A fifteenth century prayer book for nuns is now available from the medieval manuscript collections of the Special Collections and Rare Books Department of University Libraries at Western Michigan University (WMU). This high-resolution version employs color management to assist researchers.

Obrecht Manuscript 23 is the first fully digitized medieval manuscript codex from the Dom Edmond Obrecht Collection of Gethsemani Abbey. The manuscript in Latin and German is among the Cistercian manuscripts and rare books dating from the twelfth century which are held on permanent loan in the Special Collections and Rare Books Department on behalf of the Center for Cistercian and Monastic Studies (CCMS), which is affiliated with the Medieval Institute. The manuscript, part of the Cistercian Studies Collection, was digitized by the WMU Libraries Digitization Center and a descriptive metadata structure was designed by Technical Services. The images are now available online at http://luna.library.wmich.edu:8180/luna/servlet/s/cdi944. This online Medieval Document Collection contains several other early manuscripts. The digitized format allows users to click through pages, interact with metadata using searchable fields and open the text in a variety of views.

The 760-page manuscript was produced in the fifteenth or sixteenth century by Cistercian nuns in the monastery of Medingen, near Lüneberg in Northern Germany and is one of a number of bilingual, Latin and Eastfalian, manuscripts written there which are currently dispersed around the world. An additional example of the Medingen manuscripts, Ms. lat. 395, can be viewed on Harvard’s website. Obrecht Manuscript 23 includes meditations and prayers derived from liturgical texts for the Easter season and features examples of medieval manuscript illustration with pen-flourished initials in various colors.
Digitized at a high resolution to reveal as much detail as possible, the work is now available to researchers in other parts of the world and preserved for future generations. Obrecht Manuscript 23 was given priority in a long-range plan to digitize the manuscripts of the collection after Dr. Henrike Lähnemann, Chair of German Studies at Newcastle University (UK) contacted WMU about the manuscript in conjunction with her efforts to locate surviving bilingual texts from the Medingen monastery library, which she has made available at http://research.ncl.ac.uk/medingen/public.extern/. Other items in the Obrecht collection may be digitized in the future.

High quality digitization, full service planning, imaging and hosting was done in-house for this manuscript and is available to the University through the WMU Digitization Center within Waldo Library. Starting from manuscripts to artwork, the Digitization Center has the capacity for both 2-D and 3-D projects with balanced color and lighting. The Luna System, an image database system, provides enhanced viewing options and comprehensive metadata for easy research through a nice user interface. Custom digitization projects are available for the community, University, businesses and private.

For further information, contact Dr. Sue Steuer in the Department of Special Collections and Rare Books at lib-rbr@wmich.edu or (269) 387-5221. Paul Howell in the Digitization Center is available at (269) 387-4776.