In his *Divine Comedy* Italian author Dante Alighieri spoke to the “fame” of Parisian manuscript illumination already at the beginning of the fourteenth-century.¹ This is because, as Thomas Kren puts it: “By the death of King Louis IX...in 1270, Paris was the greatest center of manuscript illumination in Europe.”² Within this thirteenth-century cosmopolitan center there were numerous workshops that put breviaries, psalters, missals, bibles, and other liturgical texts into circulation. At the same time, a new form of devotional text emerged and took the lay realm by storm: the Book of Hours, described by many scholars as “the late medieval best seller.”³ Roger Wieck points out, “From the mid-thirteenth to the mid-sixteenth century, more Books of Hours were commissioned and produced, bought and sold, bequeathed and inherited, printed and reprinted than any other text, including the Bible.”⁴ Reiterating their immense popularity in present terms, John Harthan tells us that “[Books of Hours] form the largest single category of illuminated manuscripts which now exists.”⁵

Harthan pioneered the general study of Books of Hours with his 1977 book, aptly titled *The Book of Hours*. As he points out, at the time of his book’s publication: “Individual Books of Hours [had] been studied in learned monographs, and a considerable literature [was] available

about the schools of illumination which specialized in their production. But no general study [appeared] to exist." Following suit a few decades later, Roger Wieck and Bernard Muir also wrote general studies about Books of Hours. The latter authors’ perspectives lead to some inconsistencies in understanding the manuscript type. For the purposes of this paper, these inconsistencies are minor, possibly even inconsequential. However, some attention will be given to them for the sake of framing a dialogue between texts about Books of Hours in order to determine what a “typical” Book of Hours looks like.

Other participants in this dialogue include Thomas Kren, Curator of Manuscripts at the J. Paul Getty Museum, and Janet Backhouse, former Curator of Illuminated Manuscripts at The British Library; each of whom published books on the collection at their respective institutions. Also, Lynn Jacobs, M. Smeyers, and James Douglas Farquhar provide useful information and helpful tips specifically about fifteenth-century French Books of Hours. Their writings will help achieve the second objective of this paper: that is, to use the standard Book of Hours model observed through Harthan’s, Wieck’s, and Muir’s writings as a ruler against which we can measure the typical and atypical elements of a fifteenth-century manuscript leaf from a French Book of Hours currently in the Founders Memorial Library collection at Northern Illinois University (figs. 1, 2). The NIU collection’s catalogue is unclear as to when the manuscript was likely created: the item is physically labeled with a date of circa 1400, while the online

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6 Ibid.
catalogue lists the date circa 1450. As we will see, French Books of Hours took a variety of physical forms throughout the fifteenth-century, and so this paper will contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the NIU manuscript leaf’s date of origin.

Before starting a series of visual analyses, first an exploration of the phenomena that contributed to the historical development of Books of Hours. Books of Hours initially appeared in monastic missals and breviaries, as a section called the Little Office of Our Lady, and was used by monks for performing Mass and reciting the Divine Offices. In either the ninth or tenth century, the church implemented the Little Office of Our Lady into clerical liturgy, which sparked the spread of the Hours of the Virgin as a separate set of prayers.9 Slowly but surely, by the thirteenth-century, the Little Office of Our Lady made its way into the hands of the laity.10 Although at this time the hours did not yet assume a form independent of other manuscript types: as Harthan states, they were “like a kind of appendix to the Psalter, the only prayerbook normally used by the laity.”11

Books of Hours became immensely popular among lay audiences, and this reflects their unique status as a quasi-liturgical text; while they were informed by the central liturgical texts of the Divine Offices – quite literally born of them – they were never “officially sanctioned nor controlled by the Church herself.”12 Wieck asserts that, at a time when “the laity’s access to

God was very much controlled and limited by others than themselves,” Books of Hours allowed for individual, private, and unmediated devotional practices. By the fifteenth-century, well after Dante’s remarks cited above, they reached the height of their popularity and were manufactured on a large scale by lay workshops throughout France and Western Europe. The fact that not only the content, but also the production of Books of Hours had by the fifteenth-century become independent of what Harthan calls “the monopoly of monastic scriptoria” contributed to the appeal of Books of Hours for a late Medieval audience. As Muir states: “Despite...its close relationship with the breviary and the psalter, the book of hours is distinguished from them by its greater emphasis on individual and personal prayer.” The author continues to discuss the role of the vernacular in supporting private devotion: “The book of hours often includes...a greater variety of sources than either the breviary or the psalter” some of which could be written in the familiar tongue of every day social and civic life. Backhouse further explores the significance of the mass-produced yet highly individualized Book of Hours, observing reflections of secular medieval concepts of “the fashionable and social prestige.”

Books of Hours were primarily developed by, and to serve the interests of multiple lay audiences, as they were intended to be instruments of private devotion for a wide range of financially-able consumers. Wieck describes the motivations of lay people to own a Book of

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13 Ibid., 434.
15 Ibid., 20.
Hours as “a kind of bibliophilic jealousy” for the books used by monks and clergymen, which aided in securing the latter’s salvation.\textsuperscript{19} This was not a jealousy experienced only by the middle- or working-classes. According to Harthan, Books of Hours provided “every class of the laity from kings and royal dukes down to prosperous burghers and their wives with personal prayerbooks.”\textsuperscript{20}

Since their production catered to an economically diverse consumer audience, Books of Hours are quite diverse in terms of quality and form. They were produced in standard form, only in that they have a “set schedule” so to speak. However the extent to which each owner restricted themselves to this standard type fluctuates. This is due in no small part to both the lack of ecclesiastical regulation, as well as the varying wealth of patrons. Since the church had little to no say in the production of Books of Hours, patrons were free to let their personal finances determine the quality and form of their personal possessions. The patron’s ability to pay for the materials and workshop labor necessary for the production of their individually commissioned manuscripts determined everything about the Book of Hours: the size, format, content, and degree of illumination, the number of narrative scenes, how many figures in the scenes, the use of colored paint and/or gold leaf, and the extent of in-text and border decoration. It is important to consider the economics of manuscript production because these financially-based influences on their individual forms provide evidence for understanding the origins of some existing Books of Hours.


Harthan employs the snowflake analogy when he says that “no two manuscript Books of Hours are alike.”21 To the same effect, Wieck uses a less organic metaphor to describe the variety of Books of Hours when he writes: “Books of Hours are like automobiles. While they consist of certain prayers without which they cannot properly function...there was a nearly inexhaustible array of ancillary prayers that people, depending on their piety and their pocketbook, felt free to add.”22 So despite to their characteristic ability to be crafted according to their owner’s wealth, taste, and personal piety, a Book of Hours does have a specific set of component parts. Harthan classifies these parts – which we know are actually texts – according to three levels of fundamentality: essential, secondary, and accessory texts.23 (Keep in mind that where an individual manuscript is used—that is, the country, city, or province that where it was commissioned and produced—affects the content and combination of these texts. This is referred to as the “use” of a particular city: Use of Rome, Use of Paris, etc.24) Aside from the essentials, different texts were more or less fashionable in various parts of Europe throughout the fifteenth-century when the workshops were at the height of their subservience to the consumer. Thus, the presence or absence of these texts can provide clues about where the book was used just as the final physical form suggests something about the patron’s wealth. The singular NIU leaf contains only the standard opening text for the Hours of the Cross, and therefore we do not have any evidence of its geographic origin based on its “use,” which might otherwise provide evidence of its date of origin.

21 Ibid., 15.
The essential texts of Books of Hours are the ones which were borrowed from the breviary, and so must exist in a manuscript: the Calendar, Hours of the Virgin, Penitential Psalms, Litany, Office of the Dead, and Suffrages to the Saints.\textsuperscript{25} The secondary texts are most often included, although not always. Gospel texts will almost surely make an appearance. There is also a good chance that the first person singular prayers to the Virgin, called \textit{Obsecro te} and \textit{O intermerata}, would be included; and it was not uncommon to accompany these texts with a portrait of the person who commissioned the manuscript.\textsuperscript{26} The remaining secondary texts that were often featured are the Fifteen Joys of the Virgin, the Seven Requests to the Savior, the Hours of the Holy Spirit, and the Hours of the Cross.\textsuperscript{27} Which, at last, brings us to the second area of this paper’s interests.

The Hours of the Cross is an office when at every canonical hour the lay user would sing hymns and recite devotional poems in order to “form meditations on sequential moments of Christ’s Passion.”\textsuperscript{28} These Hours are shorter than the Hours of the Virgin, and therefore illustrated with a less extensive pictorial program.\textsuperscript{29} In France during the fifteenth-century, the Hours of the Cross were most often illustrated with a single scene of the Crucifixion at the first hour of Matins.\textsuperscript{30} This is certainly true of the manuscript leaf in the NIU collection, because the manuscript leaf is the opening page of the Hours of the Cross section.

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{25} Ibid.
\bibitem{26} Ibid., 26; See also Roger S. Wieck, “The Book of Hours,” in \textit{The Liturgy of the Medieval Church}, eds. Thomas J. Heffernan and E. Ann Matter (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2005), 431-468, esp. 454.
\bibitem{27} Ibid., 14.
\bibitem{30} Ibid., 29; See also Roger S. Wieck, “The Book of Hours,” in \textit{The Liturgy of the Medieval Church}, eds. Thomas J. Heffernan and E. Ann Matter (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2005), 431-468, esp. 452.
\end{thebibliography}
On the recto of the NIU leaf is a miniature of the Crucifixion, framed within an archway situated above a single column of text. A U-bar frames the scene and the text, running parallel to the miniature’s frame until the arch begins, where the U-bar stops. This outer frame is composed of two thin bands of color, the outer in gold leaf and the inner in faded red paint. Inside the frame, a pale-white, haloed Christ hangs on the cross wearing the crown of thorns, and a white loincloth. Mary, complete with a halo of gold leaf, stands to Christ’s right, facing the viewer with her hands clasped and her head bowed. The disciple John stands to Christ’s left, holding a green book and also shown with a halo of gold leaf. He looks up at Christ, with one hand gesturing towards him. Both Mary and John stand on an unremarkable ground of green paint. A textured horizon forms out of frenzied brushstrokes just below the horizontal bar of the cross, separating a golden background from the blue sky.

Surrounding the miniature on the recto and extending to the left of the text on the verso is a decorated border with black vines and ivy leaves in gold. The border also features floriated ornament, including flowers and berries in red, blue, pink, orange, and green. Other illustrative elements include: decorated initials, line-endings, and smaller painted initials. On the recto, there is a large decorated initial “D” in blue paint, with white tracery and filled with an ivy leaf pattern in orange and blue on gold ground. On the verso, there are six letters in gold on either blue or mauve grounds, patterned in white, and filled with the color opposite its ground. Also, on lines 2, 4, and 5 there are line-endings in blue and mauve, patterned in various white motifs, with the sections of color separated by gold geometric shapes.

Based on the information provided by the dealer, we only know that the date of the NIU leaf spans the entire first half of the fifteenth-century (1400-1450), and is probably from
northern or northwestern France. In addition to the appearance or combination of certain texts as it pertains to the area of “use,” there are other ways to date and localize the NIU leaf more conclusively. For example, sometimes there are locally venerated saints featured in the Calendars. In addition, there might be what Farquhar calls “legal, liturgical, armorial, visual, or codicological evidence” throughout the decorative program, which could be used to secure a date and place of origin. However each of these methods requires textual or visual information that does not currently exist in conjunction with the single NIU leaf. Furthermore, as Christopher de Hamel affectionately put it, the NIU leaf is rather “mainstream” and therefore it is difficult to find evidence that stands out on its own. Since the NIU leaf is not the exception, but the rule of fifteenth-century French manuscript production, and because we lack the textual and visual information necessary to employ conclusive methods of dating, stylistic analysis between the NIU leaf and a range of comparanda will provide just such evidence. In order to narrow the investigative scope, the focus will be on miniature scenes of the Crucifixion that open the Hours of the Cross section in fifteenth-century French Books of Hours.

The first point of analysis will be the miniature scene’s frame. In surveying early fifteenth-century scenes of the Crucifixion, one can see that there is a tendency for scribes to rule entirely rectilinear frames for the miniature scenes. The scribe who ruled folio 97 of Walters MS.276, a Book of Hours from Paris dated to the first quarter of the fifteenth-century chose to use this type of frame (fig. 3). The artist of folio 84 verso of MS.743 at the Pierpont

31 Ibid., 18; See also Roger S. Wieck, “The Book of Hours,” in The Liturgy of the Medieval Church, eds. Thomas J. Heffernan and E. Ann Matter (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2005), 431-468, esp. 442.
33 Christopher de Hamel, interview by author, in person, Dekalb, IL, 13, November 2013.
Morgan Library, dated to 1415, also chose to do so (figs. 4,5). MS.22 at the J. Paul Getty Museum, also features a squared frame, and it is dated to 1420 at the latest (fig. 6).\(^{34}\) These three manuscripts – dated in total between 1400 and 1425 – represent early fifteenth-century tendencies to frame miniature scenes within an entirely rectilinear border. Departing from this tradition, the scribe of the NIU leaf framed the miniature scene within a rounded archway, and so it is likely that the NIU leaf was created after these practices fell out of fashion, towards the second quarter of the fifteenth-century.

Now, to briefly examine the productive tendencies specific to the latter half of the fifteenth-century: by at least the third quarter, artists experimented with three-dimensional modeling and naturalistic landscapes, evidence of which cannot be found in the illumination of the NIU leaf. Newberry MS.47, a French Book of Hours circa 1490 offers an exceptional example of the use of gold cross-hatching to model three dimensional shapes and forms (fig. 7). Folio 111 of MS.2917 in the Harley collection at The British Library, a Book of Hours dated to 1485, is another fine example of this technique (fig. 8). Mary’s cloak is of a high artistic quality, in that the folds of fabric are consistently rendered three dimensionally with intricate hatching.

Observing a similar treatment of garments, Lynn Jacobs claims that the artist who painted the Visitation scene on folio 52 of Getty MS.10—which she dated to 1478—was influenced by his contemporaries, from whom he learned to render shadows on folded fabric by using particular brushstrokes and outlining the garments with gold (fig. 9).\(^{35}\) While the artist of the Getty leaf rendered Mary and John similarly to those in the NIU leaf scene, the final


image on the NIU leaf is not as sophisticated as the Getty leaf in terms of overall artistic quality. Also, Jacobs observes that by the time Getty MS.10 was created, artists were interested in depicting naturalistic landscapes. No other comparanda exhibit these techniques, and so it seems that naturalistic tendencies for depicting landscapes appeared more towards the third quarter of the fifteenth-century. The NIU leaf lacks the naturalistic qualities present in Newberry MS.47, Harley MS.2917, and which are observed in Getty MS.10 by Jacobs.

M. Smeyers describes Walters MS.721, a Book of Hours dated to the mid-fifteenth-century (ca. 1450): “This decoration, principally in green, red, and blue, consists of tendrils with acanthus leaves filled with gold dots. It is separated from the text by a double baguette” (fig. 10). With the exception of drolleries featured in the margins, the decoration of the NIU leaf looks very much like Walters MS.721. Furthermore, the form and function of the NIU leaf’s decorated initials are quite comparable to the Walters manuscript: “Initials with three lines or more are in blue or red with white tracery; the center of the letter is filled with foliage and flowers on gold fields....Initials of one or two lines in gold on red and blue fields, also with white tracery, indicate smaller sections within the major texts.” Walters MS.721 so far bares the closest resemblance to the NIU leaf. However there is a significant point of difference: no text is written underneath the full page miniature of the Crucifixion in the Walters manuscript (fol. 86v).

The scribe of MS.865 at the Pierpont Morgan Library, dated to 1425, placed the Crucifixion scene above the same introductory text as did the scribe of the NIU leaf (figs. 11,
Also, the line-endings are very similar in shape, color, and pattern. The decorative border features the same thin, wispy tendrils and gold ivy and acanthus leaves in its foliation. However, the height of the large decorated initial “D” on the Morgan manuscript does not span the entire four lines of text as it does on the NIU leaf. Also, the Morgan miniature’s framed looks stepped, in that the arch does not extend directly to the outermost edges of the frame. Instead, the arch descends and then moves horizontally before meeting the vertical posts of the frame and forming a right angle.

The Pierpont Morgan Library’s MS.293, a Book of Hours dated to 1430, frames the Crucifixion underneath an arch that does extend directly to the vertical posts of the frame (figs. 13, 14). In addition to this similarity to the NIU leaf, the height of the large decorated initial “D” spans the entire four lines of text. Despite these similarities, the Morgan manuscript’s decorated borders are not as similar to the NIU leaf as are the previous Morgan manuscript’s decorated borders (MS.865). The foliation on Morgan MS.293 is busy, tangled, and complex, while the NIU leaf’s is concentrated at four points and lacks the former’s layered quality.

In Harley MS.2971 (fig. 15), produced circa 1450, the miniature scene has a frame similar to Morgan MS.293: The arch extends directly to the vertical posts of the frame, formed from two thin bands of gold and red paint; also both have a floriated U-bar, which connects to the large decorated initial “D.” However, the decorated border of the Harley manuscript looks much more like the NIU leaf with regards to the blue, red, and yellow acanthus leaf formations, which are concentrated towards the corners of the page, and the more systematic wispy tendrils. Also, the decorated initials, smaller painted initials, and line-endings of the Harley manuscript have inlaid pattern similar to those on the NIU leaf. With the exception of
the height of large decorated initial “D” that does not span the height of the five lines of text, Harley MS.2971 seems to bear the closest resemblance to NIU leaf.

Considering the composition of figures in any of the miniature scenes, it is interesting that, in this regard, Morgan MS.743 from 1415 seems most similar to the NIU leaf: Mary and John stand alone on either side of Christ, against a blue background decorated with what appear to be fleurs-de-lis. Beyond Morgan MS.743 and the NIU leaf, the figural compositions of the other comparanda are equally varied. This is in fact due to the various iconographic traditions of depicting scenes of the Crucifixion. Regarding these traditions, it is certain that the Virgin Mary will be present; her actions represent the emotions or practices that the image intends to inspire. For example, a standing Mary might suggest the power of devotion, while a fainting Mary might suggest meditation on the Passion.39

Given that the scenes under consideration in this paper each illustrate a Book of Hours—a text almost exclusively devoted to a relationship with the Virgin Mary—we should not understate the role that Mary’s figure plays in the scene. Emile Mâle writes: “Many works of art testify to the fifteenth century’s devotion to the Seven Sorrows of the Virgin, although this has never been pointed out. [These works], seemingly devoted to Christ, [are] in reality devoted to his mother.” However, considering both that the wealth of the patron determined many factors in the production of any given Book of Hours, certainly the number of figures appearing in any given scene, and that the NIU leaf so far stands on its own with no other images of the Virgin,

without further knowledge we cannot know exactly how this particular pictorial tradition factors into the dating and localizing of the manuscript leaf.

The NIU leaf is certainly consistent with the biblical narrative of the Crucifixion, which tells that at least Mary and John were present. Keeping in mind what Harthan, Wieck, and Muir demonstrate – that in a book made for a wide range of financially able lay patrons, the “extra” visual content of the scenes could vary greatly – what the Crucifixion scenes “look like” probably changed the most in individual fifteenth-century Books of Hours, except of course for the simple fact that Christ and Mary must be present. In this case, the choice to include only Mary, John, and Christ was in all likelihood a matter of economics. So, despite the compositional resemblance to Morgan MS.743, the visual similarities observed between the NIU leaf and Harley MS.2971 fol. 101 demonstrate that the NIU leaf can be securely dated to the mid-fifteenth century, circa 1450.


Above Left
**Figure 1:** Northern Illinois University, Founders Memorial Library, fol. 1r, Book of Hours, France, ca. 1450 – *The Crucifixion*

Above Right
**Figure 2:** Northern Illinois University, Founders Memorial Library, fol. 1v, Book of Hours, France, ca. 1450

Right
**Figure 3:** Baltimore, Walters Art Gallery, MS.276 fol.97, Book of Hours, Paris, 1400-1425 – *The Crucifixion*
Figure 4: New York City, Pierpont Morgan Library MS.743 fol.84v, Book of Hours, Poitiers, ca. 1415 – The Crucifixion, detail

Figure 5: New York City, Pierpont Morgan Library MS.743 fol.84v, Book of Hours, Poitiers, ca. 1415 – The Crucifixion

Figure 6: Los Angeles, J. Paul Getty Museum MS.22 fol.257, Book of Hours, Paris, 1415-1420 – All Saints

Figure 7: Chicago, Newberry Library MS.47, Book of Hours, possibly Tours, 1490 – Arrest of Christ?

Figure 8: London, British Library, Harley MS.2917 fol.111, Book of
**Left**

*Figure 10:* Baltimore, Walters Art Gallery MS.721 fols. 86v-87r, Book of Hours, Bruges, ca. 1450 – The Crucifixion, Absalom’s Death, Finding of the True Cross

**Bottom Left**

*Figure 11:* New York City, Pierpont
Above Left

Figure 13: New York City, Pierpont Morgan Library MS.293 fol.103v, Book of Hours, Besançon, ca. 1430 – The Crucifixion

Above Right

Figure 14: New York City, Pierpont Morgan Library MS.293 fol.103v, Book of Hours, Besançon, ca. 1430 – The Crucifixion, detail

Right

Figure 15: London, The British Library, Harley MS.2971 fol.101, Book of Hours, Paris, mid-15th cent. – The Crucifixion