

International Conference

Bound for Devotion: The Prayer Book as Object and Practice, 1300–1800

1-3 July 2026



Detail from *Getijden van onser liever vrouwen* (Paris: Wolfgang Hopyl, 10 September 1500), Brussels, KBR, INC A 2.188 (RP)

Prayer was central to religious life in the late medieval and early modern period. Despite growing scholarly interest in religious texts, devotional practices, and spirituality, prayer and prayer books remain comparatively understudied. Prayer could take on a multitude of forms and occur in a range of spaces, from public to secluded and private; from monastic, liturgical prayer to short, indulgenced invocations and meditative prayers that evoked a rich scale of emotions and mental images.

To pray, devotees – whether clerical or lay – often took a book to hand. Prayer books played a vital role during many moments in a person’s life in the performance of prayer and prayer-related practices. While the act of prayer is inherently transient, the books held or touched by late medieval and early modern devotees form codified and material evidence of the practices in which they engaged. Still extant in large numbers and containing a vast variety of textual and visual materials, these books – through both content and appearance – reflect the diversity of prayer practices as well as developments in book production. Taking the book as the central artefact for the study of prayer allows for an analysis that encompasses all aspects and components of prayer books, along with the actors involved in their production and use. This, in turn, enables us to chart the ‘cultural ecosystem’ in which prayer books were produced, circulated, and used.

This three-day international conference, hosted at Leiden University by the [PRAYER](#) project (ERC Starting Grant), with keynotes by Walter S. Melion (Emory University) and Kathryn M. Rudy (University of St Andrews), aims to bring together researchers working on books that were (intended to be) used in any form of prayer practice in the late medieval and early modern era (up to the eighteenth century). This conference aims to shed new light on prayer across late medieval and early modern Europe by exploring the broader ecosystem of prayer books. This includes a wide range of interactions between the material book, texts and images disseminated through it (and their connections to other types of objects, such as rosaries, small pipe clay figures, and single-sheet prints), the devotions inspired by these texts and images, the producers and buyers/readers of the books, and the communities they belonged to.



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Programme

Wednesday 1 July

Location: **Leiden University Library & Herta Mohr Building**

- 09:00 – 09:30 Registration & Welcome Coffee
- 09:30 – 09:45 Opening Remarks
- 09:45 – 10:45 **Keynote Lecture: Walter S. Melion (Emory University) - Reflecting on Prayer in the *Passio domini nostri* (1523) of Alardus van Amsterdam and Jacob Cornelisz van Oostanen**
- 10:45 – 11:15 Coffee break (Faculty club)
- 11:15 – 12:45 **Session 1: The Multifunctionality of Prayer and Prayer Books: Narrative, Play, and Identity**
Chair: Sean Vrieland (University of Copenhagen)
Björn Klaus Buschbeck (Zurich University) - Storytelling and Prayer in Late Medieval Scroll Manuscripts: The Case of Colmar, Les Dominicains, Ms 832
Daniel Swift (Northeastern University London) - The Players and the Prayer Book: The Book of Common Prayer on stage in early modern London
Marco Sergio Narducci (Università di Torino) - Prayer Books and Civic Identity under Siege: Turin 1706
- 12:45 – 14:00 Lunch break (lunch for speakers at Pakhuis, Doelensteeg 8, 2311 VL Leiden)
- 14:00 – 15:30 **Parallel Session 2A: Text & Image in Prayer Books**
Chair: Lieke Smits (Leiden University)
Tilleane Charavel (University of Lausanne) - Exploring the Temporalities of Philip the Good's Breviaries ad usum Parisiorum pars hiemalis and pars aestivalis (Royal Library of Belgium, mss. 511 and 9026)

Jakov Đorđević (University of Belgrade) - To Hell and Back Again: An Unexpected Journey through Words and Images of the Office of the Dead in the Très Riches Heures

Eleanor Jackson (York Art Gallery) - The Wounded Good Shepherd in 15th-century Prayer Books

Parallel Session 2B: Lifecycles of Books

Chair: Renske Hoff (Utrecht University)

Laura Katrine Skinnebach (Aarhus University) - Distressed Skin. The Practice of Post-Reformation Deletion in Medieval Prayer Books

Evelyne Verheggen (Independent Scholar/Ruusbroec Institute Antwerp) - The Dutch Book of Hours after the Reformation in the Dutch Republic, first half of the seventeenth century

Alicia Montoya (Radboud University) and Simon Burrows (Western Sydney University) - Two bestselling eighteenth-century French prayerbooks: An initial bibliographic survey

15:30 – 16:00

Coffee break (Faculty club)

16:00 – 17:00

Session 3: Space & Prayer

Chair: Thor-Oona Pignarre-Altermatt (UCLouvain)

Marianne Ritsema van Eck (VU Amsterdam) - Expanding the ecosystem of prayer: from sacred mountains to prayer books and vice versa

Stefaniia Demchuk (Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv) - Prayer in the Garden of the Soul in early modern Lviv: The Boim Chapel and the Hortulus Animae polonice (1513)

Marta Battisti (UCLouvain) - Prayer Books and Sacred Steps: A Material, Textual, and Sensory Approach to Holy Staircase Devotion in Early Modern Rome

Thursday 2 July

Location: **Leiden University Library & KB, National Library of the Netherlands (The Hague)**

09:00 – 09:15 Coffee

09:15 – 10:45 **Session 4: Social and Medical function(s) of Prayer**

Chair: Walter S. Melion (Emory University)

Cynthia Turner Camp (University of Georgia) - Praying in (War)Time: The Suffrages in William Porter's Prayerbook

Barbara Müller and Niklas Voltmann (University of Hamburg) - Prayer Books as Instruments for Dealing with Death and Dying. The Example of the Late Medieval Prayer Books from the Hamburg Convent near St. Jacob's Church

Daniel Bennett Page (Independent researcher) - Queen Mary I's Manual of Healing Prayers

10:45 – 11:15 Coffee break

11:15 – 12:45 **Parallel Session 5A: Hybrid prayer books**

Chair: Youri Desplenter (Ghent University)

Jeske van Dongen (Radboud University Nijmegen) - Prayer in Late Medieval Dutch Songbooks

Thor-Oona Pignarre-Altermatt (UCLouvain) - Hybrid Prayer Books: The Rosary of St. Anne across Print and Manuscript

Francesco Mele (Pegaso University Rome) - Images in Prayer: The Vita Christi Engravings in a Rosary Book from the Early 16th Century

Parallel Session 5B: Animation, Interaction and Performance

Chair: Karl Enenkel (Universität Münster)

Elizabeth Sandoval (Williams College) - The Book as Soul: Animated Codices in Margaret of York's Fifteenth-Century Apocalypse Manuscript

Clara Humrich (Universität zu Köln) - (Un)Dressing for Devotion

Carolin Gluchowski (University of Hamburg) - Cradling Christ: Illuminated Prayer Books from the Benedictine Convent of Neukloster Buxtehude

- 12:45 – 14:30 Lunch break / travel to The Hague
- 14:30 – 15:30 **Production and Methodologies Panel I (KB Atelier)**
Chair: Carolin Gluchowski (University of Hamburg)
Suzan Folkerts (Athenaeumbibliothek Deventer) - Made in Deventer? Geert Grote's Book of Hours and the Production of Prayer Books in the IJssel region
Eyal Poleg (Queen Mary University of London) - Unfolding the Materiality of Devotional: New Technologies in the Study of Prayer Books
Parallel: Special Collections session I (Groot & Klein Colloquium)
Anne Margreet As-Vijvers (RKD – Netherlands Institute for Art History) - Online Records and Physical Manuscripts: Introduction to the Byvanck Database of Dutch Manuscript Illumination, and Viewing Session of Illuminated Manuscripts
- 15:30 – 15:45 Short break
- 15:45 – 16:45 **Production and Methodologies Panel II (KB Atelier)**
Chair: Carolin Gluchowski (University of Hamburg)
M. Jakubek-Raczkowska, J. Raczkowski, M. Czyżak (Uniwersytet Mikołaja Kopernika w Toruniu) - Netherlandish Prayer Books as Serial-Produced Artefacts: a Case Study of a Set of Manuscripts from the University Library in Toruń
Noam Lefler (Queen Mary University of London) - Erasures as Evidence: A Material-Analytical Approach to Erasures in Devotional Codices
Parallel: Special Collections session II (Klein Colloquium)
PRAYER-project - Viewing session with manuscript and early printed prayer books
- 17:00 – 18:00 **Keynote and Public Lecture: Kathryn M. Rudy (University of St Andrews)** - How Lay Book Owners Handled Devotional Manuscripts in Europe, 1300-1550

Friday 3 July

Location: **Leiden University Library & Herta Mohr Building**

09:00 – 09:30

Coffee

09:30 – 11:00

Parallel Session 6A: Books of Hours in Canada

Chair: Irene O'Daly (Leiden University)

Dorothea Kullmann and Alison May-Kosiewski (University of Toronto) - The database “Books of Hours in Canada” and the definition of the genre

Brianna Daigneault (University of Toronto) - Prayer Fragments: Trials and Triumphs of Studying Fragments of Books of Hours

Devon Sherwood (University of Toronto) - “*Il alegera et soulagera des peines de purgatoir*”: Variations in Indulgences in Four Fifteenth-Century Books of Hours

Loula Abd-elrazak (University of Toronto) - “Ave corpus incarnatum” in York University MS 27: A Eucharistic Hymn within a Devotional Cluster

Parallel Session 6B: Between Private and Communal

Chair: Irene Van Eldere (Leiden University)

Dafna Nissim (Ben-Gurion University of the Negev) - At the Empty Altar: Personal Devotion and Princely Authority in Philip the Good's Hours

Wybren Scheepsma (Leiden University) - Regular Canonesses of Maaseik and ms. Leiden BPL 2145

Clarck Drieshen (Independent Scholar) - New Insights into the Prayer Culture of the St Agnes Convent in Arnhem

11:00 – 11:30

Coffee Break

11:30 – 12:45

Session 7: Translation and Adaptation

Chair: Anna Dlabacova (Leiden University)

Youri Desplenter (Ghent University) - Not (only) by Geert Grote Middle Dutch Books of Hours from the southern part of the Low Countries

Kateřina Voleková (Charles University Prague) - The Fifteen Oes and Their Czech Adaptations

	Sean Vrieland (University of Copenhagen) - Vernacular Prayer in Late Medieval Denmark
12:45 – 14:00	Lunch break (lunch for speakers at Pakhuis, Doelensteeg 8, 2311 VL Leiden)
14:15 – 15:45	Session 8: Materiality of and beyond Prayer Books Chair: Alicia Montoya (Radboud University) Veronika Sladká (The Czech Academy of Sciences Library) - Preparing the Heart: Material Culture and Prayer Practice in Unity of Brethren Hymnals Iliana Kandzha (University of Copenhagen) - Customising Prayer Practices in Late Medieval Denmark Katelin Marit Parsons (University of Iceland / Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies) - Something Old and Something New: The Prayer Book of Helga Sigurðardóttir
15:45 – 16:15	Coffee Break
16:15 – 17:30	Closing Discussion
18:30	Reception and Dinner for speakers