

Psalter (use of the Celestines)

In Latin, illuminated manuscript on parchment

Northeastern France, Metz, c. 1490

190 folios on parchment, lacking four leaves, modern foliation in pencil (collation i¹² ii-xi⁸ xii⁸ [-3 through 6, four leaves after f. 94, with loss of text] xiii-xiv⁸ xv⁷ xvi-xxiii⁸ xxiv⁷), catchwords, written in brown ink, the calendar in cursive bookhand and the rest of the text in gothic textualis bookhand on 19 to 22 lines (justification 74 x 50 mm), ruled in red ink (occasionally appears brownish), 1- to 2-line initials alternating in blue and red throughout, nineteen 3- to 9-line initials in raspberry red, blue or liquid gold, decorated with flowers, acanthus and strawberries, on grounds painted in blue, violet, red or liquid gold, ff. 104 and 118 excised vertically in half with loss of text, first and last leaves very stained and darkened, first quire detached from the uppermost sewing, some original defects of parchment in the outer margins, stains, especially in the first quire, and thumbing, but otherwise in good condition, sewn on four bands, but unbound (spine bare, lacking front and back covers). Dimensions 133 x 95 mm.

This is a small-format illuminated Psalter from the Celestine monastery of Notre-Dame in Metz. At the end of the Middle Ages, the Celestines were intimately linked to French royalty and especially to the House of Orléans. Celestine manuscripts have not survived well, and this book thus provides rare insight into Celestine manuscript production and liturgy, a study that remains to be written. The Psalms were essential to the prayer life of all Christians, lay and religious, in the Middle Ages.

PROVENANCE

1. Written and illuminated in Northeastern France at the Celestine convent of Notre-Dame in Metz in northeastern France c. 1490 as indicated by the liturgical contents and the style of the decoration. The calendar and the Office of the Dead indicate that the manuscript was prepared for use in the Celestine Order. François Avril has noted that the saints Onuphre (in the calendar and the litanies) and Erasmus (in red in the calendar) are especially present in manuscripts originating in Metz (Avril and Reynaud, p. 191). This evidence should, however, be treated with care, as within the Celestine Order the veneration of St. Onuphre appears to be widespread, and the saint can be found in manuscripts made for use (at least) in Avignon and Paris, as well as in Metz. Nevertheless, the content of the calendar of our manuscript is very close to those of a Diurnal made for use at the Celestine monastery in Metz around 1490 (Metz, Bibliothèque Municipale, MS 586) and an earlier Psalter (Metz, Bibliothèque Municipale, MS 594).

It is even possible that our Psalter was copied by a scribe Jean-Henri de Conflans who was at the convent from 1454 until an unknown date and copied "petit livres des psaltier des heures," that is, small (Ferial) Psalters (Metz, BM, MS 833, p. 185; cited in Chazan, p. 21). Further research is needed to identify with precision his hand.

2. Private European Collection.

TEXT

ff. 13-175v, Liturgical psalter, with the psalms in numerical order from psalm 1 to psalm 82:7 and continuing from psalm 87:13-psalm 150 (ending on f. 158), preceded by antiphons, and

followed by hymns and canticles. Lacking psalms 82:7 - psalm 87:13 (four leaves after f. 94 in quire xii);

Rubrics for the Office according to monastic use precede certain but not all psalms, starting on f. 15 at Psalm 5, "Verba mea," which is preceded by the rubric *feria secunda ad laudes*, informing that it is to be sung at Monday Lauds.

On f. 28v, the scribe indicated, erroneously, the beginning of Saturday Prime with a rubric at Ps. 17:29, "Quoniam tu illuminas lucernam meam, Domine; Deus meus, illumina tenebras meas." The verse was also marked with a 4-line decorated initial "Q" (the beginning of Saturday Prime is in fact at Ps. 17:26, "Cum sancto sanctus").

ff. 175v-180, Litanies, followed by prayers, including St. Martial, bishop of Limoges, among the apostles, evangelists, disciples and innocents, St. Medardus of Noyon, St. Germaine, St. Eligius and St. Peter Celestine, among the pontiffs and confessors, and St. Onuphrius among the monks and hermits;

ff. 180-190, Office of the Dead, use of the Celestines, *Sequitur officium mortuorum secundum usum ordinis celestinorum,*"

ILLUSTRATION

The opening initial on f. 13, beginning psalm 1, "Beatus vir," is the finest of the nineteen illuminated initials, painted 9-lines high in raspberry pink, decorated with white roses and in-filled with thistles and strawberries. It lies on a ground painted in sky blue with liquid gold decoration and fill.

The eighteen further initials highlight psalms that are sung in the beginning of hours or nocturns of Matins, thus (following psalm 1 beginning Monday Prime): psalm 7 - Tuesday Prime (f. 17), psalm 9:20 - Wednesday Prime (f. 20), psalm 12 - Thursday Prime (f. 23), psalm 15 - Friday Prime (f. 24v), psalm 17:29 - Saturday Prime (rather than 17:26 in error), psalm 20 - Sunday Matins (f. 32), psalm 26 - second nocturn Sunday Matins (f. 38), psalm 32 - Monday Matins (f. 44), psalm 38 - second nocturn Monday Matins (f. 52), psalm 45 - Tuesday Matins (f. 58v), psalm 52 - second nocturn Tuesday Matins (f. 64v), psalm 59 - Wednesday Matins (f. 69v), psalm 68 - second nocturn Wednesday Matins (f. 77), psalm 73 - Thursday Matins (f. 83), psalm 79 - second nocturn Thursday Matins (f. 92), psalm 101 - Saturday Matins (f. 106), psalm 105 - second nocturn Saturday Matins (f. 112v), and psalm 109 - Sunday Vespers (f. 120).

The Celestine Order was founded in 1263 by Pietro di Murrone (1209/1210-1296) who became Pope Celestine V in 1294 (he abdicated in the same year). The Order observed the rule of St. Benedict, but its foundation was inspired by the hermetic and ascetic ideals of the Camaldolese and the Franciscans. In the beginning of the fifteenth century the Celestines had ninety-six religious houses in Italy and twenty-one in France. The last surviving foundations were suppressed in 1789 in France and in 1807 in Italy.

The Order was especially popular in France, where it was intimately linked to the royalty. King Philip the Fair invited the Celestines to France, where they founded their first monasteries at Chanteau and Ambert, in the diocese of Orléans, in 1300. King Charles V established the

Convent of Notre-Dame de l'Annonciation in Paris in 1352, which became the motherhouse of all Celestine foundations in France. It became one of the spiritual centers of the monarchy and was adopted as necropolis by the House of Orléans, making it the second most important burial site for the French royalty after the Basilique Saint-Denis. The Celestine Order received privileged allocations throughout the fifteenth century, especially from Charles VI, Louis d'Orléans, Charles VII, Louis d'Orléans, and Philippe de Mézières. Amadeus VII of Savoy introduced the Celestines in Lyon. Other important Celestine foundations in France included Notre-Dame in Sens, Notre-Dame in Metz, Saint-Antoine in Amiens, Saint-Pierre-Célestin in Avignon, Saint-Martial in Gentilly (diocese of Avignon), Sainte-Croix in Offémont (diocese of Soissons), Sainte-Trinité in Marcoussis, Sainte-Trinité in Meulan and Notre-Dame in Rouen (founded by the duke of Bedford).

Léopold Delisle has shown that in the fifteenth century the Celestine houses possessed large libraries, many of which were destroyed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Delisle, p. 248). He identified sixty-three manuscripts at the Bibliothèque nationale de France originating in different Celestine convents, mainly Paris, Ambert, and Marcoussis. The manuscripts from the Celestine houses in Avignon and Gentilly, which both received favors from the popes at Avignon, are now mainly at the Bibliothèque municipale of Avignon, and those from Notre-Dame in Metz at the Bibliothèque Municipale of Metz.

The Celestine convent in Metz was founded by a rich noble, Bertrand II le Hungre, in 1370. His descendants maintained the tradition of donations to the foundation, and in 1470 the community counted fifteen monks. The convent appears to have had an important library: the inventory of 1675 counts 117 articles (Chazan, p. 19, Online Resources). The history of the convent from 1371 to 1469 can be read in a contemporary chronicle written at the convent (an exceptional achievement within the Order), known through a copy from the second half of the fifteenth century (Metz, Bibliothèque municipale, ms. 833; see Online Resources). The chronicle informs us about monks whose job it was to copy and illuminate manuscripts. Jean Béalrobert, scribe and illuminator, worked at the convent of Metz from 1425 to 1450, before he was transferred to Paris, and then to Rouen where he died in 1462 (Metz, BM, MS 833, p. 118; cited in Chazan, pp. 6-7). Béalrobert copied at Metz a Bible in three volumes, a Legendary, an Antiphonary, a Missal, and other things. He was taken over by a monk called Jean-Henri de Conflans who was at the convent from 1454 until an unknown date and copied "petit livres des psaltier des heures," that is, small (Ferial) Psalters (Metz, BM, MS 833, p. 185; cited in Chazan, p. 21). Further research is needed to identify his hand, but it is possible that he was the scribe of the Psalter described here, or the Psalter that is now Metz, BM, MS 594.

LITERATURE

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ONLINE RESOURCES

"Chronographie du Monastere des Célestins de Metz," Metz, Bibliothèque Municipale, ms. 833, fully digitized (Medium, IRHT)

<http://medium-avance.irht.cnrs.fr/ark:/63955/md257d279691>

Metz, Bibliothèque Municipale, ms. 586, fully digitized (Medium, IRHT)

<http://medium-avance.irht.cnrs.fr/ark:/63955/md36h128r02z>

Metz, Bibliothèque Municipale, ms. 594, fully digitized (Medium, IRHT)

<http://medium-avance.irht.cnrs.fr/ark:/63955/md720c48673b>

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<https://cruh.univ-lorraine.fr/sites/cruh.univ-lorraine.fr/files/documents/mireillechazan.pdf>

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