[Choir Book] Texts for the Office and Mass for St. Anne and the Holy Rosary of the Virgin Mary; Prose for the Holy Cross

In Latin, stenciled book on paper with musical notation

France, eighteenth century, c. 1750-1800

Stenciled manuscripts are curious hybrids, unique items, like handwritten manuscripts, but produced with a mechanical aid like printed books. Made using stencils, this large but slim volume is an attractive example of a genre that deserves a place in every collection devoted to the history of the book and typography. Combining the text and music for both the Mass and Office for selected feasts, this volume was likely intended for use in the choir for a church that otherwise lacked these texts.

PROVENANCE

1. Made in France in the eighteenth century, most likely in the second half; the liturgical contents of this volume unfortunately do not enable us to narrow down its origin and establishing a more accurate date range is difficult without good stylistic comparisons.

2. Inside front cover, bottom outer corner where the pastedown is lifted, printed book plate, Ex Libris Maurice Delort (with an owl), and a handwritten number, “8592/ <91?>-16.”

TEXT
Front pastedown and f. i, Creed with musical notation (square on black four-line staves), incipit, “//patrem omnipotentem factorem coeli et terrae visibilibus omnium et invisibilium et in unum dominum …”;


pp. 43-65, Texts for the Divine Office and the Mass for the feast of the Holy Rosary of Mary: [p. 43], Officium Sanctissimi Rosarii beatissimae Mariae Virgins ad Laudes et in vtrisque Vesperis. Antiph. 7. Toni, incipit, Solemnitas est hodie …”; [includes Mass texts, pp. 50bis-63, with a long Prosa, then second vespers, pp. 63-65, ending with a Hymn at prime; p. 66, blank].

II. pp. 67-79, Prosa de Sancta Cruce, incipit, “Crucifixum adoremus, Christi crucem praedicemus …”; pp. 80-81, incipit, “Regina coeli …”; [p. 82 blank].

The musical texts for the Divine Office (prayers said throughout the day and night by members of religious orders at the offices of Matins, Lauds, Prime, Terce, Sext, None, Vespers and Compline), were collected in Antiphonals. Musical texts for the Mass were usually found in a separate volume, the Gradual. Our book includes both Office and Mass texts for just two liturgical occasions, the feasts of St. Anne, the mother of Mary, and the Holy Rosary of Mary. The last text in the volume is of independent origin and includes the Prose or Sequence (a special musical text chanted before the Gospel on select feasts) for the Mass of the Holy Cross. The focused contents of our volume suggest this book originated as an independent volume to provide texts and music otherwise lacking in a church’s library. It is large enough to be easily read, but smaller than many Choir Books. The liturgy was not static, and new music and texts were created in the late Middle Ages and Renaissance, often for feasts in honor of various saints. Recent scholarship (Anderson, 2014), for example, has underlined the interest of the music written to honor St. Anne in the Renaissance, and the texts and music in our volume deserve more careful study.

In most respects this book is a direct descendant of the liturgical Choir manuscripts copied in the later Middle Ages through the seventeenth centuries (and occasionally later). The script, however, although it was clearly not produced by type face, was not written by hand, but instead was produced using metal stencils. The stenciled letters can be recognized by the small breaks in the body of the letter from the bridges found in the stencil template (stencil-templates must avoid continuous shapes that would cause them to fall apart, for example, the inside of an “o” must be connected with bridges to the outer shape of the letter). Stenciled books are curious hybrids. They are unique items, like handwritten manuscripts, but were produced with a mechanical aid, and in that sense are more like printed books. Here the text, initials and other the decoration, and almost certainly the musical notation, were all constructed with stencil templates. Stenciled liturgical books, often made in monastic settings, are known from the mid seventeenth century until the latter decades of the nineteenth century, and in some cases later. This practice probably began in France, where the practice was wide-spread (François, 2010).
O’Meara 1933) and then spread around Catholic western and southern Europe, including the Low Countries (presently francophone Belgium), Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Spain, and Portugal, and possibly even Mexico. One example has been identified in England (I thank Mr. Eric Kindel for sharing his research, in correspondence, 2012). In Germany in the monasteries around Mainz were known for their stenciled books (see Schreiber 1927; Gottron 1938; Rodrigues 1973; and Rosenfeld 1973), the most famous practitioner was Thomas Bauer (d. c. 1780), who entered the Carthusian monastery in Mainz c. 1720.

Gilles Filleau des Billettes composed an extensive account of the process for the “Description des Arts et Métiers” of the French Royal Academy of Science c. 1700 (edited in Kindel, 2013). In his description he suggests the practice was created by someone (name unknown) c. 1650, and specifically mentions that books for particular churches were written in this way, as opposed to printed books used more generally by the whole church (“C’est celui par lequel on écrit les plus beaux livres d’églises particulières qui n’ont pas besoin d’être autant répandus que ceux qu’on imprime pour l’usage général du clergé ...”; quoted by François, 2010). Another early historian of these books, Fischer van Waldheim, writing c. 1800, suggested that they were invented by a Trappist monk in 1674.

It is hard not to be struck by the labor that was required to produce a volume like this. Would it not have been easier to simply to copy the volume by hand? Eva Judd O’Meara, asked William Addison Dwiggins a modern stencil maker in the United States in the 1930s-50s, this question. His opinion was that stenciling was quicker than writing. Moreover, copying manuscripts in scripts imitating roman type may have been particularly difficult. Certainly, the books produced by this method have their own striking aesthetic appeal, and the fact that they could be made without employing a trained calligrapher was a practical advantage.

LITERATURE


**ONLINE RESOURCES**

Consuelo Dutschke and Susan Boynton, Introduction to liturgical manuscripts: “Celebrating the Liturgy’s Books”

[https://cel.archives-ouvertes.fr/cel-00194063/document](https://cel.archives-ouvertes.fr/cel-00194063/document)

Eric Kindel, Reading University, staff profile, with bibliography of his articles on stencils:
[http://www.reading.ac.uk/typography/about/Staff_list/e-t-kindel.aspx](http://www.reading.ac.uk/typography/about/Staff_list/e-t-kindel.aspx)

James Mosley. “Lettres à jour: public stencil lettering in France”, *Typefoundry, Documents for the History of Type and Letterforms*, 23 March, 2010:
also at:
St. Bride Library, “Temporary Type”, conference, 10-12 October 2005
[http://stbride.org/friends/conference/temporarytype](http://stbride.org/friends/conference/temporarytype)


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