

Touching Rosary Manuscripts: How Patterns of Wear Reveal Devotional Handling Practices in Two Late Medieval Manuscripts

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Late medieval Christians enthusiastically adopted the rosary as a devotional tool, perhaps because it required manipulating a physical object, which grounded prayer in the tangible.¹ The rosary devotion required repeating prayers, using the beads to count them off. The objects helped to anchor practice, to concretize habit. Counting prayers in this way brought the believer into long-term, ritualized contact with the para-liturgical object. Votaries sought beads made of unusual materials, that would feel different from the other objects in their tactile worlds, or beads carved into intriguing shapes. One of the earliest surviving strings of rosary beads – which dates from the thirteenth century, before the era when the laity widely adopted them in Western Europe – has beads that have each been carved out of bone in the form of a miniature skull, arranged neck-to-cranium on a chain (fig. 1). Their owner has handled them extensively, rubbing them to high polish so that they have forfeited their surface relief. Every stroke, every lost detail, proves that ardent devotion has happened, that worship has taken place. Humans leave traces on the objects they repeatedly rub against. That signs of wear are interpretable is the essential idea behind this article.²

Wear falls into two large categories: inadvertent and targeted. Opening the book, turning its pages, and exposing the book to such indelible destructive agents as wax, soot, and holy water cause inadvertent damage. Touching specific images with the hand, kissed (and therefore

¹ Anne Winston-Allen, *Stories of the Rose: The Making of the Rosary in the Middle Ages* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997).

² This article therefore uses the same conceptual structure as my four-volume book on the subject, titled *Touching Parchment: How Medieval Users Rubbed, Handled, and Kissed Their Manuscripts* (Open Book Publishers). Vol. 1: *Officials and Their Books* (2023); Vol. 2: *Social Encounters with the Book* (2024); with two more volumes on prayerbooks planned in 2025. One of the goals of that study is to construct a typology of forms of damage, under the two major headings, *inadvertent wear* and *targeted wear*. These terms also operate in the current article.

moistened) finger, lips, or other body part leads to targeted damage, which is distinct from the willful destruction of the image wrought by iconoclasm.

The gestures of using rosary beads intersected with those in a highly personalized prayerbook made in Bruges (Brussels, KB, Ms. IV 414).³ Its user, who touched it repeatedly, subjected it to both inadvertent and targeted wear. One of its historiated initials depicts a female figure fashionably dressed for 1470 or so, possibly the book's original owner. She appears kneeling at a prie-dieu with her guardian angel (fol. 27v; fig. 2).⁴ A large double strand of rosary beads, which dangles from her hands, informs the contents of the manuscript, whose images have all been painted in enlarged, rounded initials, like rosary beads on a string of words. Their bright red material probably signifies coral, a material highly prized for its apotropaic functions, which could be absorbed through touch.⁵ A medieval rosary, similar to the one in the image, survives: a double string of coral beads, interspersed with decade beads that have nipple-like protuberances, which announce their presence by touch alone (fig. 3). A late medieval owner added a miniature tower to the beads, possibly in order to contemplate St Barbara's fate. The beads, made at the scale of the finger and the hand, have been extensively fingered and held.

A rubric identifies the first devotion as a *rosen hoet*, or rosary (Brussels, KB, Ms. IV 414, fols. 1r–12v). The text is organized so that ten short verses, each calling for an Ave Maria, are then followed by a large historiated initial featuring a Passion scene, calling for a Pater Noster. The format of the text therefore reiterates the structure of a particular kind of rosary devotion, in which smaller beads representing Ave Marias (and signified in the fifteenth-century rosary by coral) are interspersed with the large “Pater noster” or “decade” beads bearing tactile protuberances. The particular damage in the manuscript reveals that the images have not merely been touched, but actively targeted and fingered repeatedly. Just as those performing a rosary devotion touched the beads as a mnemonic, so an owner of a handwritten rosary devotion touched all of the initials in turn.

³ Brussels, KB, Ms. IV 414 is described in J. Deschamps and H. Mulder, *Inventaris van de Middelnederlandse handschriften van de Koninklijke Bibliotheek van België (voorlopige uitgave)*, Afleveringen 1-15 (Brussels: Koninklijke Bibliotheek van België, 1998-2013), afl. 3, pp. 62-65; and Johan Oosterman, “Guillame van Schonehove, Scrivere and Scoelmeester,” in *Als Ich Can: Liber Amicorum in Memory of Professor Dr. Maurits Smeijers*, ed. Bert Cardon, et al. (Leuven: Peeters, 2002), pp. 1079-93. The scribe reveals his name, Guillame van Schonehove, on fol. 41r: “... leest voor den scrivere die mi hier ghescreven heift wiens name es guillame van sconeheve die hem te doen en heift een. Ave maria gratia.” The scribe mentions an event (fol. 1r) that took place in 1460, a *terminus post quem* for the volume.

⁴ For analogous dress, see Anne van Buren and Roger S. Wieck, *Illuminating Fashion: Dress in the Art of Medieval France and the Netherlands, 1325-1515* (New York: The Morgan Library & Museum, 2011), pp. 203, 204, 213, 217.

⁵ Shannon Kelley, “The King’s Coral Body: A Natural History of Coral and the Post-Tragic Ecology of ‘the Tempest’,” *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 14, no. 1 (2014), pp. 115-42.

Handling has also left various kinds of smudges around the pages, and examining the several categories of damage can help to reveal past behavior. Across the entire multifolio rosary text, dark finger staining occurs at the outer margin, as if these pages had been gripped over multiple episodes as a user pored over the rosary devotion, progressing through its sequence of initials and texts. These scenes begin in Gethsemane, where Christ kneels as an active, model supplicant (fol. 3r; fig. 4). Ink outlining the gilt initial has been feathered and smudged. The next initial represents Christ before Herod, but it is damaged nearly beyond legibility (fol. 5r; fig. 5). The user has aimed her finger for the center of the small initial. Perhaps the raised gilding of the letter corralled her finger and focused her touching. She has also smeared the ink outlining the gold, which has migrated from the umbilicus of the letter.

The devotion continues with short verses and large “beads” dedicated to the Flagellation (7r), the Carrying of the Cross (9r), the Crucifixion (11r), and the Entombment (12v). In the image of the Flagellation the reader has aimed for the naked body of Christ, but the three-line initial was too small to allow for precision, so the entire thing is smeared (fig. 6). At the Carrying of the Cross, the user has not only touched the image and the corner of the historiated initial, but she has also touched two of the smaller initials near the bottom of the folio, whose paint and outlining ink now blurs into the margin (fig. 7). Such damage is consistent with a user who treated the small initials as if they were coral beads to be fingered. Moreover, touching the figurative imagery did not preclude also looking at it: at the images of the Crucifixion and the Entombment, the reader has concentrated her efforts on the face and torso of Christ as far as that was possible in the diminutive images (fig. 8 and fig. 9). These actions have even continued to the next prayer, dedicated to the Face of Christ, where the repeated fondling has erased the face and deformed the gold with even more vehemence than the narrative images had been touched. It is as if the enlarged Face of Christ initial functioned as a swollen decade bead, which the finger could find by feel alone. The degree of the smears speaks to intensive interaction during repeated encounters.

The patterns of wear suggest that the owner used the action of touching the initials as a tangible aid to devotion, touching the images as “beads” as well as prompts to imagine particular episodes of sacred history. Perhaps she wanted to be physically present at all of the events pictured by making bodily contact with them. Perhaps she considered the book to be the body of Christ, and was therefore making contact with the body of Christ at every Christological image.⁶ Whether the illuminator anticipated this physical function of the initials and purposely

⁶ Marlene Villalobos Hennessy. “The Social Life of a Manuscript Metaphor: Christ’s Blood as Ink,” in *The Social Life of Illumination: Manuscripts, Images, and Communities in the Late Middle Ages*, edited by Joyce

made receptacles for the user's fingers is unknowable; however, what seems likely is that she enacted a corporeal-emotional mirroring. The images emotionally impressed her, while she physically impressed them. Her habits and emotions left traces on the page.

My assertion in the case of Brussels IV 414, that the book's user deliberately touched her way across the historiated initials as a tactile extension of reading the devotions, needs some critical examination. Is it possible that the damage was inflicted onto this book in some other way? Two frequent explanations for damage in manuscripts are iconoclasm, such as that wrought during the Protestant Reformation, and water damage.⁷ But if an iconoclast had damaged the rosary manuscript, one would expect that the images would be crossed out, or cut out, or that their eyes would be gouged out, or that mentions of indulgences and popes (the other targets of the reformers) would likewise be attacked, but they are not.

Is it possible that the damage resulted from water damage? No, spills would cause stains with an outline circumscribing the puddle, and seepage likewise records its leading edge. Moreover, spills or damage from, say mold or raindrops, would attack the entire page, without respect for the figures. But the damage here is concentrated in and around the historiated initials, as well as some of the smaller initials. The damage was not random, but was directed toward particular images and letters.

Could this damage have been done by a child, or someone on a jolly? Yes, possibly, but in that case, one would expect that all of the figures would be attacked with equal ferocity, without respect to the subject, but that is not the case. In this manuscript, only the images corresponding to the rosary devotion, the Face of Christ, plus a few selected saints, and some decorated initials have been damaged. Children, moreover, are also likely to add stray marks to the margins, and no evidence of this appears in the book (although the margins have been trimmed). While the child-hypothesis remains possible, it is far more likely that an engaged user selectively touched the initials and targeted her finger carefully, as part of a devotional response to the exercise, as if extending the use of rosary beads into the pages of the book itself. This scenario creates an internally consistent narrative that connects the subject of the manuscript, the marks of handling in the margins, and the targeted abrasion to the narrative "beads."

Coleman, Mark Cruse and Kathryn A. Smith. Medieval Texts and Cultures of Northern Europe, pp. 17-52, Pl. xvii (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013); Sarah Noonan, *Bodies of Parchment: Representing the Passion and Reading Manuscripts in Late Medieval England* (2010), All Theses and Dissertations (ETDs), Paper 262.

⁷ For example, Mark Cruse, "Matter and Meaning in Medieval Books," *The Senses and Society* 5, no. 1 (2010), pp. 45-56, offers iconoclasm as an explanation for the damage in medieval manuscripts, and compares "inflicting damage on books to inflicting pain and death on those who read them" (p. 53).

Lightly and systematically touching of the roundels, one by one in the rosary manuscript, is but one form of use in Ms. IV 414, which yields a particular type of damage: powdery paint set loose from the parchment and then blurred, plus highly soluble black ink (such as that framing and overlapping burnished gold, and therefore lightly adhering to a non-porous substrate) feathered into the background parchment. This damage corresponds to the user's fingering of the initials as if they were beads. She also left other marks throughout the volume, and studying the other areas of damage in this prayer book can reveal her habits and desires. Although the paint has not particularly loosened in globules or adhered to the facing pages, it would appear that there was some moisture present when the owner touched the non-figured initials and when she concentrated her attentions on the golden letterforms and their black ink boundaries. The owner may have kissed her finger before touching the initials. It takes only minimal moisture to loosen water-soluble paint from a metallic surface. Perhaps she involved her mouth and breath in her haptic ritual.

That a user took one set of devotional practices (fingering a rosary) and transferred it to another medium (fingering a rosary manuscript), as in Ms. IV 414, is not an isolated occurrence.⁸ Rather, this transference forms part of a social phenomenon, which connected users through shared practices and left similar marks on groups of related books. Another richly illuminated prayer book made in the Southern Netherlands around 1500 likewise contains a series of images connected in a particular sequence for systematic devotion through the metaphor of a rosary (London, BL, Add. Ms. 15525).⁹ This manuscript contains 105 full-page miniatures on its 109 folios, so that, except for its front matter, each opening has a short prayer

⁸ The transfer of practices from one realm to another can be compared with the mechanisms described by scholars of medieval performance. Jessica Brantley, *Reading in the Wilderness: Private Devotion and Public Performance in Late Medieval England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), shows that spectators who witnessed theatrical performances brought emotionally charged memories with them to their private reading. Jill Stevenson shows how attendants of Corpus Christi plays in late medieval England gained—and internalized—“performance literacy” they could deploy in other settings. See Jill Stevenson, “The Material Bodies of Medieval Religious Performance in England,” *Material Religion: The Journal of Objects, Art and Belief* 2.2 (2006) pp. 204-234; Jill Stevenson develops these ideas in *Performance, Cognitive Theory, and Devotional Culture: Sensual Piety in Late Medieval York*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

⁹ The manuscript is written in Dutch and Latin. For a basic description and bibliography, see Klara H. Broekhuijsen, *The Masters of the Dark Eyes: Late Medieval Manuscript Painting in Holland*. Ars Nova: Studies in Late Medieval and Renaissance Northern Painting and Illumination (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), pp. 20, 22, 43, 234-236. Broekhuijsen identifies the illuminators as the Masters of the Dark Eyes, a group of painters active in the Northern and Southern Netherlands, and in England, between ca. 1490 and ca. 1520; she places this manuscript in the English group, identifying the six full-page miniatures with the painter of Oxford, Queen's College, Ms 349, which has an English calendar and formerly belonged to Princess Mary, daughter of Henry VIII. In London, BL, Add. Ms. 15525 Broekhuijsen furthermore finds the hands of three further painters from the Southern Netherlands. She dates the manuscript ca. 1500-1510 and notes that the border imagery is consistent with that made in the Southern Netherlands.

paired with a full-page image, creating an image-drenched devotional routine based on the rosary.

Specifically, the rosary devotion in Add. 15525 structures nine groups of ten narrative images, depicting the Infancy and Passion, with full-page illustrations on every recto. Every tenth folio presents a depiction of the Face of Christ framed in a string of rosary beads (fol. 71r; fig. 10). Copies of this image of Christ's framed face therefore appear at intervals throughout the manuscript, functioning as “decade” beads. In this way, not only the bead-frames of these repeated images, but the very structure of the manuscript, explicitly engage with the rosary. The user has particularly targeted the rosary-framed images, laying fingers onto the face at their centers, perhaps stroking Christ's hair. For the image on fol. 71r, paint losses have marred the image of Christ, as pigment from his face and from the background have been stirred up and muddled, and is now intermingled around his beard. As in the Brussels manuscript, here the beads are represented as bright red coral, but this time the decade beads are the wounds of Christ, as if the pierced body parts were suitable for stringing. The user has also felt his or her way along these, touching each of the hand and foot wounds as if healing them, or testing them, as Doubting Thomas had.

Nearly all of the images in this manuscript exhibit signs of wear. Often the damage is concentrated near the faces of the figures, or sometimes on their bodies. These losses are consistent with an owner who systematically touched the miniatures over a series of devotional encounters. Through these deliberate acts of touching, the user could express tenderness while simultaneously enacting a ritual. Doing this degraded the very objects of veneration.¹⁰ Pious fingers have worked extensive grime into the lower and outer margins through the entire manuscript, possibly the result of turning the folios with fingers stained with paint after ritually touching the images.

The heavy-handed devotion begins with the image of Christ as *Salvator Mundi* (5v–6r, fig. 11). In addition to the grimy margins, several other marks of use in this section require explanation. To understand how these marks came to be, we have to look at them comparatively, and triangulate them back to their causes. An area on the Christ's garment bears thin white lines typical of those caused by abrading vertices of a rumpled manifold. In other words, the folio has been creased, as if it had been subjected to rough manipulation. Separate

¹⁰ This study therefore joins others in proposing models that associate emotion with performance. See Susan Broomhall, ed., *Ordering Emotions in Europe, 1100-1800. Studies in Medieval and Reformation Traditions* (Leiden: Brill, 2015); and the important studies by Barbara H. Rosenwein: *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006); and “Les Communautés Émotionnelles et le Corps,” *Médiévales* 61, no. 2 (2011), pp. 55-75.

from the rumpling operation, several areas of the blue background have been wetted (just under the arch, in the radiance, next to the crucifix, near the orb, at the hem), and the paint has, in its loosened state, migrated to the text side of the opening. These wetted areas are at the scale of a finger. Moreover, three areas in the middle of the image (on Christ's robes, from approximately his gall bladder to his right shin, and on both towers) have round areas of discoloration, where a liquid has dripped. This liquid must have been hydrophobic, as it did not reconstitute the water-soluble paint. These marks are consistent with those made by molten wax, as if someone had upset a candle while reading this opening.

It is likely that several operations caused the marks of wear on this opening. Some were deliberate (touching the image at particular locations), and some resulted from the mechanics of reading (opening the book in a sooty environment, handling it repeatedly with somewhat dirty hands, letting wax drop on it, closing the book, so that loose paint transferred to the facing folio). Given the anything-but-random distribution of marks of damage on selected figures, some of the marks point to activity that was methodical, ritualized, and performed in response to the particular subjects represented. One may rule out iconoclasm as the motivation of the damage, since eyes and faces are not attacked. Within the context of the rest of the pervasive damage in this book, this touching appears systematic, deliberate, and related to the book's original function as a haptic and physical devotional guide.

Similar kinds of damage appear throughout the series, with much of the attention directed toward Mary, such as at an image of her praying before an altar (19r; fig. 12). The owner, by the very nature of using the prayerbook, is emulating Mary, and it would appear that this owner acknowledged the identification with her by repeatedly touching the bright blue mantle worn by Christ's sorrowful mother. No fewer than twelve small areas of loss appear on the Virgin's dress, especially near the hem. Blue paint in medieval manuscripts is often grainier than other colors. The grains' low surface area-to-volume ratio therefore lack adhesion, so that the lightest touch causes them to come unmoored from the page. While it is possible that this damage was caused by, say, accidentally flicking water on the image, the areas of damage are concentrated on the blue mantle itself, with no attention to the other parts of the image. The most likely explanation is that a supplicant touched the represented fabric multiple times, possibly with a damp finger that has caused the paint to liquefy.

The pattern of wear seems to be just as deliberate, but quite different, in other images in the book. In the image of the Visitation, the figure of Elizabeth has been rubbed away (23r; fig. 13). The owner has concentrated efforts on Elizabeth's face, but also on the hands of both female characters who lovingly embrace, as if the owner were joining in their gesture. As with

the image of Mary at the altar, here her blue dress has similarly been daubed, as if with a wet finger. Strangely, a male figure is present; by context, this should be Zachariah, the father of John the Baptist, but he has the same dress and facial features as Jesus as represented elsewhere in the codex. Perhaps the owner was also confused and therefore touched the male figure's face, to the point where it is not clear whether he once bore a halo. Given this attention to this story about conception, one possibility is that the female owner was anxious to become pregnant.

If these manuscripts were systematically touched with a motivation, one can begin to make distinctions in the kind of touching involved. In each miniature, the supplicant has chosen a different area of interest to target, either out of veneration or loathing, and adjusted the method of touching accordingly. At the image of Christ in the Wilderness, the owner has left Christ alone and targeted the Devil (35r; fig. 14). One can compare the quick, aggressive strokes that gouged the Devil with the gentler strokes applied to Elizabeth. The former has resulted in jagged scrapes, as if the user had delved into the green landscape with a fingernail. These attacks mar the entire body of the devil, including his legs, as well as the smaller representation on the distant hilltop, because the aggressive actions have spilled out over the lines. In contrast, at the Visitation the user has not used a fingernail, but rather a wet—presumably kissed—fingertip to repeatedly touch Elizabeth's face, the Virgin's abdomen, and to mirror the tender hand gesture between the two women. This touching differs from the vigorous up-and-down gesture visible in the Temptation scene.

At the depiction of Christ at the house of Simon the Pharisee, where Mary Magdalene washes his feet with her tears and dries them with her hair, the supplicant has directed attention to the Magdalene's activity (39r; fig. 15). While the particular wear is diffuse, its epicenter falls at the face and hair of the kneeling Mary. The strokes have removed detail from Mary's face and Christ's feet, and have loosened some of the brown paint of the table. Here again, the user has touched the site of touching, as if helping the Magdalene or appreciating her efforts. Did the user add her own tears in this gesture? The lower corner of the image has also been repeatedly touched. I do not have a watertight explanation for this damage, but perhaps the user continued enacting Mary's penitence by "washing" Simon's feet as well. At any rate, the user directed attention to the region under the table, as if debasing herself, and stroked the surface of the miniature, at least partly in response to Mary's display.

In the miniature depicting the resurrected Christ appearing to his mother, the image itself does not show people physically interacting; however, the user has nonetheless touched the figures (fol. 46r; fig. 16). In particular, three areas appear to have been targeted with a wet finger: the feet of Christ, his face, and Mary's shoulder. One can imagine that the user

“comforted” the sorrowing Virgin by rubbing her shoulder gently, and then acknowledged Christ’s miraculous appearance by “kissing” his cheek, and then debased herself before his resurrected body by kissing his feet. In this way, the owner could insert herself into the scene with participatory emotion. That the owner touched different images and figures in different ways is testimony that a single book could contain a range of images with differentiated responses.

As these examples have shown, the damage inflicted is specific to each image. This makes it highly unlikely that the damage is random or caused by a child, an iconoclast who hated all religious imagery, or someone who had set out to destroy the images out of some kind of malice. Rather, the damage makes most sense in the context of an ardent viewer touching deliberately, who performs while intensely concentrating on the painted figures and their relationships with one another. I call this form of damage *targeted wear*. It seems to result from a desire to engage multiple senses while praying: to see the images, hear the words, touch the figures, feel the ways in which devotion shaped the body (a sense called proprioception), and possibly even to taste the words on the tongue in a literal way. When engaging with the rosary devotion, some supplicants even smelled heavenly perfume by constructing a scented bead—made by combining nutmeg, laudanum, cinnamon, sandalwood, and black earth, all bound together with rose water, styrax or other gum resins.¹¹ All of these engagements led to heightened sensual involvement. Moreover, the touching could be quite specifically expressive: from expressing humility by touching hems to expressing shared joy by palpating pregnant abdomens.

In contradistinction to the *targeted wear* wrought by these motivated forms of touching, *inadvertent wear* resulted from the mechanics of handling the book, from rubbing grime into the margins to illuminating it with a slopping candle. The most extreme *inadvertent wear* in the volume appears on an added bifolium at the beginning (fols 3-4). Written in a smaller, less decorated script, this bifolium was ruled separately and originated from a different campaign of work (fig. 17). It contains the short Hours of the Cross, condensed so that it fits on the inside of a single bifolium, 3v–4r, and it has been so heavily handled that the words at the bottom of

¹¹ Reindert L. Falkenburg, “The Scent of Holiness: Notes on the Interpretation of Botanical Symbolism in Paintings by Hans Memling,” in: *Memling Studies: Proceedings of the International Colloquium (Bruges, 10–12 November 1994)*, ed. Hélène Verougstraete, Roger van Schouthe and Maurits Smeyers (Leiden 1997), pp. 149–61, here p. 160. Falkenburg found the recipe (“Deech om welriekende paternosteren te maken”) in *Dat battement van recepten. Een secreetboek uit de zestiende eeuw*, introduced and edited by W.L. Braekman (Omirel UFSAL, Brussel 1990), pp. 89–90, 94. The recipe book originated in Venice and then appeared in French, Italian, and Dutch versions in the early sixteenth century. The entire Dutch version was transcribed by Braekman, digitised at https://www.dbln.org/tekst/_bat002wlbr01_01/colofon.php (consulted 4 April 2021).

the page have been abraded from the parchment, while simultaneously being imprinted in the memory. Its owner presumably read it out of habit, long having memorized the short, oft-rehearsed text, to the point that it was no longer legible. The owner of this bifolium did not touch particular words, but rather caused abrasion in the course of regular use, so that the signs of wear are concentrated in the lower margin, the gripping area. Seeing all of these marks as traces of use, brought about by a previous owner, reveals something important about that user's commitment: she interacted with the manuscript for many episodes of devotion, sometimes by candlelight, and interacted with each image in specific ways.

Conclusion

In translating the touch from one kind of devotion (handling rosary beads) to an allied kind of devotion (reading an illustrated narrative based on the life and passion of Christ), the votary accomplished several things. She called attention to the circular, repetitive nature of this form of devotion, which followed beads sequentially like a narrative. The nodes along that narrative are the moments when Christ's body is ruptured, an act that is met by the votary by a mirroring act of touch. In many cases, the circular form of this kind of narrative is emphasized by the fact that the beads join into a continuous string, forming a hoop, which can encircle the Face of Christ or crown the votary.

Touching the images in the manuscript had a number of functions. The votary was demonstrating the way in which the historiated initials, framed by rings of gold, acted like decade beads, and how the lines of text acted like textile. Moreover, the images connect the fictive reality with the viewer's physical space: the stringed beads wrap around the Face of Christ and also loop around the votary's hands, whether they are praying, turning the pages, touching the events of the Passion, or manipulating the counting devices. I opened with the proposition that votaries sought manipulables because they grounded devotion in the tangible. I have sought to demonstrate that the votary did not just gaze upon the images: she touched them, making the gold-rimmed initials serve as beads, the lines of text as threads in her hands.

These marked books, with their worn pages, open doors to new inquiries. They demonstrate that the soiled and the handled may tell us more than the untouched. This research reads the wear as signs, spelling out how people once held, fingered, and cherished certain rosary manuscripts. These marks of wear do not just show use; rather, they sketch out a history of hands at prayer and link us to lives once lived.

This study points to new paths. Future studies could consider new research in neuroscience that could shed light on how touching these objects shaped the believer's brain, how it constructed faith. Art history might compare these patterns across works in different media, hinting at a broader pattern in how people once used their sacred things. These signs of use, these traces of fingers, are not just stains. They are clues, guiding us to how people of the past held their beliefs, how they touched their world.

Figures

Fig. 1. Rosary, bone and metal, ca. 1250–1300. Ethiopian(?). Church of Our Lady, Huy (Belgium).

Fig. 2. Female patron with a guardian angel, historiated initial in a prayerbook made in Bruges, ca. 1475-90. Brussels, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, Ms. IV 414, fol. 27v.

Fig. 3. Rosary, coral bead with metallic decade beads, a miniature tower (signifying St Barbara?), fifteenth century (with a later painted pendant). Zoutleeuw, Kerk Sint-Leonardus. (IRPA KIK object number 28313).

Fig. 4. Christ in Gethsemane, historiated initial in a prayerbook made in Bruges, ca. 1475-90. Brussels, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, Ms. IV 414, fol. 3r.

Fig. 5. Christ before Herod, historiated initial in a prayerbook made in Bruges, ca. 1475-90. Brussels, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, Ms. IV 414, fol. 5r.

Fig. 6. Flagellation, historiated initial in a prayerbook made in Bruges, ca. 1475-90. Brussels, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, Ms. IV 414, fol. 7r.

Fig. 7. Christ Carrying his Cross, historiated initial in a prayerbook made in Bruges, ca. 1475-90. Brussels, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, Ms. IV 414, fol 9r.

Fig. 8. Crucifixion, historiated initial in a prayerbook made in Bruges, ca. 1475-90. Brussels, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, Ms. IV 414, fol. 11r.

Fig. 9. Opening, with the end of the rosary (featuring an Entombment, historiated initial), and a prayer to the Face of Christ, with a historiated initial, in a prayerbook made in Bruges, ca. 1475-90. Brussels, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, Ms. IV 414, fols 12v-13r.

Fig. 10. Folio in a prayerbook, with the Face of Christ framed in a rosary. London, British Library, Add. Ms.15525, fol. 71r.

Fig. 11. Opening from a prayerbook, with a full-page miniature depicting Christ as Salvator Mundi, and a facing prayer text. London, British Library, Add. Ms.15525, fols 5v-6r.

Fig. 12. Folio in a prayerbook, with the Virgin praying before an Altar. London, British Library, Add. Ms.15525, fol. 19r.

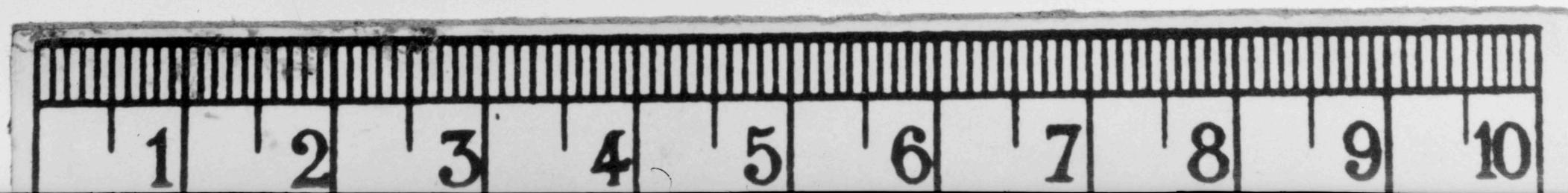
Fig. 13. Folio in a prayerbook, showing the Visitation, with a male figure present. London, British Library, Add. Ms.15525, fol. 23r.

Fig. 14. Folio in a prayerbook, showing Christ encountering the devil. London, British Library, Add. Ms.15525, fol. 35r.

Fig. 15. Folio in a prayerbook, showing Christ at the house of Simon the Pharisee, with Mary Magdalene washing his feet. London, British Library, Add. Ms.15525, fol. 39r.

Fig. 16. Folio in a prayerbook, showing Christ appearing to his mother. London, British Library, Add. Ms.15525, fol. 46r.

Fig. 17. Half of an added bifolium, which contains the Office of the Holy Cross, heavily worn. London, British Library, Add. Ms.15525, fol. 3v.



hant heb ic disponeert dinck key
tuinchet te werden uoldaen.
comit niet mi te grader demnes
met munen heilighen inglele
micke warscappen verbliden
ende wonen. Die leues ende
regneers god niet gode den ua
der under ewicheit des heilichs
gheest bij allen der werelt der
wereldem. Amen.



Van dijen
heiliche
mghel.
heiliche in
mghel mijs
gods dien
ic beuole



43

vien du he
lighe reyne
maghet
maria vā
leuten en
van lue

onernuds den inghel gabr
el uanden helighen gheest ot
suijs. O maria bid hem voor
ons. pater nū. Ave maria.

O een ghu den leuende
gods sone ontfaen hads in
dinen heilich lichame. Toe
ghinct ghu rechtewort tot
isabeth wver nichten. dor
die gheuerchte. o maria bid



na bid hem voor ons. Aue.
Gruuta. Pi si. et wien ghu dor
die vreesen van herodes den coninc
woert in egypten dor die wil
dernesse ende duert uermantē
vinden in ghelen wederkeer
des naden seuen iaren. o ma
ria bid hem voor ons. Aue.
Gruien ghu ten ry. sten
iaren verloren hadt in them
salem ende naer drie daghen
weder wondes vinden tempel in
den middel uanden leeraers. o
maria bid hem voor ons. Aue.

Die den bluide ghe
woerne ghenaeſt
ende maect siede.

o maria bid hem voor ons.

Aue maria gracia plena.

Die des coninghes dochter
west int huus vander doot
ende dat vroukin onder we
ghe ghenaeſt uan diere hemc
iken liecken met datſij uwe
leederen ghenaeſte. o maria
bid hem voor ons. Aue maria.

Lie lazaron uerweckede
vander doot die vier daghen
doot ghewest hadde in siele en
in lue. o maria bidt he uoor


 Ien si wonden al
 staect an eenen
 calonunc en ghe
 gheselen wreedeliken sonder
 ghemaden. o maria bidt hem
 voor ons. Aue maria ḡa.

DIEN si so wreedelike croō
 de mit doornen ende eenē ne
 de in sijn haud ende deedene
 mit purpere ende knieldē voor
 hem in spotte ende anbeden. o
 maria bidt voor ons. Aue mā.

When si wonnellen ter scā
 deliker doot des cruijce. o ma
 ria bid hem voor ons. Aue mā.

Die den zware balke sijs

Dreter my. Aue mar.
ne niet dier alder bit
terster ende scotier
luyster doot ghewaer
dicht heuet te steruen voor ons
arme sondaren. o maria bid
hem voor ons. Aue maria.

Dit wienis harte water en
bloet in ueigheuenesse der sou
den wt vloeyde. o maria bid
hem voor ons. Aue maria.

Delck alre helichste lidhame
si uanden cruice deden ende di
alst minlyck es te ghelouen
wederghauen. o maria bid he
voor ons. Aue maria gracia.

ten daghen. o maria bid hem
ons. Aue maria grā plena.

Die mutten nader ende den
heilighen gheest sij lof eere ende
glorie ende di niet hem o he
melsche coninghunne des he
mels ende der aerde sonder
einde. o maria bid hem voor ons

Daer nī. Aue marī.
ie hu dit wt min
nen heuet ghedaē
ende doen scruien

begheert doe gods bitter doot
dat hu in hu ghetet mach
bluuen dat hem uergheue si
ne sonden groot. Amen.

Dit es een siuerlyck ghebet
van onsen lieuen heere ghele
nedide aenschijn der vrouwe.





7 X

O bermertich vader. die daer wuert
int alder hoogste: de begeerte van
allen dienaren. hier noch als moekene
op deerde cruyppaide: verbaert. de welseke
ghy. duer v ongrondelycke liefde. hebt
woerdich ghemact. te heeten de
kinderen gode: sturfeinde in hemelide.
alleit felighen gheest. op dat zy niet
sen vast betroutien. tot hui souden
meechen recken **Abba pater.** Och
vader. Wy bidden u o vader. laet alle
nach ghebeelde weevelt duer bekent
syn. ghelyc sy ee inden hemel. Amen



19





23

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fden
e, aldi
mynt
nien



35
34





46

45

Incipit officium sc̄e crucie ad matutinæ

Dñe tabernaculo aperie **E**cce meū amicabit laude tua
Deue m adiutorium meū intende **D**ñe ad adiuvandum
me festina **Gloria p̄i et filio et spiritui sancto** **Sicut**
erat in principio et nunc et semper et in secula seculi
coram amen — **Hymnus**

Hymne

Patrie sapientia veritatem diuina Deum homo captus est
hora matutina A fuisse discipulis cito derelictus A
Iudeis traditus venditus et affixus Versus adoramus
te Christum et benedicimus tibi Rememora per sanctam crucem
tuam redemisti mundum

Oraſio

Oratio
Domine Iesu Christe fili dei domini pone passionem crucis et mortis filiam inter iudicium tuum et animam meam misere et in hora mortis meee et semper largiri digneris curie munim et orationem defunctorum requies et veniam conforta me tace sancte pacem et concordiam et nobis peccatori et eternitatem sempiternam Qui venis ad primam

ue ad prima

Doce me in auditorium Dñe ad aduandū hymnū
Processione ductus ē iesue ad pilati falsie te-
mptationē multum accusatum Colaphie percuti-
tū magistris ligatum vultū dei cōspicuitur
tatum **V**eris oratione xpc **O**ratio Dñe

O:ratio D:ne

Dñe ad fertiam Dñe maditorū meum in
Dñe ad adivuandum **Gloria Hymne**

Dñe ad dominandum Gloria hymne

Confitee clamat hora tertiaru^m Ihesus induit^r
p^recipit aceru^m Caput eius pungitur corona
Crucis portat humerie ad locu^m penarum
XVII Quodcumque xpc oratio Dñe iesu xpc ad sextam