

The production of a highly desirable artist favored by European royalty, this work boasts an abundance of noble associations, with a small but dazzling decorative program to match. The delicate pink-tinged molding of the figures, the presence of decorative putti and birds, and the exuberant borders make this the unmistakable work of Francesco di Antonio del Chierico, a precociously talented illuminator and goldsmith working in Florence during the height of its golden age. Chierico received major commissions from the time he was in his early twenties, counting among his patrons Cosimo, Piero, and Lorenzo de' Medici, as well as Federico da Montefeltro, Duke of Urbino, who constructed one of the greatest libraries of the Italian Renaissance. With the help and connections of the bookseller Vespasian Bisticci, Chierico's fame spread quickly throughout Italy and into neighboring countries. Other known patrons included the King of Naples (Alfonso of Aragon), King Mattias Corvinus of Hungary, and King Louis XI of France, among others. Thus, it is hardly surprising that while the script, decorative patterns, and illustrations all indicate that this Book of Hours was executed in Florence, the rest of its known provenance is French. Although this work contains no obvious clues that might indicate the identity of the original patron, other markings reveal its distinguished ownership history, beginning in the early 18th century. The first known owner, the (especially fertile) Duchesse de Berry, was born at Versailles and lived a short but scandalous life, having incurred no fewer than six pregnancies by various men at the time of her death at 23. Later, our manuscript fell into the possession of Louis-Joseph de Bourbon, Prince de Condé, a staunch supporter of the monarchy who barely escaped the Reign of Terror and the fate of his less fortunate Bourbon relatives. Even without the knowledge of its lofty provenance or the reputation of the artist, one can plainly see the high level of aesthetic achievement here in the impeccable application of paint in the intricate borders, the beautifully convincing depiction of human and angelic bodies, and the faultless balance in design and color. Installed in some of the most prestigious collections in the world, including the British Library, the Getty, the Walters, etc., Chierico's work continues to be vigorously collected.