

Noted Choir Gradual
In Latin, illuminated manuscript on parchment
Italy, Tuscany (Florence?), c. 1290-1300

223 folios, preceded and followed by a parchment pastedown, contemporary foliation in red and blue Roman numerals, middle outer margin of verso of each folio, 1-39, 39bis-192, repeated in black ink and continued incorrectly by a nineteenth-century hand from f. 195 [191] to f. 204 [200], six folios missing (collation i¹⁰ [-4 and 7, ff. 4 and 7, with loss of text] ii-iii¹⁰ iv¹⁰ [-3 and 8, ff. 33 and 38, with loss of text] v-vi¹⁰ vii⁸ viii-ix¹⁰ x¹⁰ [-3 and 8, ff. 90 and 95, with loss of text] xi-xix¹⁰ xx⁶ xxi-xxiv¹⁰ xxv⁶ [6, a pastedown]), catchwords, ruled in lead with seven lines of text accompanied by seven lines of musical notation, written in black ink in a large formal Gothic bookhand, square musical notation on red four-line staves (justification 382 x 260 mm), red rubrics, numerous red or blue initials with elaborate calligraphic penwork decoration, ONE HUNDRED AND SIX ILLUMINATED INITIALS, NINE WITH BORDERS, including eighty-four one-line ornamental initials in red, orange, yellow, light and dark pink, light green, light and dark blue, often touched with white, some with burnished gold, twenty-two two-line ornamental painted initials, some with ornamental frames containing diamond-shaped patterns (ff. 18v, 54, 96), all but three (ff. 120v, 128v, 131) with burnished gold), nine with ornamental borders extending into the margins (ff. 18v, 54, 63, 65, 99v, 101v, 103v, 107v, 110v), in good condition, f. 1 darkened, with some damage to the initial, one cutting of parchment, f. 41. Early leather binding over heavy wooden boards, metal fittings, rebacked. Dimensions 565 x 400 mm.

Giant illuminated Choir Books such as this one adorned churches throughout Europe during the Middle Ages. This book, a Gradual, contains the text and music for the Mass. Its very large size allowed the entire choir to sing from it. This is a very early example of the genre, surviving in good condition in an early binding, and illustrated by more than one hundred large, vibrantly colored initials that are fine examples of Tuscan illumination from the end of the thirteenth century. Single leaves from Choir Books are not uncommon; codices, however, are increasingly rare on the market.

PROVENANCE

1. Written in Tuscany, Italy, most likely in Florence, near the end of the thirteenth century, perhaps c. 1290-1300, as indicated by the style of the illumination. The distinctive initials that include frames with diamond shaped patterns (a tradition with Bolognese origins) were characteristic of Tuscan illumination at the end of the thirteenth century (we thank Professor Dr. Gaudenz Freuler for this information). The feast of Corpus Christi, mandated for the whole church in 1264 by Pope Urban IV is included. The Visitation, celebrated from 1389, is lacking. The Sanctorale does not appear to include any saints that allow us to localize this more closely; although the absence of Franciscan and Dominican saints, and the presence of St. Benedict and St. Gregory, may be telling, and suggest Benedictine connections.
2. Early note in the lower margin, f. 223v, records the number of initials of various types; 1105 "littere florete" (presumably pen initials); eighty-eight small "pingello" initials, eighteen larger "solemn" initials, and six lesser ("mediocres") initials. We have not counted the pen initials in the volume, but this record of the painted initials is accurate.

The total mentioned here is 112. The volume now includes 106 painted initials, but is missing six leaves, all of which presumably had initials. This accounting could have been added when the book was sold (or even pawned), but is even more likely a record of payment for the artists, and as such is of special interest.

3. Belonged to A. W. von Westenholz; sold, Hamburg, Ernst Hauswedell and co., Auktion XXIV, 1941, lot 16.
4. Owners's and dealers's annotations include, front pastedown: "Libro Primo"; "Ms. S. P. H."; "Clb 484237"; "Ms. 77"; "134/13655 [52213] 264"; "Tract. Sabati S a C 22. / Kyrie a C. 30"; and other indications related to the contents; stamp, f. 1: "Dom. Script. IHS"; back pastedown: "Blatter 227."

TEXT

ff. 1-64v, Temporale from Christmas Eve (24 December) to Corpus Christi;

ff. 68-113, Sanctorale, from Andrew (30 November) to Clement (November 23);

ff. 113v-178v, Common of Saints;

ff. 179-186, Masses in honor of the Virgin Mary;

ff. 186v-118v, Dedication of a Church;

ff. 189-215, Masses for the Dead, concluding with the Creed;

ff. 215v-223v, Sequences for Christmas, for the Holy Spirit, and for All Apostles.

This is a Gradual, a liturgical chant book that compiles the chants the Mass. A Gradual is generally distinguished from the Missal by omitting the spoken items and including only the texts for the sung parts.

This volume is very large, so that it could be read by all the members of the choir, or *schola cantorum* at once; both the text and music would have been easily legible from a distance. Sets of large format Choir Books for the Mass and Office, often including numerous volumes, were used in churches and monasteries throughout the later Middle Ages and Renaissance. Some of the most famous examples are from fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century Italy: a fourteen-volume set of Choir Books was made for the Abbey of San Sisto of the Congregation of Santa Justina in the second half of the fifteenth century; an even larger set of thirty-three volumes was made for the cathedral in Florence in the early sixteenth century. The twenty-nine volumes made for the cathedral in Siena in the fifteenth century can still be seen in the cathedral's library today. Many of the most famous examples were commissioned to celebrate the opening or re-dedication of well-endowed churches. This is a very early example of the genre, and includes the texts for the Mass for only part of the liturgical year; it too may have been part of a multi-volume set (at least one more volume for the Mass, and possibly more volumes for the Divine Office).

ILLUSTRATION

Illustrated throughout with one hundred and six very fine painted initials, many with gold, in red, orange, yellow, light and dark pink, light green, light and dark blue, often touched with white. Of these, the twenty-two larger two-line initials are especially fine, with the initials executed in paler shades and decorated with brighter acanthus leaves and, often, with gold, infilled with vine motifs on vibrant grounds, all on square deep blue grounds, some with ornamental frames containing diamond-shaped patterns (ff. 18v, 54, 96); all but three, with burnished gold (ff. 120v, 128v, 131). Nine of these initials include ornamental borders composed of thin stems, sometimes interspersed with decorative knots and gold besants, entwined with vine and foliage, ending with acanthus leaves (ff. 18v, 54, 63, 65, 99v, 101v, 103v, 107v, 110v).

Larger two-line initials: f. 12v, John the Evangelist; f. 18v, Epiphany; f. 20v, Sunday within the Octave of the Epiphany; f. 35, Easter Monday; f. 49, Ascension; f. 54, Pentecost; f. 63, Corpus Christi; f. 65, *Decem milium virginum*; f. 68, Andrew; f. 75, Purification; f. 91v, John the Baptist; f. 96, Paul; f. 99v, Lawrence; f. 101v, Assumption; f. 103v, Nativity of the Virgin; f. 107v, Michael; f. 110v, All Saints; ff. 114, 120v, 128v, 131, Common of Saints; and f. 194, Kyrie (mass of the dead).

LITERATURE

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Hughes, A. *Medieval Manuscripts for Mass and Office: A Guide to Their Organization and Terminology*, Toronto, 1982.

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ONLINE RESOURCES

Susan Boynton and Consuelo Dutschke. "Celebrating the Liturgy's Books" (Introduction to liturgical manuscripts)

<http://www.columbia.edu/itc/music/manuscripts>

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