

**Liturgical Psalter (Cistercian Use)**  
**In Latin, illuminated manuscript on parchment**  
**Northwest Germany, c. 1476-1500**

iii (paper) + i (parchment) + 208 + iii (paper) folios on parchment, modern foliation in pencil top outer corner recto, missing three leaves (collation i-xvi<sup>10</sup> xvii<sup>12</sup> xviii<sup>10</sup> [-8, 9, 10, three leaves following f. 179] xix<sup>8</sup> xx<sup>12</sup> xxi<sup>9</sup> [structure uncertain]), no catchwords or signatures, ruled in ink with the top and bottom horizontal rules full across, full-length vertical bounding lines (justification 70-68 x 45-42 mm.), written below the top ruled line in a gothic bookhand by several scribes, red rubrics and paragraph marks, one- and two-line alternately red and blue initials, 15 five- to six-line polished gold initials with green (with touches of red), red (often with touches of green), blue, or purple (with touches of green) penwork, one TEN-LINE GOLD INITIAL on f. 1, infilled with purple penwork, partially filled with green, with a BLUE AND GOLD ANGLE-BORDER in the inner and lower margins extending from the initial, in good condition, top outer corner of f. 192 torn (extending into the text, which remains legible), some thumbing. Bound in seventeenth-century(?) vellum over pasteboard, sewn on three bands, edges dyed bluish-green, detached and fully separated from the book block at the back joint, but otherwise in good condition. Dimensions 97 x 70 mm.

The psalms were the central text of the Divine Office (the public liturgy of the church) in monasteries throughout of the Middle Ages. Here we have a small volume, carefully written and illuminated with gold initials for the use of Cistercian monks. It was very likely copied by a monk for his own use, evidence of the re-birth of monastic scriptoria at the end of the Middle Ages.

**PROVENANCE**

1. Certainly made for Cistercian Use, as indicated by the Office of the Dead and the calendar, which includes numerous Cistercian feasts including William of Bourges, Robert of Molesme, Bernard of Clairvaux, Malachi, and Edmund, all in red. Liturgical evidence dates this manuscript after 1476, since the calendar includes the Visitation on July 2 in red, with twelve lessons; it also includes Anne on July 26 (also in red, twelve lessons), celebrated from 1454. We may note that the Cistercians adopted the feast of the Visitation quite late; it was observed in 1263 by the Franciscans and included in the Roman calendar by Pope Urban II in 1389 (and confirmed in 1444). The calendar also includes Thomas Aquinas, 12 lessons (7 March), observed in the Cistercian Order from 1329, and Ivo (19 May), observed from 1348.

The text does not allow an exact localization, but the style of the initials suggests this was made in Northwest Germany in Westphalia, perhaps around Osnabrück. The calendar does tell us, however, that the church for which this was made was dedicated on May 23; the "dedication of the church" is entered on this date in red, with twelve lessons; further research therefore, may identify the exact monastery where this was used (and almost certainly made). The prayers here seem all to be in the masculine voice, and therefore this was likely made for Cistercian monks.

The feasts in the calendar follow Cistercian legislation closely, with the sole additions of St. Boniface (in black) on June 5, and the ten thousand martyrs on June 22, in black but with twelve lessons. These are both feasts celebrated widely in Germany. There are a

few anomalies in the calendar, probably errors, for example the Octave of the Purification in February, observed c. 1400 on, was omitted.

2. Front parchment flyleaf, two notes, the first dated 1558 in German, "Sanct mi... kloster" (mentioning the name of a monastery?); the second, "Anno domini 155//," and an erasure partially visible at the top of the leaf.
3. Price code in pencil, inside back cover.

## TEXT

ff. 1-163v, Liturgical Psalter in biblical order, with antiphons, versicles, responses, and short lessons, with gold initials marking both the weekly Psalms for Matins following secular use (Psalms 1, 26, 38, 52, 68, 79 (the initial should be at Psalm 80, so this is an error), 97 and Sunday at Vespers (Ps. 109), and, as we would expect in a Cistercian Psalter, the Psalms for Matins following monastic use (Psalms 20, 32, 45, 59, 73, 85, 101);

A Cistercian Psalter from Medingen Abbey, Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Don. e. 248, is another example with initials for both secular and monastic use. Psalms 148, 149, 150 are copied as one here, with an initial at the beginning of Psalm 148 only.

ff. 154-179v, "Confitebor tibi" [Isaiah 12]; "Ego dixi" [Isaiah 38:10]; "Exultavit cor meum" [1 Kings 2:1]; "Cantemus domino" [Exodus 15:1]; "Domine audivi" [Habakkuk 3]; and "Audite celi" [Deut. 32:1]; "Benedicite omnia" [Daniel 3:57]; "Te deum"; "Benedictus dominus" [Luke 1:68]; "Magnificat" [Luke 1:46]; "Nunc dimittis" [Luke 2:29]; "Quicumque vult";

Gallican Canticles concluding with the Creed and a prayer (Mearns, 1914, pp. 80-81), followed by three missing leaves (almost certainly with the Litany, now excised).

ff. 180-187v, Office of the Dead, Cistercian Use;

ff. 188-199v, Graded calendar in red and black for Cistercian use, including William of Bourges (10 January, in red, 12 lessons), commemoration of bishops and abbots [of the Cistercian order] (11 January), Thomas Aquinas (7 March, 12 lessons), Robert of Molesme (29 March, in red, 12 lessons), Peter of Tarentaise (8 May, in red, 12 lessons), Ivo (19 May, twelve lessons), *Dedicatio ecclesie* (23 May, in red, twelve lessons), Boniface (5 June), ten thousand martyrs (22 June, twelve lessons), Visitation (2 July, in red, 12 lessons, with octave), Anne (26 July, in red, 12 lessons), Bernard of Clairvaux (20 August, in red, 12 lessons), Malachi (5 November, in red, 12 lessons), Edmund (16 November, in red, 12 lessons);

ff. 200-208v, Common of saints, with texts for Vespers and Lauds, followed by collects for various saints;

Red marginal letters here and in the calendar allow the user to find the appropriate texts for saints without a proper Office.

[Back flyleaf], added prayers (sixteenth-century), for the souls of your mother and father, and for a priest.

The psalms have always played an important role in Christian liturgy. The weekly recital of the 150 psalms was the heart of the Divine Office, the daily cycle of prayers sung in common by monks and nuns (as well as members of other religious orders and the secular clergy). In this manuscript the psalms are copied in the order of the Bible and are accompanied by prayers and other texts for the Office, as well as by a liturgical calendar, and the Office of the Dead. The liturgy detailed here is that of a Cistercian monastery; note that important feasts are observed with twelve lessons (secular use would specify nine), the readings of the Office of the Dead are Cistercian, and the Psalter includes initials marking the psalms read at Matins for each day of the week according to monastic use. The fact that this Psalter also includes the common secular divisions of the psalms is evidence of how widely accepted these divisions were by this time (there are examples of fifteenth-century monastic Psalters that only include the secular divisions).

The Cistercians were born as a reform order at the end of the eleventh century, offering a new, more austere vision of the monastic life, shaped by their desire to return to a literal observance of the Rule of St Benedict. The discipline of copying manuscripts was an essential part of early Cistercian life, but gradually dwindled in importance, as it did in most monasteries after c. 1230. Monastic scriptoria were revitalized in the fifteenth century when copying manuscripts was embraced as part of a new, reformed vision of religious life in many orders, including the Windesheim congregation, reformed Benedictine congregations, the Carthusians, the Brethren of the Common Life, and by the Cistercians. Modern scholarship, interestingly, has focused more on the importance of scriptoria in the life of reformed convents of Cistercian nuns, like Medingen in Northern Germany, than on manuscripts made by Cistercian monks at the end of the Middle Ages (Online Resources).

## LITERATURE

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## ONLINE RESOURCES

Introduction to liturgical manuscripts, "Celebrating the Liturgy's Books"

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

Calendrier Cistercien

<https://www.univ-nancy2.fr/MOYENAGE/UREEF/MUSICOLOGIE/CMN/calcistw.htm>

Gildas, M. "Cistercians", in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, New York, 1908

<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03780c.htm>

"Order of St. Benedict: The Cistercians" (links to short history and other resources)

<http://www.osb.org/cist/>

Website on the Manuscripts of the Cistercian Nuns of Medingen

<http://medingen.seh.ox.ac.uk/>

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