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Ferial Psalter

In Latin, manuscript on parchment
[Germany, Middle Rhine [Mainz ?], c. 1450s)

133 folios, mostly in quires of 8 (collation: 1 quire missing at the beginning, i⁶, missing folio i, ii⁶, missing ff. iv and v, iii-xvi⁸, xviii⁷, missing f. viii, missing 1 or more quires at the end), modern pencil foliation, written by two scribes on 18 long lines in an angular gothic script close to Fraktur, ruled in brown ink (justification 87 x 136 mm., ff. 1-110; 80 x 135, ff. 110-33), catchwords visible throughout in the lower margin, prickings visible, rubrics in red, versals in red, 5 LARGE DECORATED INITIALS of 6-7 lines (ff. 23v, 39, 54, 55, 70) in red, blue, and green, with red, or sometimes green, calligraphic foliate infill, 4 other large initials incomplete (e.g., f. 88v), 2 finding tabs in red-dyed pigskin (ff. 54 and 88), signatures numbered in ink in the upper right corners (from ff. 37-109), manuscript additions and corrections (e.g., f. 44), manuscript browned, especially in the lower margins, some holes and contemporary repairs, but apart from the missing folios, the book block is intact with the original stitching and the folios uncut. CONTEMPORARY BINDING of white pigskin, browned or stained, decoration with acorns and floral scrollwork, sewn on 4 thongs, spine detached (pirate binding perhaps from another book; remains of red dye matching the finding tabs on the open spine). Dimensions 160 x 218 mm.

This Ferial Psalter, in spite of its lacunae, is most interesting for its relation the history of book design—script, initials, and decoration—during the crucial decades of the discovery and spread of printing in Mainz. Especially its script and its painted initials, and to a lesser extent its decoration, compare to the typeface and printed small initials in the 1457 Mainz Psalter issued by Fust and Schoeffer.

PROVENANCE

1. The writing and especially the decoration is typical of western German, the area of the Middle Rhine, especially in and around Mainz during the years of the beginning of printing. Comparison of the script, the painted initials, and the decorated initials with those of the Mainz Psalter is intriguing. Printed in 1457 by Peter Schoeffer, a calligrapher who designed its typeface, and Johann Fust, Gutenberg's foreman, the Mainz Psalter enjoys the status of being the second book printed and the first book printed in two colors, red and blue. The letter formation of the script of the present manuscript and the typeface of the Mainz Psalter are remarkably similar as are the 1-line painted initials used throughout (compare *E, I, Q, A, N*, etc.). These analogies argue for

a dating of the present manuscript in the 1450s and localization in the area of Mainz. Unfortunately, other indications of provenance have disappeared from our Psalter, lacking the beginning and end, so it is no longer possible to determine if it, like the Mainz Psalter and the other liturgical imprints associated with Gutenberg and his direct successors, may have been executed in the milieu and for the needs of the Benedictines of the Burgsfeld Congregation.

TEXT

Eight-fold division of the Psalter, lacking the first Psalm ("Beatus vir," Dominica dies) introducing the first group of Psalms, as follows:

f. 22v, "Dominus illuminatio mea et salus mea" (Psalm 26, Feria II);

f. 39, "Dixi custodiam vias meas" (Psalm 38, Feria III);

f. 55, "Dixit insipiens in corde suo" (Psalm 52, Feria IV);

f. 70, "Salvum me fac" (Psalm 68, Feria V);

f. 88v, "Exultate Deo adiutori nostro" (Psalm 80, Feria VI);

f. 105, "Cantate Domino canticum novum" (Psalm 97, Sabbatum);

f. 127, "Dixit Dominus" (Psalm 109, Vespers);

This is the text of the Ferial Psalter, without notation, used in the Divine Office. It is made up of the 150 psalms of the Old Testament, so divided throughout the seven days of the week that all the psalms are recited in one week. The psalms, the divinely-inspired poetical prayers, principally of King David, have always been the center of the Church's liturgical worship, just as they were at the temple during Old Testament times.

The eight-fold Psalter evolves from the earlier three-fold division dividing the Psalter into three parts containing fifty Psalms each, and it anticipates the devotions of the Book of Hours divided into eight hours of the day, with the Psalms arranged throughout the hours and accompanied by antiphons, responses, readings, etc.

ILLUSTRATION

The style of the initials—similar but not identical to those in the Mainz Psalter—derives from earlier regional decoration and goes back to the Rhineland in the fourteenth century (compare the Martyrology of St. Agneskloster Mainz, Stadtbibliothek Mainz HS II 11; Cat. Landesmuseum, Mainz, no. 84, p. 226), and a mid-fifteenth-century Collectarium from Mainz, (Les Enluminures, Cat. 2, now Chicago, Newberry Library MS 00).

LITERATURE

Landesmuseum, Mainz. Cîteaux 1098-1998. *Rheinische Zisterzienser im Spiegel der Buchkunst*, Wiesbaden, Dr. Ludwig Reichert Verlag, 1998.

Masson, Sir Irvine. *The Mainz Psalters and Canon Missae, 1457-1459*. (London, 1954).

Mazal, Otto. *Mainzer Psalter von 1457. Kommentar zum Facsimiledruck*. (Zürich, 1969).

Online Resources

Parallel Latin-English text of the Psalter (Vulgate and Douay versions)

<http://members.tripod.com/~gunhouse/psalmstxt/pshome.htm>