

**Saint Helena, from the Knyvett Hours**  
**England, East Anglia?**  
**Last quarter 14<sup>th</sup> century (before 1381?)**



20 x 13.5 cm; ink, pigments and gilding on vellum. Miniature: St. Helena surrounded by a four-sided border with ivy leaves in burnished gold and colours; two coats-of-arms in the outer corners of the frame. The verso ruled in purple ink for 23 lines, twelve of which are filled in (see fig. 1). Text in brown and red ink, Gothic textura script in two sizes with a two-line ornamental initial in blue, red, white and gold, surrounded by a three-sided border with an escutcheon. Few smudges and some very minor flaking in places, some oxidation to the silver, discolouring the vellum from use, lower escutcheon overpainted in red early in its history, otherwise in excellent condition.

*Provenance*

Thought to have been illuminated for the Knyvett family of East Anglia, perhaps John Knyvett of Winwick (c. 1322-1381);

The parent volume later inscribed ‘Thys is mistrys marys boke. G.’ and ‘Marset Alouf’; it has been suggested that Marset was the daughter of John Alouf, a member of Henry VI's court who received lands in 1438 in recognition of 28 years of service to the king; In the early sixteenth century the manuscript was rebound by Gerard Pilgrim (d.1536) of Oxford; Thomas Boycott (his bookplate, dated 1761), thence by descent until sold by: Mrs Wight-Boycott of Rudge Hall, Pattingham, Wolverhampton, Sotheby's, 3–5 June 1918, lot 259, bought by; Quaritch Ltd., offered as item 56 in Catalogue 1931, when the book still had 32 miniatures; Later in his Catalogue 478, 1933, item 3; With H. P Kraus, New York by March 1941; Rudolf Wien, New York, acquired from the above, a dealer who evidently broke up the book; Several leaves from the volume were sold anonymously at Sotheby's, 9 February 1948, lots 215 and 216. Five miniatures went back to: H.P. Kraus, who offered the present leaf in his catalogue 80 (1956) as item 16c together with three other miniatures from the Knyvett Hours; European private collection

This astonishing miniature, which shows Saint Helena standing at full length with her right hand supporting a large wooden cross (an attribute that symbolizes her discovery of the three crosses on which Christ and the two thieves were crucified at Golgotha), comes from a lavish Book of Hours thought to have been illuminated for a prominent member of the Knyvett family of East Anglia in the last quarter of the fourteenth century. Among the miniature's most striking features is the large amount of space allocated to the dazzling design of floor tiles beneath Helena's feet. All of the surviving miniatures from the parent manuscript are decorated in this way, though their designs vary and not all take the form of a diapered pattern. Parallels for this form of decoration can be found among the bold tessellated backgrounds in two manuscripts of Guillaume de Deguilleville by the same illuminator (New York Public Library, Spencer MS.19, and Bodleian Library, Laud, Misc.740, perhaps produced in Lincolnshire<sup>1</sup>), and in an alchemical manuscript compiled for Richard II in 1391 (Bodleian Library, MS.Bodley 581<sup>2</sup>), but no convincing comparison has yet been made between the miniatures of this manuscript and any other.

The parent manuscript from which this leaf was cut originally had 32 such miniatures, each of which was painted full-page and depicts a standing saint or a scene from the Lives of Christ and the Virgin, including an apparently unique series of six devoted to Saint Mary Magdalene. Other features that are rare or unique among English Books of Hours are the inclusion of the Penitential Psalms in rhyming French verse (in addition to the Penitential Psalms in Latin), and the presence of very unusual verses in French before some of the Suffrages. Other miniatures from the manuscript are preserved in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (figs. 2-3), the Ringling Museum, Sarasota, (nos.730-1), and in a number of European and American collections.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Otto Pächt and Jonathan J. G. Alexander, *Illuminated manuscripts in the Bodleian Library*, Oxford, 1966-73, Vol. III, pl.lxxxviii, 925a-b.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., no.673, pl.lxx.

<sup>3</sup> For a full breakdown of the location of the known miniatures see Peter Kidd, *The McCarthy Collection, Vol. II: Spanish, English, Flemish and Central European Miniatures*, London, 2019, pp. 91-92.

Although none of the heraldry appears to relate to the Knyvett family of East Anglia, several of the manuscript's borders incorporate the letters 'k', 'n', 'e', 'y', 'f', and 't' – usually in that order – which point strongly to their patronage. Peter Kidd has recently drawn attention to the red heraldic shields visible in several of the miniatures including ours, suggesting that they may be overpainted versions of the Knyvett arms.<sup>4</sup>

*Published*

Bernard Quaritch, *A Catalogue of Illuminated and Other Manuscripts* [...]. London 1931, no. 56 (still in the manuscript).

Hans Peter Kraus, *The Eightieth Catalogue: Remarkable Manuscripts, Books and Maps from the IX<sup>th</sup> to the XVIII<sup>th</sup> Century*. New York 1956, no. 16c.

Peter Kidd, *The McCarthy Collection, Vol. II: Spanish, English, Flemish and Central European Miniatures*, London, 2019, no. 18 pp. 91-98.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 96.





Fig. 1  
Verso of the present leaf





Fig. 1  
 Saint Martin, from the Knyvett Hours  
 England, East Anglia?  
 Before 1381  
 20.32 x 14 cm; ink, pigments and gold leaf on vellum  
 Los Angeles Country Museum of Art, inv. M.74.100.3a



Fig. 2  
Saint Andrew, from the Knyvett Hours  
England, East Anglia?  
Before 1381  
20.32 x 14 cm; ink, pigments and gold leaf on vellum  
Los Angeles Country Museum of Art, inv. M.74.100.2b