

The Book of Hours, Ms. Czart. 2944 – Workshop of the Master of the Rouen Echevinage

Summary

The manuscript of *The Book of Hours*, stored at the Princes Czartoryski Library in Krakow under cat. no. Ms. Czart. 2944, is a typical example of works of the Rouen artistic circle at the close of the Middle Ages. The codex was probably made for some representatives of the middle class bearing the names: Nicolas and Pierrette, depicted on pages 155 and 157 as the worshippers of Saint Nicolas and Saint Peter. According to tradition, in the 16th century the manuscript belonged to William de Nassau, Prince of Orange. Based on the entry made on the first page of the codex by Izabela Czartoryska in 1812, the prayer book was stored in the Gothic House in Puławy.

It was to be used in the diocese of Rouen, which is signified by the content of the calendar, the text of the *Hours* and a litany with calls for local bishop saints – Mellon, Roman and Audoeine. The same as the content of the manuscript, the style of the painting decoration of Ms. Czart. 2944 is also an evidence that the codex was made in the capital of Normandy. Rouen's leading illuminator in the latter half of the 15th century was a painter today known as the Master of the Rouen Echevinage (Maître de l'Echevinage de Rouen). His style is characterised by little, pale and stiff figures with large, round eyes, highlighted with grey shadows. Landscapes are symbolic, reduced to the most basic elements with geometricised shapes. The Master's palette consists of non-transparent, as if matt colours, with a clear predominance of cool shades. Intense colours, with prevailing light blue, pink, green and olive brown, are highlighted with the use of gold hatching. Based on the comparison of the decoration style of the Ms. Czart. 2944 manuscript with the works of the Master of the Rouen Echevinage, a conclusion can be drawn that the prayer book from the Princes Czartoryski collection was made in his workshop. It is confirmed by the analysis of the iconography of miniatures featured in the codex. Krakow's *Book of Hours* contains a lot of compositions bearing resemblance to the solutions used in the workshop of that Master. One of the most typical images is *The Adoration of the Baby Jesus* (Ms. Czart. 2944, p. 101), which shares similarities with numerous *Livres d'heures* dated to around 1470, made in the atelier of the same illuminator.

Since the manuscript is certainly the work of the Master of the Rouen Echevinage workshop, it must have been made sometime between the 1460s and 1480s, when the above-mentioned Master was active. In the decoration of the margins of Ms. Czart. 2944 one can find the beginnings of the motif which became widespread in the last quarter of the century, that is the division of bordures into geometric fields with a light or golden background (Ms. Czart. 2944 pp. 193, 205). It seems that around 1470 the workshop of the Master of the Rouen Echevinage began to adopt new solutions, such as the initials made up of acanthus leaves (found in Ms. 12 in the Rothschild art collection in Waddesdon Manor, around 1470; not present in Ms. Czart.) or the bordures with geometric divisions. *The Book of Hours* from the Princes Czartoryski collection probably dates back to the same time. More precise dating is unfortunately impossible due to the lack of a manuscript bearing a specific year that could be used as a point of reference.

Krakow's prayer book is an example of numerous codices decorated by the workshop of the Master of the Rouen Echevinage, which have been preserved to this day. That artist had many followers who imitated his style and compositions in a more or less competent way. The character of the manuscript from the Princes Czartoryski Library is close to the work of the Master himself; however, due to quite strong style stereotypization, it's difficult to draw authoritative and final conclusions. Without doubt, Ms. Czart. 2944 serves as an excellent example of the Rouen book painting, whose specific, homogenous character at the close of the Middle Ages resulted from the thriving activity of the imitators of the Master of the Rouen Echevinage.