A brief introduction to the principal manuscript and printed books used in liturgical and private devotional contexts during the Middle Ages

I. Liturgical books

“Liturgical” manuscript or printed book = intended for use in church and divine worship

Liturgical books were for the celebration of either Mass or the Divine Office.

- Mass = consecration and distribution of the Eucharistic bread and wine to commemorate Christ’s Crucifixion and the redemption of humankind; celebrated in churches and monasteries on a daily basis

- Divine Office = Daily round of services offered to God; services consisted of a combination of psalms, prayers, readings, singing, etc.; in monasteries, a total of eight services is offered across the days at set Hours

a. The missal became the most important service book for the celebration of mass. It was introduced in the Carolingian period (ca. 9th century). By the 13th century it had supplanted the older Sacramentary (see below), prompted by the development of saying private masses and low masses.

The missal contains the full range of scriptural readings, prayers and chants for mass, together with ceremonial directions. Often only the opening words of readings, etc. will be given, the full text would be known by heart or available in other service books such as:

- Sacramentary: prayers said by the priest during mass
- Gradual: principal choir book
- Evangelary or Evangelistary: Gospel readings arranged according to the liturgical year with the full reading (pericope) for each feast; sometimes also called Gospel lectionary or Pericope Book
- Epistolary: Epistle readings (generally NT, but also OT) arranged according to liturgical year
- Lectionary: passages of scripture (Epistles and Gospels) read out as lessons during mass; sometimes also called comes (companion)

b. The breviary is the principal book for the performance of the Divine Office

Etymology: From the Latin “brevis” = short, concise
**Hours of prayer** observed by the monks:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hour</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Matins</td>
<td>ca. 2am</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lauds</td>
<td>follows straight after Matins</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prime</td>
<td>first hour of the day, ca. 6am</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terce</td>
<td>“third hour of the day”, ca. 9am</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sext</td>
<td>“Sixth hour of the day”, noon</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>“Ninth hour of the day”, ca. 3pm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vespers</td>
<td>onset of evening</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compline</td>
<td>close of day, before retiring</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The **breviary** is divided into two main sections, the **temporale** and **sanctorale**

*Temporale* (also known as “Proper of time”, *Proprium de tempore*) = material for celebrating services organised around the commemoration and celebration of principal events in Christ’s life:

- Starting with Advent Sunday (four weeks before Christmas)
- Christmas Day (major feast)
- Feast of the Circumcision (1 January)
- Epiphany (6 January)
- Presentation of Christ in the Temple (also known as Purification of the Virgin Mary or Candlemas) (2 February)
- Lent
- Palm Sunday (Christ’s entry into Jerusalem)
- Holy Week and Easter Sunday (climax of the Christian year)
- Ascension (40 days after Resurrection)
- Pentecost
- Advent

*Sanctorale* (also known as “Proper of Saints”, *Proprium de sanctorum*) = material (prayers, music, texts) for the celebration of Saints throughout the year; usually includes feasts of all major saints

The *Sanctorale* was normally supplemented by the **Commune Sanctorum** ("Common of Saints") to celebrate feast days of saints who have no liturgical texts written for them specifically; arranges into different subsections for the rank of the Saint (apostle, martyr, confessor, virgin)

The breviary usually contains:

- Full complement of texts, both said and sung, for all hours
- Texts include psalms, antiphons, lessons, prayers, etc.
- Can contain written music ("noted breviary")
- **Calendar**: very important for establishing feast days; they usually use the **Roman system** (three fixed points in a month, i.e. kalends, nones, ides)

II. **Books used in liturgical as well as private devotional contexts** – the Psalter

The Psalter is primarily a book of Psalms. In the non-monastic Roman liturgy of the Middle Ages, all 150 Psalms were recited each week (mainly at matins and vespers), divided up into cycles.
The Psalter was the principal book for private devotions before the emergence of the **Books of Hours** (see below) in the 13\textsuperscript{th} century.

If Psalters were designed to be used in the performance of the **Divine Office**, they contained other relevant texts, such as the **Hours of the Virgin**. Other possible additions could include:

- Calendars
- Canticles (= hymns, excluding the Psalms)
- Creeds (= statement of belief)
- Litany of the Saints (= series of invocations for deliverance and intercession addressed to the Holy Trinity, the Virgin, angels, apostles, martyrs, confessors, and virgins)
- Prayers

**III. Books used for private devotion**

**a. Prayer Book**

- Collections of prayers for private devotional use appeared at least as early as the 8\textsuperscript{th} century in the Insular world, and shortly after in the Carolingian Empire
- Prayers were collated according to central devotional themes
- Often accompanied by passages from the Gospels and the Psalms
- Popularity grew in the later Middle Ages, esp. with aristocratic patrons for whom fine illuminations would be included
- Supplements the **Psalter** and **Book of Hours** for private devotional use

**b. Books of Hours** (also called a *primer* or *horae*)

- Central text: **Little Office of the Blessed Virgin** (or **Hours of the Virgin**), a shorter, simpler version of the **Divine Office** performed at the eight canonical hours
- Text of the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin known from the 10\textsuperscript{th} century
- Originally only read by ecclesiastics
- Enters popular use by the end of the 12\textsuperscript{th} century, often attached to the **Psalter**
- Gradually, a variety of other elements were added to the Little Office: a liturgical calendar, a Litany of the Saints, Suffrages (intercessory prayers presented to a hierarchy of Saints), the Office of the Dead, other Offices, Penitential Psalms, Gradual Psalms and prayers. The presence of these elements can help to date the Book of Hours.
- The Book of Hours takes its more or less standard form in the 13\textsuperscript{th} century, and remains in use until the 16\textsuperscript{th} century, also as a printed book
- Books of Hours express the lay person’s desire to imitate the prayers of monastic life
- Nearly always illuminated, according to the patron’s budget (sometimes even portraying the patron)
- Medieval best-sellers, made to suit all tastes and pockets (esp. popular in France, Flanders, but also for the English market)
A typical Book of Hours would have:

1. A **calendar** recording the fixed feasts of the liturgical year and anniversaries of important saints; often ornamented with miniatures portraying the signs of the zodiac and the occupations of the months (invaluable information about everyday life)

2. A sequence of extracts from the **Four Gospels**, with the four evangelists often depicted with their symbols: John (“In the beginning was the word”), followed by Luke (story of Incarnation of Christ, starting with the Annunciation), Matthew (continuation of Christmas story), and Mark (Christ appearing to the disciples after Resurrection).

3. **The Little Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary**, often illustrated by eight scenes showing the Virgin in her role as mother of Christ according to the eight canonical hours:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Matins</th>
<th>= the Annunciation</th>
<th>Sext</th>
<th>= the Magi</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lauds</td>
<td>= the Visitation</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>= the Presentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prime</td>
<td>= the Nativity</td>
<td>Vespers</td>
<td>= the Flight into Egypt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terce</td>
<td>= the Shepherds</td>
<td>Compline</td>
<td>= Coronation of the Virgin</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, especially in England, scenes from Christ’s Passion and Resurrection were often preferred to the scenes of Christ’s birth and childhood.

4. A variety of subsidiary material such as the Office of the Dead, Hours of the Cross, Hours of the Holy Spirit, “Fifteen O’s” (devotion to the Passion attributed to St Bridget of Sweden, d. 1372), the seven Penitential Psalms with a litany of the saints, prayers, etc.