
The Flemish Book of Hours

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The Flemish Book of Hours is sometimes called the Book of Golf because it is thought to contain the earliest known illustration of golf. Not only does it depict golf as a peasant pastime, but also it includes additional evidence of sport for both peasants and nobility. Indeed, the importance of the Flemish Book of Hours in sport history is its documentation of the sharp contrast in sport for the social groups of the early sixteenth century.

The art of illumination developed over many centuries and reached its peak in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The Flemish Book of Hours, 4½" x 3¼", is attributed to Simon Bening or Bening, a Bruges miniaturist, renowned for his coloring. The Manuscript is dated about 1530 during the height of Flemish illumination. Books of Hours vary in content but usually include one lesson from each of the four gospels, prayers to the Virgin, a

variety of short services, and a calendar. The calendar in the Flemish Book of Hours contains 18 leaves which portray sport, games, and pastimes of the noblemen and peasants. For each month there is a calendar on the left hand leaf and an appropriate scene on the right hand leaf. At the foot of each page is a horizontal panel portraying sport and pastimes for the nobility.

The sports for the nobility include hawking, hunting, boating and riding. In addition one tournament scene depicts both the joust and the behourd. The peasants appear in 17 scenes, the main themes of which are hunting, children's games, and sports such as golf, a ball-and-bat game, and bowling. The September border is the famous "first" illustration of golf. Perhaps the most interesting picture in terms of contrasting social groups is the tournament scene, in which the nobles are shown in the joust and the behourd and the peasants on hobby horses with toy lances. The Flemish Book of Hours is a rich source of early sixteenth century sport for peasants and the nobility.
