes quite correctly that the angel and the Virgin

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5. Unless otherwise specified all biblical citations are from the King James Version. Luke 1.28.

6. Eamon Duffy, *Marking the Hours* (London, UK: Yale University Press, 2006), 36.

are typically separated by some impediment, usually a column, a lectern, or a large vase.<sup>68</sup> This suggests that the Angel Gabriel inhabits a sacred heavenly space that is separated from the earthly and ephemeral world of Mary. In some images of the Angelic Salutation in which the book owner is painted into the scene, the patroness is shown occupying the *espace sacré* typically reserved for the Angel Gabriel in Annunciation iconography. The significance of this will be explored later. Firstly, one must consider how the Christian church of Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages interpreted the event described in Luke 1:28.

The Early Church Fathers all affirmed that the Annunciation was the divine recognition of Mary as the paragon of womanhood. Athanasius of Alexandria, one of the earliest of the great Church Fathers, wrote in his early fourth-century *Oratio de incarnatione Verbi*,

He, the Mighty One, the Artificer of all, Himself prepared this body in the virgin as a temple for Himself, and took it for His very own, as the instrument through which He was known and in which He dwelt. Thus, taking a body like our own, because all our bodies were liable to the corruption of death, He surrendered His body to death instead of all, and offered it to the Father.<sup>69</sup>

In this passage, Athanasius suggests that the words spoken by Gabriel at the Annunciation heralded the beginning of Mary's pregnancy and, consequently, man's salvation through the vehicle of the Incarnation. The Annunciation was thus of profound importance to all Christians.

Penketh and Marina Warner, in their respective works on medieval women, also posit the theory that through both Patristic commentaries upon and artistic renditions of the Angelic

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7. David M. Robb, "The Iconography of the Annunciation in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries," *The Art Bulletin* 18, no. 4 (December 1936): 488-9.

8. Athanasius of Alexandria, *Oratio de Incarnatione Verbi* [On the Incarnation of the Word] (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library), 2:8, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/athanasius/incarnation.iii.html> (accessed May 1, 2011).

Salutation, the Church belief in the subaltern status of women was reinforced.<sup>70</sup> During the period of the Middle Ages, the sociopolitical and religious landscapes were inextricably entwined. Both spheres of influence were dominated by misogynistic attitudes and came equipped with an arsenal of biblical passages which reinforced their views of women. Verses such as, “Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord”<sup>71</sup> and “Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence... she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety”<sup>72</sup> are two of the most powerful examples. Images of the Annunciation depict Mary as the perfect woman—a humble, attentive, and submissive future mother. Warner writes that, “In Christian theology Mary’s consent to the Incarnation, her *Fiat*, exemplifies the most sublime fusion of man’s free will in the divine plan... but this lofty view of Mary’s act of acceptance came to epitomize a restricted moral notion quite unworthy of the term: that of feminine submissiveness.”<sup>73</sup> One can therefore speculate that, of all the scenes from which to choose, the young and newly-married female book owner’s likeness was incorporated into the Annunciation in an attempt to reinforce the “Christian” ideal of the perfect woman.

At this time, a thorough analysis of the visual programmes and the historical contexts of the three images under consideration is appropriate. The first illuminations to be examined are those included within the Book of Hours of Jeanne d’Evreux, but before launching into a study of the imagery, it is essential that we say a few words about the young bride—her time, place, and position in fourteenth-century France. Jeanne d’Evreux was no ordinary French noblewoman; between the years 1325 and 1328, she was the queen of France

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9. Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary* (London, UK: Littlehampton Book Services, 1976), 177.

10. Ephesians 5.22.

11. 1 Timothy 2.11-15.

12. Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, 177.

and the wife of King Charles IV. Upon her death in 1371, she bequeathed to her godson, King Charles V, a “very small little book of prayers that Charles [IV], God keep his soul, had made for Madame, which Pucelle illuminated.”<sup>74</sup> This is almost certainly the Book of Hours from the atelier of Jean Pucelle that resides in the Cloisters Museum today and from which our images are taken. While most medieval women are resigned to historical obscurity, Jeanne’s elevated status merited a fair amount of contemporary documentation from which her life may be pieced together.

She was the oldest daughter of Louis de France, Count of Evreux, and Marguerite d’Artois, the daughter of a Norman lord, making Jeanne the first cousin of Charles IV and her family part of the Valois ruling elite. When Charles ascended to the throne of France in 1322, he inherited a dynasty in very dire straits. His two brothers, Louis X and Philip V, had held the crown for relatively short periods of time. When Louis X, the Headstrong (*le Hutin*), died in 1316 he left behind a pregnant wife and his son did not live a week. His brother, Philip V, the Tall (*le Long*), reigned for six years and during his uneventful tenure failed to produce any male issue. The third brother, Charles IV, had married Blanche de Bourgogne, but she had provided no heirs and was accused—probably justly—of having an adulterous affair in 1314.<sup>75</sup> The marriage was dissolved and Blanche retreated to a nunnery until the end of her days. Charles therefore assumed power under these fickle circumstances and undoubtedly understood the gravity of producing an heir.

Sir Jean Froissart (d. 1405), the famous French chronicler of the Hundred Years’ War, writing roughly three decades after the death of Charles IV, records, “When the kingdom of

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13. “Un bien petit livret d’oroisons que le roy Charles, dont Diex ait l’âme, avoit fait faire pour Madame, que Pucelle enlumina,” Joan A. Holladay, “The Education of Jeanne d’Evreux: Personal Piety and Dynastic Salvation in Her Book of Hours at the Cloisters,” *Art History* 17 (1994), 585.

14. The circumstances surrounding the queen’s supposed affair and the subsequent adultery hearings make for a fascinating additional case study of the role of noblewomen in medieval France. Unfortunately, for the purpose of this piece, a more thorough investigation is omitted. For a more in-depth discussion, see: Robert Fawtier, *The Capetian Kings of France* (London, UK: Macmillan & Co., 1960), 53-54.

France devolved upon him, he was crowned by the twelve peers of France and all the barons, who were not willing that such a kingdom should be deprived of male heirs; they therefore strongly recommended his marrying again, with which he complied.”<sup>76</sup> Pressured by the barons and driven by an intense personal desire to establish a dynasty, the twenty-eight year-old king wed his second wife, [Marie de Luxembourg](#), in 1322. She and a potential heir both perished in childbirth two years later. The senescent king then frantically sought a third wife and settled for his nubile young cousin Jeanne d’Evreux. After papal dispensation for the marriage was secured, the fourteen year-old noblewoman wed her royal relative and became the queen of France in 1325.<sup>77</sup> Madeline A. Caviness has pointed out quite perceptively that, “In the fraught atmosphere of a failing dynasty, betrayed by female lasciviousness and punished by a lack of male heirs, more than lessons of conventional piety had to be directed at the girl-bride who was supposed to become the chaste mother of indubitably male children.”<sup>78</sup> The future of the Capetian line now rested upon the impressionable shoulders of a fourteen year-old girl. Charles IV, betrayed by one wife and denied an heir through the death of another, understood the urgency of inculcating his new bride with a desire for virtue, fidelity, and pregnancy. The years between 1325 and 1328 (the year Charles died) would be defined by a relentless quest for a son to continue the Capetian dynasty. Given the circumstances, one can assume that Charles would use any means at his disposal—including the visual arts—to remind his wife of her duty to continue their shared royal bloodline.

Jeanne d’Evreux’s pedigree, however, was not only a stemma of kings but also the line of

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15. Sir Jean Froissart, *Chronicles of England, France, Spain, and the Adjoining Countries*, trans. Thomas Johnes, Esq. vol. 1 (London, UK: Bradbury and Evans, 1849), 29.

16. For biographical information, see: Holladay, “The Education of Jeanne d’Evreux”, 603-4, Elizabeth M. Hallam, *Capetian France, 987-1328* (NY: Longman, 1980), 283-285, and John Harthan, *Books of Hours and their Owners* (Singapore: Thames & Hudson, 1988), 41-44.

17. Madeline H. Caviness, “Patron or Matron? A Capetian Bride and a Vade Mecum for Her Marriage Bed,” *Speculum* 68 (1993), 338.

a saint. King Louis IX, the most famous of the Valois kings, ruled France between the years 1226 and 1270 and was canonised by Pope Boniface VIII in 1297. Louis was an exceptionally pious monarch hailed as the perfect Christian king. An avid relic collector, church-builder, and Crusader, he kept within his monumental chapel of [Sainte-Chapelle](#) in Paris a fragment of Christ's Crown of Thorns and a segment of the True Cross. He died whilst on Crusade at the age of fifty-six and almost immediately after the translation of his relics to Saint-Denis the *cultus* of Saint Louis emerged. As the great-grandfather of both Charles IV and his wife Jeanne, Louis was a dynastic saint whose descendants were duty-bound to continue his blessed line. Joan Holladay notes that, "Charles's interest in his forebear was motivated by both devotion and politics: Louis provided a role model for both ideal kingship and moral behaviour, raised the status of his descendants, and legitimized the accession of the Valois dynasty, in only its third generation on the throne."<sup>79</sup> The Hours of Saint Louis in Jeanne's Book of Hours are a unique feature of the volume and depict a series of scenes from the life of the saint which emphasize his acts of mercy and charity—feeding the leprous, washing the feet of the poor, and collecting the decomposing remains of fallen Crusaders with his bare hands. If Holladay is correct in stating that such images of Louis were intended to offer the queen a mirror of "moral behaviour," then perhaps they were included to inspire the young queen to live a devout existence, gaining God's favour in the process. This divine favour would hopefully manifest itself in the way that it had manifested itself in Mary, with the conception of a son. The comparison of Jeanne with the Virgin Mary is quite appropriate, for both are given the charge of carrying on a very holy bloodline.

In the first image contained in the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Book of Hours of Jeanne d'Evreux (*Fig. A*), the likeness of the owner is painted in a historiated initial

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18. Joan A. Holladay, "Fourteenth-century French Queens as Collectors and Readers of Books: Jeanne d'Evreux and Her Contemporaries," *Journal of Medieval History* 32 (2006), 96.

beneath the Annunciation scene. Complete with crown, she appears in the *prie-dieu*, cueing herself from the very book in which the image is painted. Accompanying the image is the text of versicles and beneath these lines, marginal female figures engage in merriment; Jonathan Harthan claims that the game they play is “hot cockles,” a form of tag.<sup>80</sup> The Latin script is the first line of a series of verses and responses that accompany the opening of Matins—*Domine labia mea aperies*, or “Lord, open my lips.” This plea marks the beginning of the prayer, the rest of which is included in the book’s subsequent folios. It is transcribed here, with “V” introducing the versicles and “R” marking the responses: (V) Lord, open my lips. (R) And my mouth shall sing thy praise. (V) God, come to my aid. (R) Lord, hasten to help me.<sup>81</sup> Roger S. Wieck adds that, “This plea, with its almost breathless cadence, sets the tone and states two themes that run throughout the Office, praise of God and a request for aid.”<sup>82</sup> Jeanne d’Evreux’s place within the Annunciation scene is thus that of a suppliant. She is shown, Book of Hours in hand, praying earnestly for divine intercession.

In her role as the pious and humble petitioner, Jeanne does not engage directly with the scene of the Angelic Salutation; on the contrary, she is detached from the action. Joan A. Holladay notes that, “Although she is directly associated with the text of the prayers she is supposed to utter, she is clearly isolated from the scene that occurs like a vision above her head. She is supposed to picture the scene, but she is not part of it.”<sup>83</sup> Holladay’s assessment of this image and Jeanne’s placement within it is sensible yet calls for a deeper re-examination. The meeting between Mary and the Angel Gabriel indeed appears to materialize like a holy

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19. Harthan, *Books of Hours and their Owners*, 41.

20. Translation provided by the author. See: New York City, The Cloisters Museum, *The Book of Hours of Jeanne d’Evreux*, fols. 16r-18v.

21. Roger S. Wieck, *Painted Prayers: The Book of Hours in Medieval and Renaissance Art* (New York: George Braziller, 1997), 52.

22. Holladay, “The Education of Jeanne d’Evreux”, 599.

apparition above the patroness' head. The entire scene, exempting the protrusion of the angel's right wing, is framed within a floating Gothic structure which is supported by Jeanne's head on the left extremity and an angel on the right. Gabriel's cloak drapes down from the lower left-hand corner of the stage, making contact with the historiated initial in which she prays and linking the worldly monarch to her celestial contemplation. The position of the figures thus gives the impression that the pious queen is contemplating the Annunciation and the divinely-instigated conception of the Virgin Mary. One must allow for the possibility that, contrary to Holladay's aforementioned assessment, Jeanne is in fact incorporated—albeit indirectly—into the action of the scene. The queen's crimson background in her initial complements the red halo around Mary's head and the breviary in the Virgin's hand, suggesting a connection between Jeanne, her Book of Hours, and the Mother of God. Although not a key player in the action of the Annunciation, she envisions the scene and accordingly links herself with Mary in the mystical devotional tradition. As such, she is, contrary to Holladay's assertion, a part of the scene.

Jeanne d'Evreux's likeness is included in the book in only two distinct folios, making the illuminations contained on these pages worthy of careful consideration. In the frontispiece image of Matins, Jeanne is inserted directly into the scene and is an active participant (*Fig. B*). She kneels before the tomb of her great-grandfather in Saint-Denis while, on the opposite folio, Saint Louis is chastised by his confessor. The artist Jean Pucelle recreates the tomb and sarcophagus of the saint, offering the historian a general idea of the shrine's appearance in 1324. Flanking the sarcophagus are two mendicants whose purpose is unclear. Some sources speculate that the two figures are monks charged with guarding the saint's remains. Others claim that this is an allusion to a fourteenth-century thaumaturgic account in which two blind beggars were miraculously

restored to sight after praying before the great king's relics.<sup>84</sup> The spirit of Saint Louis appears atop his tomb, crowned in a saintly halo and gesturing to his royal descendant. He reaches out to her, perhaps offering his guidance and counsel. At first glance, the scene on the opposite folio of the saint being flogged by his confessor seems out of place. Louis is depicted in the same *prie-dieu* position that Jeanne's likeness assumes in the Annunciation scene, performing his prescribed penance within the confines of his chamber whilst a steward to the left of the image guards the entrance. The two illustrations, however, communicate the same themes—humility and submission. Jeanne humbly offers herself before the relics of her holy ancestor while Louis submits to the caustic cords of his confessor. The juxtaposition of the images thus served the dual purpose of emphasizing Jeanne's wifely duty to submit to her husband while reinforcing her ancestral connection with Saint Louis.

One aspect of this particular image that has gone overlooked by scholars is its correspondence with traditional medieval Annunciation imagery. When the scene of the Angelic Salutation at the beginning of the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary (*Fig. A*) is compared side-by-side with the representation of Jeanne at the tomb of Saint Louis (*Fig. B*), one sees that the basic arrangement of the scene and the characters within it bear close resemblance. In both instances, the action is framed within hovering ecclesiastical structures that dominate the central register. The drapery conventions of the figures are identical, as are the postures of the two key players. In a scene that takes place within the Cathédrale royale de Saint-Denis, the traditional burial site of French monarchs, Jeanne assumes the position of Gabriel in the sacred space on the left whilst Louis assumes the position of Mary in the Annunciation scheme; he is even depicted with a matching disc-shaped halo. The young queen is placed in the spot traditionally occupied

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23. Both of these views are outlined in: Jeffrey M. Hoffeld, "An Image of St. Louis and the Structuring of Devotion," [\*The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin\*](#) 29 (1971), 264.

by the angel but this does not suggest that the space she inhabits is holy. In this case, the spheres are reversed and the hallowed area is enlarged to accommodate the saint, his tomb, and the two figures who have already received his blessing. From her position on the left, Jeanne prays to her sainted ancestor and patiently awaits her turn to gain a portion of his divine grace. Just as the Virgin Mary was blessed with a miraculous pregnancy at the exact moment of the Annunciation, so the queen prays for a similar miracle in a devotional image patterned after the pivotal event. Assuming that she used the book in the prescribed manner and uttered the Hours daily, she would certainly have made this connection between the two illuminations. Thus, the arrangement of the Annunciation scenes and the position of the characters contained therein was carefully considered and potentially designed with the purpose of generating contemplations of conception and maternity. If one looks closely at Jeanne's likeness in this image (*Fig. B*), one can discern a slight bulge in the abdomen. Perhaps this is a visual expression of the commissioner of the book's hope that the Capetian line's patron saint will respond to his and his wife's entreaties for an heir.<sup>85</sup>

A second Book of Hours, also housed in an American museum, is the Buves Hours at the Walters in Baltimore. Historians have been unable to determine the original female owner of this volume but it is possible that it was produced for a woman of the Picard Buves family. The unknown patroness appears in the Annunciation scene on folio 13v (verso, *Fig. C*). The book dates to circa 1450 and is believed to be of Franco-Flemish origin; Ann van Dijk points to the

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24. Although Caviness makes limited mention of this folio in her piece, she does offer a very good analysis of the marginal figures littered throughout the book. She is particularly perceptive in pointing out the abundance of rabbits in the margins and theorizes that these creatures, "connoting fertility, would remind Jeanne of her duty to produce an heir, and might enhance her desire for offspring...no doubt because of their frequency of copulation and conception." Caviness, "Patron or Matron?", 344.

25. Ann van Dijk, "The Angelic Salutation in Early Byzantine and Medieval Annunciation Imagery," *The Art Bulletin* 81, no. 3 (September 1999): 422-3.

Hainaut province in southern Belgium.<sup>86</sup> The action of the scene is set in a small domestic chapel or household and framed in intricate flora. In this illustration more than any of the others we have considered, the likeness of the unknown book owner emerges a key figure in the Annunciation. Immediately beneath her an unusually detailed and complete rendition of the Hail Mary is etched—*Ave Maria gratia plena Dominus tecum: Benedicta tu in mulieribus et benedictus fructus ventris tui Iesus*, translated, “Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou amongst women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.” The position of the patroness, coupled with these verses, has led scholars to conclude that the text and image were arranged to encourage the book owner to imagine herself in the role of Gabriel at the time of the Annunciation.<sup>87</sup> But, as has already been noted in our assessment of the Hours of Jeanne d’Evreux (*Fig. B*), the book owner’s assumption of the space typically occupied by the archangel does not suggest a usurpation of his role. Although there is much evidence for the presumption that the female book owner supplants the position of the messenger, one must not forget that her primary role is that of suppliant and not of angelic intercessor. In her devotions, she would be expected to visualize herself present at the Annunciation, taking advantage of this closeness to the Virgin to ask the Blessed Mother for guidance and, perhaps, a favour.

In the image, the kneeling patroness and the Virgin are painted along the same plane and kneel at ornamented desks, with Mary slightly taller than the book owner. Both women have their respective books opened to the appropriate page. On the verso, Gabriel places his right hand on the petitioner’s shoulder, encouraging her in her devotions and nudging her closer towards the Mother of God, her exemplar of womanhood. He clutches his customary scroll. With his left arm thrust forward, he offers his words to the patroness, a gesture which supports the owner-as-angel

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26. See: van Dijk, “Angelic Salutation”, 423, and Duffy, *Marking the Hours*, 37-8.

thesis. On the recto, Mary is depicted as the embodiment of piety, submission, and humility. The Virgin appears with her devotional book displayed, encouraging the young noblewomen to open her respective Book of Hours and join her in her devotions. While the book owner's hands are placed together in prayer and supplication, Mary's arms are folded in a gesture of acquiescence and humility. In an aperture in the upper left-hand corner of the scene on folio 13r—the right-hand page—God dispatches the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove to impregnate the elected Mother of Christ. Subliminally, the submission of the wife to the seed of her husband is thus emphasized. The patroness, depicted alongside the Angel Gabriel and along the same visual plane as the Virgin, is supposed to imagine herself present at the Annunciation. She would picture herself in the role of Gabriel but also—perhaps more so—in the role of Mary. Thus, the visual programme of folios 13v-14r in the Buves Book of Hours is intended to encourage the unknown French noblewoman to submit her prayer to the Blessed Mother of God whilst contemplating conception.

Sadly, next to nothing is known about the female who owned the Buves Book of Hours. The inclusion of her likeness within the tome suggests that her husband, the probable commissioner, was a rich nobleman who could afford a personalized devotional book for his wife. Unlike the Book of Hours of the French queen Jeanne d'Evreux, this remarkable little volume leaves behind a limited trail for the historian to follow. It is fitting at this point in our examination to take a retrospective look at these two Books of Hours, gleaning from their imagery their relevance to history. The Hours of Jeanne d'Evreux was commissioned in 1324 and the Franco-Flemish manuscript known as the Buves Book of Hours is dated to circa 1450. More than one hundred years separate the two volumes yet certain folios and illustrations within them communicate the same message. On the surface, there is one pivotal aspect of medieval

devotional imagery that divides them—the extent to which the likeness of the book owner engages with the Annunciation scene. Both of these Books of Hours are exceptional in that the patroness is painted into the action of the Salutation and communicates directly with the person who possesses the power to grant her request. The *vita* of St. Gertrude of Ostend, written sometime after the saint’s death in 1358, records an instance in which Gertrude’s mystical contemplations of the Virgin Mary’s immaculate conception and Christ’s infancy caused her “breasts...to swell and fill with milk.”<sup>88</sup> It was believed that there existed a divine power behind these images, a force that could reward pious meditations of motherhood with very real and physical manifestations. Whether they are contemplating the conception of the Virgin Mary or beseeching their sainted ancestor for a child to continue the blessed bloodline, scenes of the Annunciation are crucial to understanding lay female devotional piety in the Books of Hours commissioned for and used by noblewomen in the late Middle Ages.

The visual programmes of the books provide an abundance of information concerning medieval relationships between many parties—husbands and wives, ancestors and the living, and the church and the laywoman. In these three instances, the images appear to support the church-sanctioned belief in the inferiority of women and suggest that a woman’s goal in this life should be the conception—and successful birthing—of a child. *The Book of Vices and Virtues*, a late thirteenth-century handbook written in France and used by the clergy as a tool of religious instruction, contained a section entitled “The Blessings of Marriage” which was read before assembled parishioners. The homily proclaims that, “The state of marriage is so holy and so honest that the deed that was previously deadly sin outside of marriage is without sin in marriage, and not only without sin, but in many cases greatly approved by God.” As such, “if the

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27. David Herlihy, *Women, Family, and Society in Medieval Europe: Historical Essays, 1978-1991* (Oxford, UK: Berghahn Books, 1995), 150.

one refuses the other and will not allow him to have his right when it is asked or prayed... she that refuses the other that bids, is sinning.”<sup>89</sup> The anonymous cleric who penned these lines is claiming the spouse’s right over his partner’s body, emphasizing that the wife will please God by submitting to her husband’s sexual desires. This view, brilliantly laid out in this sermon, is reflected in these pages from two Books of Hours. Whether it be the position of the Virgin’s arms or the resignation of a saintly ancestor to the whip of his confessor, submission and humility emerge as central themes in all of the images considered. The placement of the book owner within these scenes and her general role as suppliant encourages the noble wife to “submit to [her] husband,” her lord on Earth, whilst praying ceaselessly for an heir to continue the family line. This is particularly the case with Jeanne d’Evreux, the young queen who at age fourteen found herself entrusted with the charge of saving a dynasty that had been plagued by treacherous wives and an overall lack of male issue. The bloodline she was expected to preserve had been blessed by God and the young noblewomen must have been distressed and confused to find herself condemned to barrenness.

The church’s dictum that women “shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety” was at the forefront of the minds of medieval noblewomen and their titled husbands. Images contained within these volumes thus pointed not only to personal redemption but also to dynastic and familial salvation. Historians do not know whether or not the mysterious owner of the Buves Book of Hours succeeded in her wifely duties. Jeanne d’Evreux managed to produce a daughter, Blanche, Duchess of Orléans, who was ineligible for the French throne under Salic Law. Christine de Pizan, the famous female writer and biographer of Charles IV’s successor, Charles V, records that Jeanne withdrew from court

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28. “The Book of Vices and Virtues: Blessings of Marriage,” in *Women's Lives in Medieval Europe: A Sourcebook*, ed. Emilie Amt (New York: Routledge, 1993), 89-90.

after her husband's death and lived the rest of her days "according to such goodness and wisdom that [she] may always be [an example] of good and wise living to those women who come later."<sup>90</sup> We can thus conclude that the Book of Hours was a unique devotional manual, prompting noblewomen to lead good, pious, and obedient lives in the hopes of attaining many different modes of salvation.

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29. Christine de Pizan, *The Treasure of the City of Ladies*, trans. Sarah Lawson (London, UK: Penguin Classics, 1985), 84.