

Choir Book (Antiphonal)

In Latin, decorated manuscript on parchment with musical notation

Northern Italy (Genoa), 1509

ii (paper) + i (parchment, with colophon) + 104 folios on parchment (crinkly, with pronounced difference between hair and flesh), paginated in ink top outer corner with errors: 1-81, 81bis, 82-131, 133*-160, 162*-209, complete (collation i-xxii¹ xxiii² [5, pp. 186-187, single] xxiv-xxv⁴ xxvi³ [no evidence of missing text]), ruled in lead with double full-length vertical bounding lines (justification 452 x 265 mm.), written in a large liturgical gothic bookhand (using e-cedilla), with six lines of text and six lines of musical notation, square notation on red 4-line staves, 40 mm. rastrum, red rubrics, large initials, alternately red and blue, with pen decoration in black or red respectively, initials range from one line of text high, to one line of text plus two staff lines, as on p. 1, decorative border to colophon with two angels in black ink, pp. 35 and 172 are patched, pp. 90-91 are torn, pp. 96-97 with stains within the text block, some stains bottom margins, cockling, overall in good condition. Bound in very heavy wooden boards covered with brown leather, tooled in blind with two sets of six fillets, five star-shaped bosses, upper and lower boards (one missing lower board), two straps with metal shell-shaped fasteners, sewn on six bands, with head and tail bands which no longer enter the boards, and with a system of place markers made out of braided cords at head, with four cloth ribbons/tapes attached, binding is fragile, revealing its structure, wear to leather, spine damaged at top and bottom, inner hinges fragile (front cover now attached mostly by the leather cover with the bands broken at the hinges), paper pastedowns with evidence of old insect damage. Dimensions 524 x 345 mm.

This rare survival directly documents female spirituality in the Italian Renaissance. The exceptionally large Choir Book was written for a high-born member of Genoa's ruling class, Sister Dorothy Adorno, who belonged to a convent of nuns in Genoa. It is signed and dated by an otherwise unknown male scribe, Paul Lambert. Textually intact, this impressive Choir Book is still preserved in its original (though fragile) binding created in the age of Christopher Columbus.

PROVENANCE

1. Written in 1509 by Paul Lambert for the Abbess Sister Dorothy Adorno at the Abbey of St. Leonard in Genoa, front flyleaf, "Anno Millesimo quingentesimo Nonagesimo Tempore R[everendissime] D[ominæ] Abbatissę Sororis Dorotheę Adurnę Monastery Sancti Leonardi Genuę P. Paulus Lambertus scribebat."
2. Although we have found no other records of this abbess, Dorothy Adorno, her family was one of the most prominent in Genoa. Eight members of the Adorno family served as doge in the period from 1363-1527. Dorothy was also a relative by marriage of St. Catherine of Genoa (1463-1510, Catarina Flisca Adurna, in Latin).

Given the prominence of Dorothy's family, it is likely that her convent was a wealthy one for well-born women, but we have not identified this foundation, and further research is called for (Debby, 2012, p.655, mentions a painting by Domenico Fiasella (1589-1669), active mainly in Genoa, illustrating St. Clare expelling the Saracens from Assisi (1667), now in the Chiesa di San Giovanni Decolatto in Montaggio, near Genoa, and suggests it was originally painted for the Clarissan community of San Leonardo. We have been unable to find other mentions of the convent, and in any case the text of our manuscript is almost certainly not Franciscan).

3. Front flyleaf f. i, "San Leonardo," in a seventeenth-century hand.

TEXT

Front flyleaf, f. i, scribal colophon (see Provenance above); f. i verso, contemporary note indicating that the "Miserere" and "In manus tuas" are found at the end of the Proper of Saints (see below pp. 146-148);

pp. 1-146, Sanctoriale from Andrew (30 November) to Clement (23 November), contents as follows: Lucy, Thomas, Chair of St. Peter, Agnes, Conversion Paul, Agnes secundo, Purification of the Virgin, Agatha, Annunciation, Philip and James, Invention of the Cross, John before the Lateran Gate, John the Baptist, Peter and Paul, Commemoration of Paul, Visitation, Mary Magdalene, Peter in Chains, St. Mary of the snows (5 August), Transfiguration, Lawrence, Assumption, Decollation of John, Nativity of Mary (8 September), Exaltation of the Cross (September 14), Dedication of Michael Archangel (September 29), All Saints (November 1);

pp. 129-134, Office of the Dead; pp. 134, Martin (November 11), Cecelia, Clement (November 23), ending p. 146, *Explicit proprium Sanctorum*;

pp. 146-148, *Ad compline*, "Miserere mihi domini ..."; "In manus tua ...", "Gloria pater ...", "Custodi nos ...";

pp. 149-187, Common of Saints,

pp. 188-192, Anniversary of Dedication of a Church;

pp. 192-201, *Tempore paschalis*, antiphons ad compline , In manus tuas, Gloria patri, Te deum laudamus;

pp. 201-208, *In festo gloriosissimi nominis iesu* (January 14).

This is an Antiphonal, a liturgical chant book that contains the music for the Divine Office. In contrast to Breviaries, Antiphonals omit the spoken texts and include only the texts and music for sung portions of the Office. The most obvious, but also one of the most important features of this volume is that it is very, very big. Its size meant 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.

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 from convents of nuns are always of special interest, particularly in this case, since the nuns of Genoa where our manuscript was made have not yet been the subject of a modern scholarly study. Recent studies have underlined the importance of religious communities of women in the social history of the Italian city, where remarkable percentages of the female population, and in particular of women from the nobility lived in convents. Reardon in her study of the nuns in Siena estimated that in 1575 about 10 percent of Siena's women lived in convents; by the mid-Seicento the percentage had increased to about 12 percent (Reardon, 2009, pp. 18-19). It is also noteworthy that in the

sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, in Siena, Milan, Bologna, and Rome, and other Italian cities many of the most skilled female musicians lived in convents. Our manuscript, signed and dated, offers room for further research in the context of studies of the female convents in Renaissance Genoa.

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ONLINE RESOURCES

Monastic Matrix: A Scholarly Resource for the Study of Women's Religious Communities from 400 to 1600 CE

<https://monasticmatrix.osu.edu/>

"Singing the Antiphony," Pablo Alvarez, University of Michigan, Special Collections

<https://www.lib.umich.edu/online-exhibits/exhibits/show/singing-the-antiphony--mich->

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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