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Eamon Duffy’s *Marking the Hours: English People and Their Prayers, 1240-1570* is about late medieval readers and their use of Books of Hours. As Duffy explains, Books of Hours (also called primers or horae) were illustrated Latin prayerbooks. Before the introduction of print, Books of Hours were owned primarily by the financially advantaged. According to Duffy, nearly eight hundred manuscript Books of Hours are extant from medieval England. Widespread before the end of the fifteenth century, they increased in popularity as print made them available to a broader audience. Books of Hours fell out of favor in the later sixteenth century, Duffy states, because they "could not long survive as a Protestant devotional tool" (p. 171).

Duffy’s main concern in *Marking the Hours* is to demonstrate how medieval people used their Books of Hours. Scholarly, contemporary interest in the primers has centered on their status as art objects, and most studies of Books of Hours have been conducted by art historians and are concerned with the books’ illustrations. Duffy, in contrast, takes as his central object of investigation the emendations and additions to the books made by their owners. Duffy sets out to articulate the central importance of the primers to late medieval society, and he is particularly interested in the lessons the physical nature of the books can teach us about "interiority" in the period.

*Marking the Hours* offers a useful general history of the nature of medieval Books of Hours. It draws attention to basic elements of the primers, and is particularly helpful on the subject of their affinities with service books for the clergy. Duffy explains that the books were almost always in Latin and that they offered the laity a "slimmed down and simplified share in the Church’s official cycle of daily prayer" (p. 59). He briefly discusses the primers’ contents, outlining the material that generally appeared in the books while at the same time noting that the content varied. *Marking the Hours* also includes numerous illustrations that illustrate primers’ changes over time.

Duffy breaks the ten chapters of *Marking the Hours* into three parts. Part 1 offers an overview of the contents and history of Books of Hours. Part 2 is composed of a chapter in which Duffy argues
against the idea that Books of Hours promoted individualism and selfishness as well as three case studies of primers and their owners. The case studies are those of John Talbot and the Talbot Hours, Edmund Roberts and the Roberts Hours, and Thomas More and his printed Book of Hours. Part 3 explores the changes in Books of Hours before the Reformation, with the introduction of print, and after, with the rise to prominence of Protestantism and religious practices that differed from those from the earlier period.

Parts 1 and 3 will be especially useful to readers who want to know about the basic historical progression of Books of Hours--from luxurious illuminated texts to mass productions with, according to Duffy, generally inferior illustrations, and, finally, to printed editions. Parts 1 and 3 explore the nature of the evidence that Books of Hours can provide. Part 1 states that the primers often included personal information and annotations, including customized references to the owner's name, as well as handwritten additions and marginal comments that ranged from the pious to the secular. Part 3 describes the kinds of deletions and changes that were made to the Catholic Books of Hours after the Reformation. These included elimination of names of popes and saints, for example, and the deletion of prohibited terms such as "purgatory."

Part 2, sandwiched between the more broadly focused sections, is for readers interested in analysis of specific Books of Hours. In part 2, Duffy advances his claim that reading Books of Hours was an "intimate" practice but that that intimacy does not necessarily imply a "regrettable privatising of religion" (p. 97). The reading of primers was part of the communal, mainstream nature of prayer in the later Middle Ages, according to Duffy, and he argues that Books of Hours did not encourage "individuality" but, rather reinforced shared religious ideals. The aim of part 2, then, is to demonstrate how three individual readers used their Books of Hours in this way. For this reason, rather than dealing with the "routine contents" of these primers, the chapters in part 2 look at the "non-standard material which people added to their books" (pp. 67-68).

The first of these case studies is an analysis of the Book of Hours commissioned by John Talbot Earl of Shrewsbury. Talbot was an aristocratic soldier who fought in France, and his Book of Hours reflects his concerns as a military man. In particular, Talbot had prayers added to the book over the course of his lifetime, and these prayers were concerned with safety and salvation. Some of these included prayers to be said on the battlefield. Further, his personal interests, according to Duffy, influenced the primer's inclusion of material related to St. George, who was associated with chivalric deeds and the order of the Garter.

Talbot's Book of Hours was personally commissioned and included portraits of Talbot and his wife. In contrast, Duffy's second case study is a mass-produced manuscript book owned by the Roberts family of Middlesex. Many blank pages were left at the back of the book, and the family filled them with devotional material, and charms in Latin and English. Duffy maintains that these additions suggest the "instrumental" nature of the family's religious interests, and place them in the mainstream of late medieval religious culture and society.

The third study is of Thomas More's Book of Hours. More's is a printed Book of Hours published in 1530 by Regnault. It includes a manuscript prayer composed by More written in at the top and bottom of several pages and a Latin psalter bound at its back, which More had annotated heavily. Duffy finds that the parts of More's book that show the most use are those popular with his contemporaries, such as the Fifteen Oes and the Penitential Psalms. Going on to consider More's manuscript prayer, Duffy concludes that from studying his Book of Hours we can conclude that More's religious understanding was conventional and outward-looking. "More's devotional
instinct moves towards the human condition in general, and to the universally applicable disciplines of the spiritual life" (p. 116). More, then, becomes for Duffy an important example of the way that Books of Hours fit into a religious culture that fostered social consciousness rather than "growing individualism, social anomie, and alienation" (p. 118).

Duffy, part of the growing number of historians revising our picture of the relationship between medieval Catholicism and sixteenth-century Protestantism, sees Books of Hours as important keys to understanding the public and social nature of late medieval religion. He does this very eloquently in *Marking the Hours*. Yet as convincing as he is, Duffy does leave readers with a number of questions. Since, for example, Books of Hours became increasingly popular and more and more people were using the books, how did this change devotional culture? If, as Duffy insists, the move was not toward private interiority, then what was it? How did intense and "intimate" reading of Books of Hours in the later Middle Ages influence people's lives and change the way they thought about religion? Even if it was "social" and "public," as Duffy insists, it seems at least worth considering how the introduction of Books of Hours into devotional life changed things. Similarly, although Duffy mentions that women were frequent owners of Books of Hours, he does not offer an explanation of gender differences in use of the books and his case studies are concerned with two male owners and a family. Finally, Duffy avoids discussion of a subject that seems baffling to modern readers: why were Books of Hours primarily in Latin—even some of the later additions to the primers were in Latin—if they were simplified prayerbooks for lay readers? How might we think about lay literacy in Latin? How much or how little might lay readers have understood? These are all questions that Duffy raises as he investigates the "intimate" nature of the primers in this fascinating and beautifully illustrated book.
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