

Quest for the origin of a beautiful illumination



'Our' illumination shows a player on his knees whilst putting a ball into a hole and a man aiming at the ball beside him. In the background, a player is making a full swing. On the continent, golf did not exist at the beginning of the 16th century, so we have to search in the Low Countries, i.e. the Netherlands and Flanders, where people played the games of colf and crosse.

The first mention of this illumination I came across is in 'Golf Illustrated & Outdoor America', August 1915, where chief editor Max Behr wrote the article 'The other Golf Book of Hours'. He contributed the illumination to the 'Horae B.V.M. ad usum Romanum, cum Calendario'. Behr gave the following caption: "Page from a Book of Hours written and illuminated by a Flemish artist about 1510. It represents, outside of the above illustration (N.B. From the 'Golf Book of Hours'), the only other picture of early continental golf and has an important bearing upon the history of the game. By courtesy of E.P. Dutton & Company."

I found these Hours in Gallica, the digital library of the Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF). The BnF attributed the book to Simon Bening, also the artist of the 'Golf Book of Hours' (British Library). The BnF dated the Hours of Charles V between 1510 and 1525.

Some illustrations represent daily life, but there is no trace of people playing a game with a stick and a ball.

The second reference I saw was the full-colour illumination in 'Golf through the ages: 600 years of golfing art' (2004) by Michael Flannery & Richard Leech. They contributed the illustration to the 'Hours of Charles V'.

Information on Wikipedia says that the workshop of Jean Poyer in Paris possibly produced the Hours in the late 15th or early 16th century. A 17th-century note in the book indicates that Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor, owned it. The book was not made for Charles, but he acquired it from an anonymous donor.

According to Wikipedia, the Hours of Charles V, the 'Libro de Horas de Carlos V', were retrieved in May 2024 by the Biblioteca Digital Hispánica, who published it on its site in its entirety. The Biblioteca has doubts about its age and mentions '1500?'. The same goes for its origin: '[Paris]'.

This beautiful book, lavishly illustrated with pious, cruel and warlike

illuminations, contains no picture of stick and ball players.

So there must be at least one other book of hours with the same name.

And bingo! In 2021, Christie's had the 'Hours of Charles V' for sale and contributed it to the workshop of Gerard Horenbout (Ghent, c.1515). The book contains many scenes of daily life, under which series of children's games.

Christie's sold the book with the following teaser:

"A book of exquisite miniatures and figurative borders associated with the court painter Gerard Horenbout of Ghent, and adapted with the motto of the Emperor Charles V; the entrancing scenes of daily life include one of the earliest representations of the game of **golf**."

In April 2021, the price realised at Christie's was USD 870,000, slightly (!) more than the estimated USD 500,000 – USD 800,000.