

**Breviary (Benedictine Use, Congregation of Santa Giustina)
In Latin, illuminated manuscript on parchment
Lombardy (Piacenza), probably c. 1457**

iii (parchment) + 479 folios on parchment (very fine, prepared in the manner of Southern Europe), missing text (a quire?) at end, else complete (collation i-xx¹⁰ xxi⁸ xxii⁴ xxiii-xxx¹⁰ xxxi⁴ xxxii-xlv¹⁰ xlvi⁴ [-4, a cancelled blank] xlvii-l¹⁰), fanciful decorated horizontal catchwords, lower middle margin, no signatures, ruled, usually very lightly, in lead with single full-length vertical bounding lines, a few prickings remain top margin (justification 80-78 x 60-57 mm; ff. 243-272v, 88 x 60 mm.), written in a very small and precise Southern gothic bookhand in two columns of thirty-two lines, majuscules touched in pale yellow, red rubrics, red or blue paragraph marks, one- to three-line alternately red and blue initials, three- to five-line alternately red and blue initials with contrasting pen decoration in violet or red, four nine- to six-line illuminated initials in pink or green enclosing scrolling vine, flowers, or acanthus leaves in blue, green, and pink on brightly burnished gold grounds (ff. 1, 213, 297, 440), the first with a decorated panel border in the outer margin, not connected with the initial (slightly trimmed at the top) of similar tightly curled leaves with gold undersides and infill, large colored circular diagram on verso of first endleaf, initial on f. 440 is damaged, ff. 112-339 show varying degrees of damage from water, most folios are simply stained, but there is occasional damage to the upper lines of text (e.g. ff. 151, 153, 166, 174, 185-189), in a few places there has been actual damage to the parchment in the upper margin (e.g. ff. 154-155, 174-183, 211-212, 215-216, 248-250, 283, 297), at times also affecting the top lines of text (e.g. ff. 184-187, 190, 194-201, 263, 282), ff. 298-326 are more extensively stained, but legible, ink has powdered on a few folios, ff. 36, 75, 85, 97, and 183, some thumbing and soiling from use lower outer margins, erasure treated by reagent lower margin f. 1. Nineteenth-century brown leather binding over pasteboards, rebacked with gold-tooled spine laid down, in robust condition, with some wear to the edges and a few scratches upper cover. Dimensions 123 x 94 mm.

This tiny Breviary was copied for the monastery of San Sisto of Piacenza, a reformed Benedictine monastery of the Congregation of Santa Giustina of Padua; it may have been copied at the abbey itself. Decorated with four small-scale illuminated initials, it is a sister volume to a gorgeously illuminated set of gigantic Choir Books in fourteen volumes made for that abbey in the second half of the fifteenth century. For Benedictine Use, modified according to the observances of that Order, this is a meticulously copied, very complete example of a portable Breviary.

PROVENANCE

1. Script, decoration, and text, all confirm that this was written in northern Italy, almost certainly in Piacenza, in the second half of the fifteenth century, very likely c. 1457, since it includes instructions for finding the dominical letter for the years 1441-1457. The feasts mentioned in the Sanctorale confirm this date; the Visitation, celebrated after 1389, and the Transfiguration, celebrated widely after 1457, are included. Also of note is the absence saints such as Nicholas of Tolentino (1446), Bernardinus of Siena (1450), Vincent Ferrer (1455), and Catherine of Siena 29 April (1461).

With a contemporary ex libris from the monastery of San Sisto in Piacenza, copied in blue ink, on f. 212v, "Istud breuiarium est monasterii sancti sexti placentie congregationis sancte iustine de padua ordinis sancti benedicti" (This is a Breviary of the monastery of

San Sisto of Piacenza of the Benedictine Congregation of Santa Giustina of Padua), so there can be no doubt that it was copied for use in that monastery, most likely in Piacenza itself, and possibly even at the monastery.

The Empress Angelberga originally founded the abbey of San Sisto as a nunnery in the ninth century; it became a community of Benedictine monks in the twelfth century, and joined the Congregation of Santa Giustina in 1425. The present church dates from 1499; its altarpiece was Raphael's Sistine Madonna, commissioned for San Sisto by Pope Julius II in 1512. San Sisto was secularized in 1810.

Contemporary corrections and other signs of active use through the sixteenth century: formally supplying an omitted passage, f. 116v; f. 89, lower margin, added response and versicle; f. 381, adding a prayer mentioning pope Sixtus; f. 421v, lower margin, crude drawing in ink of a man in profile; f. 461v, lower margin, contemporary(?) addition; and front flyleaf, f. i, added prayer, sixteenth-century (?), incipit, "Credo in deum patrum omnipotente"

2. San Sisto was secularized in 1810, but the monastery had fallen on hard times before that time. In 1754 a serious flood and financial difficulties forced them to sell their prized possession, the Sistine Madonna by Raphael. We do not know when this Breviary left the monastery, but sometime in the later eighteenth century is likely, if not in 1810. Perhaps the water damage visible in the Breviary dates from the mid-eighteenth century flood?
3. Bottom margin f. 1 treated by a reagent, likely obscuring an ownership note.
4. Owners's and dealers's notes: inside front cover, price code in pencil; back flyleaf, f. ii verso, in pencil "6V6F4"; inside back cover, price code and "224" in pencil; and note of number of leaves.

TEXT

ff. i-iii [f. i, blank with later prayer], f. ii, Circular diagram with instructions for finding the dominical letter and golden number to calculate Easter (the diagram stipulates that 1441 is 'a'); the concluding instructions mention 1457 ("Anno domini 1457 currit pro aureo numero 14 et sic sequitur usque ad 19 et postea recipitur ab uno ..."); f. ii, decorative table of the calendar year aligned with liturgical seasons and feasts (Lent, Ash Wednesday, Easter and so forth), with dominical letters and golden numbers; f. ii verso, *Ratio inueniendi aureum numerum*, instructions for finding the golden number, ending with verses, *Auratum numerum quisque cognoscere tentas*, incipit, "Oblatos domini in partes tu domini de cunctos/ ... Pro numero certe in aurato suscipe tibi"; f. iii, incipit, "Hec est ratio pasche que incipit anno current Mccclx ...," Easter table beginning with the year 1360; [f. iii verso, blank];

ff. 1-207v, *In nomine domini nostri yesu christi incipit breuiarium monasticum secundum consuetudinem monachorum congregationis de obseruantia sancte iustine de padua ordinis sancti benedicti, ...*; Temporale from the Saturday before the first Sunday in Advent to the twenty-third Sunday following Pentecost including Trinity Sunday (f. 151v) and Corpus Christi (f. 155v);

On f. 53rv, a liturgical note on the suffrages for days of the week includes a prayer mentioning the saints with relics within the church [i.e. San Sisto]: the four holy innocents, Fabian and Sebastian, Timothy, Symphorian, Marcellus and Apuleius, Germanus, Macarius, Martina and Barbara, followed by a prayer for St. Benedict and one for St. Sixtus; following the first Sunday in Lent are the seven penitential psalms (cues), and litany (beginning f. 79v), including Fabian and Sebastian, Cyrinus, Procul, Germanus and Protasius, Marcellus and Apuleius, Benedict, Maurus, Bernard, Severinus, Dominic, Francis, Macarius, Felix, Justina, Euphemia, Martina, Scholastica, Clare and Elizabeth.

ff. 208-212v, Liturgical directions, for the most part explaining the different grades of feasts, and how that changes various Offices, concluding with contemporary ex libris in blue (see provenance above);

ff. 213-282, Ferial Psalter (not in biblical order), extremely complete and with detailed rubrics, with canticles, hymns (not noted), capitulum, antiphons, and responsaries;

ff. 282v-296, Hymns (not noted), for the Temporale, Sanctorale (including "our father Benedict" and Justina of Padua), dedication of a church, and the common of saints; [ending top column b, f. 296; remainder and f. 296v, blank];

ff. 297-439, Sanctorale, from Saturninus (November 29) and the Vigil of St. Andrew to Catherine of Alexandria (November 25), concluding with the dedication of a church; ; [ends f. 439, bottom column a; remainder and f. 439v, blank];

Includes *In festo sanctissimi patris nostri benedicti abbas* (The feast of our most holy father the Abbot Benedict) (f. 328), Visitation (f. 363v), Sixtus (with a rubric on f. 380v, noting that in this church, dedicated to St. Sixtus, and where he is buried, the feast of St. Mary ad Nives is transferred to a different date), and the Transfiguration.

ff. 440-473, Common of Saints;

ff. 473-477v, Office of the Virgin, Use of Rome;

ff. 477v- 479v, Office of the Dead, Use of Rome; ending imperfectly in the response to the ninth lesson ("Liberate me domine de morte eterna//").

ILLUSTRATION

The monastery of San Sisto in Piacenza was home to a thriving scriptorium in the second half of the fifteenth century; their series of fourteen Choir books were one of the great monuments of Renaissance painting. This Breviary is tiny, and lacks figural decoration. Nonetheless, the colors and some of the motifs in these initials (especially the use of dark blue highlighted with numerous white dots) are found in some of their grand Choir books (including for example f. 2 of the volume with the Common of Saints, sold at Les Enluminures in 2015; the vine scroll border on f. 1 of this Breviary can be compared with the initial on f. 22r, of Berkeley, University of California, Bancroft Library, UCB MS 59 by Francesco da Castello, see Online Resources).

Initials as follows:

f. 1 9-line pink initial with blue and green details, infilled with curling blue buds on gold, on a notched polished gold ground, with blue and pink fleshy acanthus extending from the initial in the inner margin, and a detached floral border (pink, green, blue with white spots, and polished gold), border in the outer margin, extending the full length of the page (slightly trimmed at the top);

f. 213, 8-line pink initial infilled with blue flowers and vine, highlighted with a section of blue with white dots, ending in very short acanthus curls, all on polished gold;

f. 297, 8-line green initial infilled with blue flowers and vines with touches of pink and blue with white dots, ending in short pink and green acanthus, all on polished gold;

f. 440, 6-line blue and green initial, infilled with vines and ending with acanthus as above, on a gold ground (initial rubbed and damaged);

Major feasts begin with 5- to 3-line red or blue initials with violet or red penwork respectively (for example, f. 24, Christmas, f. 37, Circumcision, f. 42v, Epiphany, etc.).

The Divine Office (today known as the *Liturgy of the Hours*) is the daily prayer of the Church, recited (or chanted) by priests, and other religious, including monks and nuns, beginning with Matins, said during the night, and continuing through the day, with Lauds at dawn, followed by Prime, Terce, Sext, None, Vespers, and concluding with Compline. These are the prayers modeled on the scriptural teaching to pray without ceasing (for example, I Thessalonians 5:17-18 "Pray without ceasing. In all things give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you."). The prayers and readings for the Office are included in Breviaries. The regular observance of the Office was particularly important to monastic life, and this is a monastic Breviary, which includes twelve lessons at Matins for major feasts.

Key to understanding the context of this Breviary is the Congregation of San Giustina, part of the broader movement known as the Observant Reform that changed the face of the Church in the fifteenth century – revitalizing lay faith, and resulting in fundamental changes in many monastic orders. The abbey of Santa Giustina in Padua was reformed in 1409 by Ludovico Barbo (1381-1443), and became the center of a congregation of abbeys organized around the central authority of a chapter-general. San Sisto joined in 1425, one of the earliest members; the Congregation grew especially rapidly after 1500, when it became known as the Cassinese Congregation. Influenced by the religious ideas of the *Devotio moderna*, as well as by the Franciscans, and humanist scholarship, the Congregation encouraged learning and manual labor, including the copying of books. At San Sisto, we can see signs of a revitalized and newly prosperous monastery. The Church was restored, choir stalls refurbished, and in the second half of the century, the magnificent set of Choir Books were commissioned. Interestingly, the General Chapter was especially concerned with Breviaries, noting that monks were encouraged to copy their own.

Establishing a regular, devout observance of the Divine Office was a key goal for this movement. The general chapter included numerous provisions to encourage liturgical observance, and to mandate uniformity. The minutes of 1446 make clear that the proper form of worship was the particular responsibility of each monk in the Congregation, and as such all those capable of copying their own breviaries for personal use were permitted to do so with the permission of

their abbot, and these books accompanied them from house to house as the Congregation dictated. At a monk's death, his personal breviary was to be restored to the monastery where the majority of it was written; monks were instructed to indicate this monastery within the breviary itself to avoid confusion (Overty, 2014, pp. 68-69; Leccisotti, 1939, vol. 1, p. 96).

Despite its very small size, this is a careful, very complete Breviary, with all the proper texts and with extensive liturgical directions in red; on f. 111, there is a note stating that the Penitential Psalms and the Office of the Dead are not said according to "our constitutions" at this time of year, but instead are said according to the use of the Roman Curia: f. 118v, "His tribus diebus diximus officium secundum morem curie romanus. De cetero uero dicimus more monastico."

Catchwords were a method used to keep the quires of a book in order before it was bound. A scribe would copy the first words of the following quire at the end of the previous quire. Matching the catchword with the beginning of the quire ensured that the volume was bound in the correct order. Occasionally scribes would decorate catchwords. The fancifully and elaborately decorated catchwords found in this volume, however, are quite extraordinary, providing an unexpected touch of whimsy in this serious liturgical volume. Carefully drawn in red and brown, many with touches of green and yellow wash, they depict such things as pomegranates (?) on f. 40v, flower bulbs or onions on f. 90v, pinwheels on f. 140v, and multi-colored grids f. 356v, to name only a few examples among many.

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ONLINE RESOURCES

Berkeley, University of California, Berkeley, Bancroft Library, UCB, MS 59

<http://vm133.lib.berkeley.edu:8080/xtf22/search?rmode=digscript;smode=bid;bid=1;docsPerPage=1;startDoc=59;fullview=yes>

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