

**Rule of Saint Augustine, adapted for nuns; Constitutions of the sisters of Santa Monica in Florence of the Order of Saint Augustine and the Holy Spirit
In Italian with some Latin, illuminated manuscript on parchment
Italy, Florence, c. 1475-1500**

i + 29 + i folios on parchment (traces of significant script erasures on ff. 5, 6v, 10v, 12v-13, 19, 21, 22v, 24v, and 27 suggest these leaves are palimpsests), contemporary foliation in Roman numerals, upper rectos, I-XXVI, with the first leaf unfoliated and the final two leaves foliated in modern pencil, upper outer rectos, 27-28, complete (collation, i¹⁰ [+1, unfoliated singleton tipped in at the front of the quire] ii¹⁰ iii⁸), horizontal catchwords for quires i and ii, lower verso, ruled in pale brown ink with full-length vertical bounding lines, prickings visible in the outer and lower margins (justification, 137-138 x 86-87 mm.), written in a careful Gothic Rotunda script on twenty-five long lines, red rubrics, one-line blue paraphs, two-line initials of red or blue with contrasting pen decorations of purple or red, three-line blue initial with red pen decoration (f. 7), five-line blue initial with red pen decoration (f. 1), FULL-PAGE ILLUMINATED MINIATURE on the verso of the first unfoliated leaf, corrections and additions to the text, with overwriting where the original script has faded, marginal annotation in at least three later hands, one of which has made substantial additions on ff. 27v-28, slight soiling and staining in the margins and wear to the outer edges of f. 29, some fading and flaking away at the bottom of the miniature. Bound in restored, roughly contemporary binding of dark brown leather, blind-tooled with triple-fillet frame along outer edge and three concentric double-fillet rectangles within it, blind-stamped with foliate designs, rosettes, and, in the center, a IHS monogram within an oval (unusually, with the S backwards), all over beveled wooden boards, spine with three raised bands, two restored brass fore-edge clasps, front to back, green ribbon bookmark terminating in a sizable knot, extending from top to bottom, bookplate on the front pastedown, slight wear to the spine and worming on the lower board. Dimensions 213 x 143 mm.

Economy and luxury collide in this fine copy of the Augustinian Rule, recorded on reused parchment (palimpsests) and including also the only known copy of the Constitutions for the Convent of Santa Monica in Florence. A beautifully illuminated frontispiece depicts the community receiving the Rule, while the two texts, corrected and annotated by the nuns, allow us rare and informative glimpses into the lives of these women in Renaissance Florence.

PROVENANCE

1. Evidence of script and decoration suggest that this book was produced late in the fifteenth century, c. 1475-1500, in Florence, most likely at the Convent of Santa Monica. The decorated initials in this manuscript bear comparison to those in two Florentine manuscripts produced in the final third of the fifteenth century: Florence, Biblioteca del Convento di San Marco, MS 540, produced c. 1475 (Garzelli, ed., 1985, p. 387, no. 665) and Già Collezione De Marinis di Firenze, MS 261, produced c. 1468-69 (Garzelli, ed., 1985, p. 359, no. 622).

This book appears to have been constructed in part from previously used materials, as a number of the leaves within the book appear to be palimpsests (see above). These and other leaves also bear traces of folding in their outer margins, which also point to reuse. Though most of the underwriting is difficult to make out, closer examination may indicate the sources of some of the reused leaves and could shed further light on the circumstances in which this manuscript was produced.

The Convent of Santa Monica in Florence was founded in 1442, after Augustinian nuns of Castiglion Fiorentino were forced to take refuge in Florence on account of fighting between Florence and Milan, part of the Wars in Lombardy. Their new convent, dedicated to Monica, mother of Augustine, was founded in 1442 with the patronage of Ubertino di Andrea dei Bardi and by the license of Pope Eugene IV (*sedit* 1431-1447). Bardi's testament of 1447 left 500 florins for the completion of the convent building, which went into construction in 1447 with the patronage of the aristocratic Florentine Capponi family.

2. There is plentiful evidence that this book was used by sisters in the convent. Corrections were added in at least one different ink to update the Constitutions, and multiple hands annotated the Constitutions. One of the annotators (see f. 21v) copied the table of contents that follows the Constitutions (f. 27v), while another hand, writing in distinctive capitals, left annotations throughout the Constitutions and the added table of contents. For the most part, these annotations identify topics being touched upon within particular passages. In one case, an annotator bracketed the beginning of a chapter of the Constitutions covering manual work – a topic that does not appear in contemporary Florentine Constitutions from a neighboring convent (see Text section below) – and added, “Nolite negligere [Do not neglect]” (f. 22). This is a particularly interesting in light of the importance of manual labor to the nuns' livelihood.
3. Belonged to Piero Ginori Conti (1865-1939), Prince of Trevignano, an Italian politician and businessman as well as a scholar and collector; his bookplate on the front pastedown bearing his name, arms, and motto, “Quid pulchris lumine trino?”
4. Private European Collection.

TEXT

unfoliated leaf, recto, blank but for pen trials;

ff. 1-7, *IN comincia la regola di sancto agustino uescouo In uolgare. Lasciatone certi capitoli non necessarij alle suore et trasmutato il nome del frate in suora etc.*, incipit, “Innançi a tutte le chose Suore karissime Sua amato iddio et poi il proximo ... che siete poste nel munistero”; f. 1, *Capitolo primo delle unita delle uoluntidi et chomunita delle chose*, incipit, “IN prima in pero che ssiete in uno raghunate chomandiamo ... e nella temptatione non sia abandonata. Amen. *Chonpiuta La regola del nostro padre messer santo agostino ueschouo meno alchuni capitoli non necessarij alle suore. Amen*”;

The Rule of Saint Augustine, adapted from the Rule for Augustinian friars for the use of Augustinian nuns. This Rule contains twenty-three chapters dictating, among other things, who may enter the convent, what the sisters may wear and how it should be washed, what concessions should be made in diet and recreation for nuns who are sick or otherwise infirm, what reverence is owed the Abbess of the convent, and how often the Rule itself should be read. The Rule here closely follows that printed by Mattioli (1901, pp. 132-141).

ff. 7-27, *Queste sono le chonstitutioni delle suore di sancta monicha di firence dellordine di sancto agostino et sancto spirito*, incipit, “COnciosia chosa che per comandamento della reghola del nostro padre messer

sancto agostino ... quelle sara chiaramente manifesto"; f. 8, *Capitolo primo dellufficio diuino*, incipit, "Perche lonor di dio debbe andare inanci ... per lo suo amore el quale vidia dicio la gratia. Amen";

The Constitutions of the Convent of Santa Monica in Florence. The twenty chapters of the Constitutions relate to the sisters' lives in their convent and touch upon such topics as obligations to say the Divine Office, the Office said by lay nuns or *conversi*, confession, silence in the cell, manual work, the profession of novices, sins of various degrees, and the election of the Abbess.

Though there are differences throughout, these Constitutions bear a marked resemblance to those found in the Constitutions for the Augustinian Convent of Santa Elisabetta in Florence (Mattioli, ed., 1901, pp. 142-163). Santa Elisabetta was founded over a century earlier than Santa Monica, around 1330. The two convents were built quite close to each other, so it is quite likely that they were in contact and that Santa Elisabetta's Constitutions might have supplied at least a partial model for those of Santa Monica. Some chapters appear to be nearly identical (chapters 6 and 7 in each, for example) and many vary only slightly in wording. The order of the first four chapters of these two Constitutions, however, differs, and a number of roughly corresponding chapters are significantly longer in the present manuscript. Four chapters in the Santa Elisabetta Constitutions are not found in our manuscript; the chapter on manual labor, on the other hand, is found only in our manuscript. This chapter merits closer examination in light of the fact that, as in many urban convents during the Italian Renaissance, the nuns of Santa Monica supported themselves in part through commercial activity. Spinning gold thread was a specialty of the convent, and by the early sixteenth century the nuns supplied the Medici court directly (see Strocchia, 2009).

f. 27v, incipit, "Prohemio delle presente constitutione a C[om...?] 7. Capitolo primo. Del ufficio diuino 8 ... 20. Del Electione del Abbatissa xxvj";

Table of contents for the Constitutions, added in a later hand.

f. 27v, incipit, "Queste Diffinitioni è constitutioni è regole sono ordinate non per che solamente il confessor le legghi, studij, predichi, abreuji, s[umm?]j, uolti è riuolui è su di in ricordarle ora per le siero osseruate dalle Monache è cosi uiuino con uno ordine medesimo è non à aria è a modo suo, che per che doue non è ordine è confusione";

A brief observation, added in a later hand, regarding the ordering of the Rule and Constitutions and its value.

f. 28, incipit, "Deus uirtutum cuius est totum quod est optimum ... ac pietatis studio que sunt nutrita custodias. per christum dominum nostrum. Amen"; [f. 28v blank but ruled].

Latin prayer, added in a later hand.

This manuscript contains the Rule of the Augustinian Order, translated into Italian and adapted for Augustinian nuns, and the Constitutions of a particular house of Augustinian nuns, the Convent of Santa Monica in Florence.

The roots of the Hermits of Saint Augustine (now known as the Augustinian Friars) go back to a number of eremitical groups in Italy in the twelfth century, but the Order adopted a mendicant lifestyle in the thirteenth century. After the approval of their Constitutions by Pope Alexander IV in 1256, the Order grew quickly and founded many houses throughout Europe. From the thirteenth century, there were also convents of nuns associated with the Order with varying degrees of formality. Some foundations simply adopted the Rule of Saint Augustine, but other houses, like Santa Monica, were more closely aligned with the Hermits of Saint Augustine, followed the Rule and Constitutions of the Order, and often depended upon the friars for direction and supervision.

Male foundations of the Hermits of Saint Augustine followed the Rule and Constitutions set forth by the Order. The Rule and Constitutions in this manuscript are adaptations based on these regulations for male houses. In fact, the rubric for the Rule makes note of this fact, indicating that the Rule that follows has been translated into a vernacular (*in volgare*), that references to a brother (*frate*) have been replaced with references to a sister (*suora*), and that chapters irrelevant to sisters have been removed (see f. 1). We can assume that each convent of nuns needed their own Constitutions. David Gutiérrez, in his history of the Augustinian Order, knows of only five examples (see Gutiérrez, 1984, vol. 1, part. 1, p. 211), and we have identified a sixth (our TM 470, a sixteenth-century volume containing the Constitutions for an Augustinian convent in Siena). The earliest of all of these are the Constitutions from the Convent of Santa Elisabetta in Florence (Mattioli, ed., 1901, pp. 142-163), a free adaptation in twenty-one chapters based on the fifty-one chapters of the friars' Constitutions. As noted above, the Constitutions in the present manuscript correspond textually to the Santa Elisabetta Constitutions in many of their chapters, but also contain some notable divergences. While the two sets of Florentine Constitutions may have shared a common source, each has been adapted to fit the particular policies of their respective convents.

Although the study of the history of women in religion in the Middle Ages and the early modern period has flourished in the last decades, direct sources that were created by nuns themselves are comparatively difficult to find. This manuscript, therefore, is an important direct source of information of the rules that governed daily life and the liturgy at one of the most illustrious convents in Renaissance Florence. Recent studies have underlined the importance of religious communities of women in the social history of the Italian city (for example, see Strocchia and Sperling). Remarkable percentages of the female population, and in particular of women from the nobility, who were often educated and allied with the city's most powerful families, lived in convents. For example, Camilla Martelli (1545-1590), mistress and later morganatic wife of Cosimo I de' Medici, Grand Duke of Tuscany, was born into one of these families and received her early education at Santa Monica. She was then compelled to return to the convent after the death of her husband and died there.

ILLUSTRATION

A full-page miniature appears as a frontispiece on the verso of the manuscript's initial unfoliated leaf. It depicts Augustine of Hippo, robed in white and wearing a mantle of purple and green and a mitre, seated upon a throne before an assembly of nuns who kneel before him in black habits. He extends his right hand in blessing over the nuns while holding out an open book, presumably his Rule, which one nun grasps in her hand. Monica, clad in a black habit, stands

behind the nuns and gazes at her son, as she extends her open right hand above the nuns. The halos of Augustine and Monica have been executed in gold leaf, now flaking in some areas. The artist has taken great care in modeling the folds of garments and detailing the faces of the seven figures visible in the miniature. These are striking in the variety of profiles the artist has chosen to render and in their expressive qualities, particularly in their large, finely drawn eyes. Each figure's face is chiefly executed as a drawing, with light tinting in pale pink. In the background is a clouded sky painted in a deep rich blue but fading to white as it approaches the horizon.

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