

Psalter (Benedictine Use)

In Latin, illuminated manuscript on parchment

Southwestern Germany (Constance?) or Switzerland (St. Gallen?), c. 1450-1475

i (parchment) + 82 +i (parchment) on parchment, modern foliation in pencil top outer corner, lacking at least one leaf at the end (collation i-iv¹⁰v⁸vi-viii¹⁰ix⁴[apparently complete, but text ends imperfectly]), calendar very faintly ruled in ink(?), otherwise no discernible ruling (justification 72-70 x 54-52 mm.), written in a very small, uniform hybrida script in 31-33 long lines, red rubrics, 1- and 2-line red or blue initials, 4- to 9-line larger red or blue initials with pinkish-purple pen flourishing including foliage decoration, and occasionally grotesque and zoomorphic figures (listed below), two with partial borders of scrolling foliage, 10 large initials formed of light-colored fleshy acanthus on red, blue, green, pink, purple, or finely pounced burnished gold, infilled with contrasting colors in the same, on contrasting square grounds with partial borders of delicate scrolling foliage terminating in flower buds often with long stamens, ONE LARGE FULL-PAGE INITIAL of burnished gold pounced with small flowers, infilled with fleshy acanthus in light colors on blue, on a dark reddish purple ground with white tracery, the remaining letters of the word written below the initial, with a full foliage border, ONE CIRCULAR DIAGRAM with a tree-like acanthus growing from its center, original holes in the parchment, ff. 45 and 56, heavily cropped, affecting the 'KL' letters in the calendar and the illuminated borders, short strip of illuminated border pasted to the bottom of last leaf (f. 82), illumination occasionally slightly rubbed, outer corners often very dirty. Bound in sixteenth-century blind-stamped pigskin over wooden boards with two clasps, fastening back to front, spine with three raised bands, green and white head and tail bands, scattered wormholes especially on upper board, a bit worn with small areas of loss to leather at edges, but overall in good condition. Dimensions 100 x 80 mm.

A tiny gem of an illuminated Psalter, this volume is notable for its very small size, the fineness of its script, and the vivid colors of its illuminated initials and borders. These decorative initials were executed by artists of considerable skill. Especially striking is the tree-like form used to decorate one of the computistic tables. The darkened lower outer corners of many of the pages in this manuscript are a direct link to the monks who used this book centuries ago for their daily prayers.

PROVENANCE

1. Evidence of the calendar indicates that this was made for use in a Benedictine monastery in Southwestern Germany in the diocese of Constance, or in Switzerland, perhaps St. Gallen, in the middle of the fifteenth century, c. 1450-1475. The calendar is graded with twelve lessons for major feasts, and includes numerous Benedictine saints including Maurus, Scholastica, three feasts in honor of Gregory (in red), and two in honor of Benedict himself.

Included in red in the calendar are St. Gall (16 October), Othmar, the first abbot of St. Gall (16 November), and Conrad, bishop of Constance (26 November), as is Ulric, bishop of Augsburg (4 July). The feasts of Erhard, bishop of Regensburg, Kilian, bishop of Würzburg, and Magnus, a monk from St. Gall, are also in the calendar, although not in red. A date around the middle of the century is suggested by the style of the initials; it must date after 1389, since it includes the Visitation. The feast of the Transfiguration, observed from 1457 is lacking.

Although the manuscript lacks figurative decoration, the style of the initials and borders are similar to those found in other manuscripts copied in Southern Germany in the second half of the fifteenth century, in particular manuscripts illuminated by Berthold Furtmeyr (documented 1460-1502) of Regensburg (for example, British Library, MS Egerton 1895-1896, Old Testament, Regensburg, 1465; Online Resources).

Numerous signs of use, including dirt, marks from tabs, and written additions: correction added in the margin f. 57v, in the later fifteenth or sixteenth century the originally blank leaf on f. 10v was used for computistic notes(?), and the first and last flyleaves were used to copy prayers (some for the night office of Matins) in German and Latin.

2. Illuminated border glued to f. 82 at the bottom by a later owner.
3. Owners's and dealers's notes include: small stamp with blue border inscribed "Aa. V. 135" pasted inside upper cover; remains of paper label inscribed "<9?> 15 / l'" on spine; brief identification in English written inside front cover; typed description on strip of paper in English laid in; other notes in pencil, inside back cover have mostly been erased, one price code remains.

TEXT

ff. 1-6v, Calendar, with Erhard (January 8, bishop of Regensburg), Maurus, in brown but 12 lessons (January 15), Scholastica, in red (February 10), Gregory, in red (March 12), Gerdrudis virginis (Gertrude of Nivelles, March 17), Benedict, in red (March 21), George, martyr, in red (here on April 22), Servatius, bishop (May 13, Maastricht, Tongeren), Visitation, in red (July 2), Udalricus, in red (July 4, Ulric, bishop of Augsburg), Kilian (July 8, bishop of Würzburg), Commemoration of Benedict, in red (July 11, his translation), Margaret, in red (July 20), Anne, early addition (July 26), Dominic, added by the same hand (August 4), Lawrence, in red (August 10), Bernard, abbot (August 20), Aegidius (or Giles), in brown but with 12 lessons (September 1), ordination of Gregory in red (September 3), Magnus (September 6), dedication of Gregory in red (September 22), Remigius, in red (October 1), Leodegar, bishop (October 2), Francis (October 4), Gallus, abbot, in red (October 16), Martin, in red (November 11), Othmar, in red (November 16, first abbot of St. Gall, listed here as "nacione sweuus"), Elizabeth, in red (19 November), Katherine, in red (25 November), Conrad, in red (November 26, bishop of Constance).

Special observances linked to each month are recorded at the end in red: "Nonas januarii pro abbatibus"; "Idus Februarii pro fratribus"; "Kalendas Martii pro benefactoribus"; "Kalendas Aprilis pro fundatori loci"; "Nonas maii pro fratribus"; "Kalendas iunii pro benefactoribus," and so forth.

ff. 7-10v, Computistical tables and instructions; f. 7, instructions for finding the dominical letter (with the year 1400 as the base year), and the golden number; f. 7v-8v, full-page circular table, f. 7v, to calculate the golden number and dominical letter, with instructions on f. 8, and a full page chart on f. 8v ; f. 9, incipit, "Nota quod feria quarta post dies sancta lucie . . .," followed by a

table; ff. 9v-10, table copied on both leaves for finding lucky days in Latin and German; [f. 10v, blank leaf used for added text in German, perhaps further computistical details];

ff. 11-80, Liturgical Psalter with antiphons, hymns (not noted), and other texts for the Divine Office for Benedictine Use;

ff. 80-82, Canticles (*Benedicite omnia opera dominum, Benedictus dominus deus, Te deum laudamus*), and the Athanasian Creed, followed by a prayer, incipit, "*Omnipotens eterne deus ...*", and the second of the Advent canticles (*Ecce dominus deus, Isaiah 42:10-17*), here ending abruptly in verse 14 (Mearns, 1914, p. 87).

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, but are accompanied by prayers and other texts for the Office, as well as by a liturgical calendar and related computistical texts. The liturgy detailed here is that of a Benedictine monastery; in particular note that important feasts are observed with twelve lessons (secular use would specify nine). The particular divisions of the Psalter marked by the illuminated initials are also particular to monastic use (Psalm 20, Sunday matins; Psalm 32, Monday; Psalm 45, Tuesday; Psalm 59, Wednesday; Psalm 73, Thursday; Psalm 85, Friday; Psalm 101, Saturday; Psalm 109, Vespers; Psalm 118, Prime; Psalm 141, Friday at Vespers). Most of these important liturgical divisions were also once marked by tabs that allowed the monks to find their place quickly within the book (traces of these tabs are still visible in the outer margins).

The generations of monks who used this volume left behind dirt from their fingers. The lower outer corners of many openings are soiled; the dirt seems particularly pronounced on openings with illuminated initials. We can imagine the monks holding the book open, gazing on the initials, while they waited for the Office to begin.

ILLUSTRATION

This is a finely decorated Psalter, exhibiting the skill of the artists who specialized in decorative initials – the colors are vivid, and the technique of drawing outlines and details of fleshy, swirling acanthus in lighter shades or white on the deep vivid colors is very appealing. Some of the color combinations are notable – f. 31, a gorgeous blue initial infilled with orange acanthus swirls on gold, f. 43, a pink initial, infilled with green acanthus, also on gold, and on f. 56, a stunning violet initial with modelled acanthus, infilled with green acanthus, all on gold. The borders (sadly now trimmed), are also very well executed.

f. 7v, Circular table enclosing a hill (a series of stepped gray circles) with a tree made from a green vine, with orange, blue, red, and green acanthus leaves and flowers;

f. 12, [Psalm 1], full-page gold 'B' infilled with swirly blue acanthus outlined and with highlights in white on very dark blue, on a deep red ground with white highlights, with a border (almost full) of red, green, and blue acanthus and flowers on a thin green vine (trimmed in the three outer margins);

Ten large illuminated initials on ff. 18v, 24, 31, 36v, 43, 49v, 56, 64, 66v, 76v (before Psalms 20, 32, 45, 59, 73, 85, 101, 109, 118, 141), 8- to 13-lines, with fleshy acanthus in lighter colors on vivid green, pounced gold, deep blue, pink, or violet infilled in contrasting colors (gold, red, vivid orange, blue, green), usually with acanthus, on square red, green, or gold grounds with short acanthus borders extending into the outer, and occasionally bottom, margins (often partially trimmed);

Two penwork initials, ff. 71v, 82v, Psalm 119 and Old Testament Canticle (Isaiah 40:10), 11- to 7-line red or blue, with painted acanthus borders.

Penwork initials occasionally include figurative decoration: f. 2, face, f. 2v, a figure (a woman?), ff. 3v and 4v, animals (?) (mostly trimmed), f. 65, an animal or grotesque, f. 68v, a grotesque, f. 72v, a grotesque, f. 73, a face in profile and a flower, f. 74, a grotesque

LITERATURE

Leroquais, V. *Les psautiers manuscrits latins des bibliothèques publiques de France*, Maçon, 1940-1.

Mearns, James. *The Canticles of the Christian Church, Eastern and Western, in Early and Medieval Times*, Cambridge, 1914.

Plummer, John. *Liturgical Manuscripts for the Mass and Divine Office*, New York, 1964.

van Deusen, Nancy, ed., *The Place of the Psalms in the Intellectual Culture of the Middle Ages*, Albany, 1999.

van Dijk, S.J.P. "The Bible in Liturgical Use," *The Cambridge History of the Bible. Volume 2, The West from the Fathers to the Reformation*, Cambridge, 1969, pp. 244-248.

ONLINE RESOURCES

"Berthold Furtmeyr: Illumination of the Renaissance," Bayerische Landesbibliothek Online <https://www.bayerische-landesbibliothek-online.de/berthold-furtmeyr-illumination-of-the-renaissance>

British Library, MS Egerton 1895

<https://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/record.asp?MSID=2752&CollID=28&NStart=1895>

Introduction to liturgical manuscripts:

"Celebrating the Liturgy's Books":

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

"Psalms," New Catholic Encyclopedia:

<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12533a.htm>