

LES ENLUMINURES

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***De benedictione et Consecratione Virginum* (The Blessing and Consecration of a Virgin)
In Latin, illuminated manuscript on parchment with musical notation
Italy (Tuscany, Florence), May 1609**

i (paper) + 24 + ii (paper) folios on parchment, contemporary foliation in Roman numerals in red ink, I-XVIII [preceded and followed by three unnumbered leaves], complete (collation i-vi⁴), catchwords on every verso, ruled in hard point (justification 138 x 77 mm.), written in black and red inks in Italian textualis bookhand on 16-17 lines for text pages, and for music on 5 staves of four lines ruled in red with square notation, rastrum 16 mm., red rubrics, each page with a red border, 1- to 2-line initials alternating in red and blue with contrasting penwork, which extends to the margins and occasionally includes acorns and oak leaves, red and blue monogram f. 18v, large colored coat of arms of the del Riccio family on the unnumbered leaf before f. 1, apart from a tiny worm hole, the manuscript is in pristine condition. ORIGINAL BINDING of dark brown goatskin over wooden boards, both covers gold tooled with filets and a tracery roll, corner fleurons and fleurs-de-lis, a central IHS monogram with a cross, three nails and a crown of thorns, inside the blazing sun (a symbol of St. Bernardino), spine with four raised bands, gold tooled with flowers, leather in corners and spine slightly worn, otherwise in excellent condition. Dimensions 200 x 138 mm.

Surviving in its original binding and in pristine condition, this small and carefully prepared manuscript contains all the chants and liturgical instructions for a nun's consecration ritual in early modern Florence. It was made for Maria Veronica del Riccio, a woman from an eminent Florentine family, and her family coat of arms feature prominently here. This is a charming, well-preserved book, of special value as a direct source for the religious life of women.

PROVENANCE

1. The manuscript was made for Sister Maria Veronica del Riccio in May 1609. Her coat of arms appear at the beginning of the book on the third blank leaf: *d'or à la bande de gueules accompagnée de deux roses du même*, and below, "SUOR MARIA VERONICA DEL RICCIO HA FATTO FARE QUESTO LIBRO 1609" (Sister Maria Veronica del Riccio had this book made [in] 1609). The colophon on f. 18v states that the book was completed in May 1609, "Anno Domini .M.D.C.ix. mens. mai." The colophon ends with a monogram made of the letter T interlocked with the letter A; a large serpent pierces the upright and crossbar of the T and interlaces the A. The cross and serpent are an ancient symbol of Christ on the Cross. The monogram may well be an emblematic symbol of the religious institution in which the manuscript was used. The colophon does not say where Maria had her manuscript made. Nuns in Italy in this period, especially in Florence, were actively involved in various aspects of making manuscripts (and printed books), and it is possible that it was made for Maria by the nuns of her convent (Moreton, Online Resources).

The del Riccio family was a noble and ancient family of Florence, which included such eminent personalities as Luigi del Riccio (d. 1546), an important friend of the artist Michelangelo. Another Florentine member of the family was the Dominican friar and author of several works on agriculture, Agostino del Riccio (d. 1598). Agostino became

a novice preacher at the Dominican convent of San Marco around 1560, and the final years of his life were spent at the monastery adjoined to the principal Dominican church of the city, Santa Maria Novella, where he held the title of curator of the gardens. Maria Veronica was very likely related to Agostino. The IHS symbol of St. Bernardino on the binding suggests the book was used at a Dominican convent.

2. A late nineteenth-century or early twentieth-century inscription in French and Latin on the front pastedown, "famille del Riccio de Florence pinxit [painted]"; the origin of the family in Florence was also noted in a pencil note added to the inscription.
3. On the front pastedown an old sale price, 80 francs, marked in pencil. On the back pastedown, in modern hand, "124" circled.

TEXT

ff. i-ii, [blank and unnumbered]; f. iii [unnumbered], the del Riccio coat of arms;

ff. 1-18v, [Benediction and consecration of a Virgin], incipit, "De benedictione et consecratione Virginum. Dicto Graduali Tractu vel Sequentia usque ad ultimum Versum exclusive ... Vade quomodo istas. Et cetera. Laus et gloria Omnipotenti Deo. Anno Domini .M.D.L.ix. mens. mai"; [ff. i-iii, blank unnumbered parchment leaves belonging to quire vi with f. 18].

Auguste Boissonnade edited the text (and translated it into French) in 1817; see Boissonnade, 1817, columns 540-563.

The manuscript provides the text and music for the ceremony of the benediction and consecration of a young woman as a nun. It is the entrance rite, in which she makes her final appearance in public and in front of her family, before entering a monastery. The text begins with a rubric explaining that the bishop is seated in front of the altar, and the girls enter the church, each accompanied by two matrons, "associate singule a duabus matronis senioribus" (ff. 1-1v). The ceremony begins with the archpriest singing the opening antiphon *Prudentes virgines* (ff. 1v-2). Then follows a tripartite dialogue sung by the bishop and the girls (ff. 2v-4v). The bishop summons the novices with verse 11 from psalm 34: "Venite, filie, audite me; timorem Domini docebo vos" (Come, daughters, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord). The response of the virgins is from the third book of Daniel, verses 41-42 (slightly adapted): "Et nunc sequimur in toto corde, timemus te, et quaerimus faciem tuam videre; Domine ne confundas nos, sed fac nobis juxta mansuetudinem tuam, et secundum multitudinem misericordiae tue" (And now we follow you with all our heart, fear you, and pray to see your face; Lord, let us not be put to shame, but act with us according to your compassion, and your great mercy). The verses are sung partially the first two times, and then in their entirety. The bishop summons the novices three times and each time his voice is louder, "secundo altius," "tertio altius." The novices, who were in the nave of the church at the end of the antiphon *Prudentes virgines*, light their candles ("accendentes cereos suos," f. 2) and step progressively forward toward the choir after each response, arriving finally at the feet of the celebrant, where they kneel down (cf. de Vert, pp. 60-61). The virgins first take a vow of poverty, then chastity, and finally obedience (for the symbolic values of the movements and words of the novices and the celebrant, see Glixon, 2017, p. 114).

The ceremony continues with each novice rising separately to sing the combined verses 116 and 133 from psalm 118: "Suscipe me secundum eloquium tuum, ut non dominetur mei omnis injustia" (Uphold me according to your promise, and let no iniquity take dominion over me; f. 5r-v). This is followed by a tripartite interrogation in which the bishop first asks all the virgins together: "Vultis in Sancte Virginitatis proposito perseverare?" (Do you want to persevere in holy virginity?), to which the virgins respond: "Volumus" (We do) (f. 6). And then each virgin makes her individual promise to preserve her virginity (f. 6r-v). After the promises, the bishop asks the novices if they wish to be blessed and consecrated and wedded to Jesus Christ, to which they respond "Volumus" (ff. 6v-7). These questions are followed by the central part of the ritual, the enactment of the nun's marriage to Christ, during which she is adorned with a veil, a ring, and a crown. The presentation and reception of each of these items is accompanied by a chanted dialogue (ff. 8-14v; Glixon, 2017, pp. 114-115).

Joining a religious order was rarely a personal choice for Renaissance nuns. Their families entrusted them to the Church, often at an early age. Sharon Strocchia has observed: "Florence was among the earliest Italian cities to invest heavily in female monasticism, the growth of which was driven by local political dynamics as well as marital strategies"; by 1552, about ten percent of the women in Florence were nuns (Strocchia 2009, pp. xii-xiii). It is interesting to examine this manuscript in light of the urban social geography at the time, and it provides a fascinating contribution to the growing field of study concentrating on religious women in early modern Europe.

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