Introduction
The Coëtivy Hours is a masterpiece of fifteenth-century illumination. It was commissioned by Prigent de Coëtivy, noted bibliophile and Admiral of France, to mark the occasion of his marriage to Marie de Rais, heir to her father’s vast estates. The manuscript was produced in Paris and written and painted with ink, colours and gold on parchment between 1443 and 1445. It is illuminated with a staggering 148 three-quarter page miniatures painted in demi-grisaille. The term ‘demi’ indicates that only part of the painting is executed in monochrome. In the Coëtivy Hours the figures, for the most part, are rendered in a limited palette of white with occasional hints of colour and highlights in gold. In addition, all 364 folios were illuminated with ivy, floral and acanthus-leaf borders inhabited by marginalia, ensuring the luxury status of this small volume.

Books of Hours are a collection of prayers intended for private use that are often decorated. Although described as the medieval ‘best seller’ due to the sheer number of surviving examples, the quality of execution can vary drastically. The number of miniatures and the amount of additional decoration were determined by the desires and wealth of the patron, and the style and palette were a result of the abilities of the workshop and availability of materials.

The Coëtivy Hours is attributed to the Dunois Master, previously known as the ‘Chief Associate of the Bedford Master’. These artists are identified by monikers because, up to the late fifteenth century, most did not sign their work. These ‘names’ are derived from noteworthy illuminated manuscripts and often reflect the titles of their most influential patrons.

The book was acquired by Edith Beatty in 1919 and gifted to her husband on their wedding anniversary. Her inscription on the flyleaf reads: ‘To A. Chester Beatty, from this loving wife, Edith’.

This exhibition relates the fascinating story of this manuscript which was produced for one great bibliophile and, five centuries later, acquired by another; on both occasions as a celebration of marriage. The exhibition features 145 miniatures from this illuminated manuscript together with examples of other Books of Hours from the collection.

Key words: Coëtivy Hours, Dunois Master, Books of Hours, bibliophile, illumination, miniature, marginalia, manuscript, folio, grisaille, monochrome, acanthus-leaf, flyleaf, moniker, commission, patron, parchment, attributed, palette, three-dimensional
Paintings by contemporary Netherlandish panel painters were often copied into manuscripts. Elements of the riverscape in the background of this painting (the small island and boat) were influenced by Jan van Eyck’s *Rolin Madonna*. An almost exact copy of which is found in another manuscript attributed to the Dunois Master, the *Dunois Hours*.

Quite unlike the colour scheme of the rest of this book, this painting was produced in a dark, muted palette to reflect the night time of the Arrest. It was a device inspired by the Limbourg Brothers, who used it in the Duke of Berry’s *Très Riches Heures*. The painting here is one of the few in the Coëtivy Hours that could be considered a full-page illumination.
Popular stories

**St George and the dragon, CBL W 082 f.277**

The *Golden Legend* was a popular 13th-century encyclopaedia of saints’ lives. Among these is the story of how St George saved a princess and her town from a dragon. The composition of the painting echoes that of St Michael slaying a demon (right). The image in the lower margin of this page shows the princess walking the now powerless dragon back to the town.

### Historical imagery

**Prigent de Coëtivy and St Michael, CBL W 082 f.141**

The figure in the gold-embroidered, fur-lined robe is said to be Prigent de Coëtivy, the man for whom this book was made. He is pictured alongside the Archangel Michael. The cult of St Michael centred on the island monastery of Mont-Saint-Michel which remained under French control during the Hundred Years War. The warrior-angel became a symbol of the French fight to retake Normandy from the English; the island location appealing to Prigent as Admiral of France.
Return to Paris after a funeral, CBL W 082 f.108

Many of the architectural details in the paintings of this book were inspired by local Parisian buildings. The cityscape of the capital is illuminated in the background and the distinctive west façade of the Cathedral of Notre Dame is seen on the left. Its west end and twin towers had been completed by 1250.

Annunciation, CBL W 082 f.21

The architectural setting of this biblical scene is a contemporary French Gothic Church, and both interior and exterior are visible. Many of the decorative details can be seen in the east ends of both Notre Dame and the basilica of St Denis (Paris). The vaulted ceiling is painted with gold stars on a sea of azure (blue), like those in the royal chapel of Sainte-Chapelle (Paris).
St Luke, CBL W 082 f.14

St Luke is one of the four Evangelists, or authors of the Gospels. He is pictured here with his symbol, the ox. Rather than writing his text, which was a typical pose for Evangelists’ portraits, Luke is depicted painting a portrait of Virgin Mary. Luke is said to be the first iconographer, or the first person to paint the Virgin and Child.

St Margaret, CBL W 082 f.294

The red ruling lines, still visible on the text side of this folio, were part of the important preparatory work in manuscript production. They were used as guides for writing the text as well as to determine the shape of the miniatures. Sometimes they even played a role in the design of the paintings themselves. Both the bars of Margaret’s cell and the masonry of the walls were determined by these ruling lines.
Virgin of Tenderness, CBL W 082 f.204

The Virgin of Tenderness is one of the most intimate types of Virgin and Child compositions. It captures a loving relationship between mother and child, nuzzled cheek to cheek. The type found its way into Parisian manuscripts through Netherlandish panel painters who in turn copied Italian paintings. The Cambrai Madonna (c. 1340) is one such example, itself said to be inspired by the original Byzantine icon of the Virgin of Tenderness. The artist here creates a sense of three-dimensional (3D) by modelling the drapery and extending it over and in front of the crescent moon.

Madonna of the Enclosed Garden, CBL W 082 f.277

Like the Virgin of Tenderness, the Virgin and Child in an enclosed garden was a popular iconographic type. The realistic setting allowed artists to depict easily identifiable flowers, such as the white lilies and red roses lining the trellis. In addition, the Christ child picks violets with the aid of an angel. The three flowers were potent symbols of the Virgin Mary, who was described by St Bernard as ‘the violet of humility, the lily of chastity and the rose of charity.’
Teacher’s Notes

Chester Beatty Library

Working with objects: key questions

Who made it?

Where and when was it made?

What materials is it made from?

How was it used?

Who used/owned it?

How might it be interpreted by different people and at different times?

Glossary

Acanthus (ornament). Stylised ornamental motif used especially in architecture and decorative arts, based on the characteristic Mediterranean plant with jagged leaves. Most recognisably used in classical Corinthian and Composite capitals.

Attribution. Ascribing an unsigned work to a particular artist or school or artists.

Books of Hours. Books containing the approved prayers and readings from the Bible; often illuminated and intended for the lay community. They were especially popular during the Middle Ages.

Bibliophile. Someone who collects or is an expert in books.

Commission. A request for a particular art work to be made, which is paid for by the patron, or person who made the request. It often comes with very clear specifications regarding size, subject, materials and fees.

Flyleaves. Usually blank pages at the beginning and end (endleaves) of a book not pasted to the cover.

Folios. The text of a book is written on large bifolios (sheets), which folded in half and sewn in the middle create two folios (leaves) or four pages. Each pages is a single side of a folio. The two sides of a leaf are referred to as the recto (front) and verso (back).

Grisaille. Painting of images in monochrome, usually greytones.

Icons. Images that portray a sacred entity and that are themselves regarded as sacred. The term is used particularly for Christian images produced in the Eastern churches, since the sixth century, according to prescribed formulas of subjects and compositions, and intended for devotional use in the church or at home.

Iconography. Subject matter in works of art, including characters, animals, plants, themes, stories, events, places, objects and their symbolism and allegorical significance. It refers to typical or common depictions of particular subjects.

Illuminate. The act or process of creating illuminations.
Illuminated manuscripts. Handwritten books that have been decorated with ornamental designs and/or miniatures.

Illuminations. Painting and other adornments applied to books, scrolls or other document types for the purpose of illustrating or decorating a text; this includes miniatures, decorated initial letters and decorated borders. The media generally includes ink, colours and precious metals on parchment, paper or silk.

Manuscripts. Handwritten documents, particularly books, created before the invention of the printing press.

Marginalia. Notes or symbols written in the margins of a page. Sometimes refers specifically to marginal illustrations – scenes or figures appearing in the margins or decorated borders of a page of text.

Miniatures. Small pictures that are often set apart from the text and comprise a self-contained design.

Monochrome. Made with light and dark shades of a single colour or hue.

Moniker. Nickname or substitute for a proper name.

Parchment. Material made from calf, sheep or goat skin which has been limed, dehaired, scraped and dried under tension to produce a thin, strong material for writing, bookbinding or other uses.

Patron. A supporter of artists, especially those who commission and pay for individual works of art. The Christian Church and the Medici family in Renaissance Florence were important patrons of artists, architects and musicians. The Coëtivy Hours was named after its patron, Prigent de Coëtivy.

Palette (artist’s palette). The tray or receptacle used by an artist to hold his/her paints and pigments. The term is also used to describe the choice and range of colours used by an artist in a work of art.

Three-dimensional. A fully-rounded object with height, width and depth, or in a two-dimensional (2D) image creating the illusions of depth.

For further information on art-related terminology, see Artefacts: A Teacher and student resource for Leaving Certificate Art and Design Appreciation [link]

Curriculum Links

Junior Certificate: History and Art, Craft, Design. How we find out about the past; Our roots in ancient civilisation; Castle, church and city; Gothic; History of Art, Craft and Design; Use of tools in the creation of miniatures and books; painting; composition

Junior Certificate: Religious Education. Communities of faith; foundations of religion; major world religion; celebration of faith
**Leaving Certificate: Art History and Appreciation.** European art; Gothic; religious painting; landscape and portrait paintings; architecture; depiction of real space; composition; stories; narrative; patronage; European cities as centres of art production; Book of Hours; book of prayers; exhibition in an Irish museum

**Leaving Certificate: Religious Education.** Christianity origins and contemporary expressions; worship, prayer and ritual

**Further resources**

Chester Beatty Library website [www.cbl.ie](http://www.cbl.ie)


Chester Beatty Library Education Learning Resources [https://chesterbeattyeducation.wordpress.com/resources/](https://chesterbeattyeducation.wordpress.com/resources/)

*Artefacts: A Teacher and student resource for Leaving Certificate Art and Design Appreciation* [https://chesterbeattyeducation.files.wordpress.com/2015/10/artefactslr.pdf](https://chesterbeattyeducation.files.wordpress.com/2015/10/artefactslr.pdf)

*Chester Beatty’s A-Z: from Amulet to Zodiac* exhibition is available online and features images from the Coëtivy [https://www.google.com/culturalinstitute/beta/exhibit/cwKCBM1xFozyKw](https://www.google.com/culturalinstitute/beta/exhibit/cwKCBM1xFozyKw)

**Exhibition details** 9 March – 2 September 2018