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RAIMUNDUS DE BRETIS, *Distinctiones temporales et sanctorum cum thematibus connexae*
In Latin, illuminated manuscript on parchment
[Italy, Venice (?), c. 1360-80]

176 folios, preceded and followed by a blank parchment flyleaf, complete, bound mostly in sexternions (i-xiv¹², xv⁸), with horizontal catchwords and alphabetical signatures (beginning a-d in the first quire, then the quires are signed a to m on the first six folios of each quire), written in dark brown ink in a rounded Italian Gothic script on one column of 30, then 25 (from ff. 49v-175v) long lines, ruled in plummet (justification 75/80 x 110/120 mm.), illuminated with ONE HISTORIATED INITIAL painted in pink representing Saint Paul on a gold ground, with border decoration on three sides composed of pink, blue, and red leaves interspersed with highly burnished gold leaf besants, 2-line initials in blue with red calligraphic penwork, catchwords in blue, medieval foliation in ink. Bound in nineteenth-century dark brown morocco, blind stamped with a Greek frieze, vegetal and floral motifs, and with square geometric motifs on the center of the covers, spine sewn on two bands with the space between decorated in the same style as the covers, metal clasps. Dimensions 167 x 120 mm.

Deluxe copy of the unedited Biblical distinctions by the French mendicant preacher Raimundus de Bretis, existing in only a handful of manuscripts, exclusively found in European collections, among which our copy is not only one of the most complete but finely illuminated.

PROVENANCE

1. Written and decorated in Northern Italy (Venice?), c. 1360-80, based on comparisons with the art of Giustino di Gherardino da Forli (flourished c. 1360s, 1370s), whose style is close to that of the historiated initial.

TEXT

ff. 1-9v, *De misericordia*, incipit, "Misericordia. Loquenti de misericordia divina est sciendum quod Dei misericordia excedit et excellit omnem cujuscumque misericordiam ...";

ff. 9v-16v, *De Domino*, incipit, "Dominus. Nota quod Deus est dominus, scilicet omnis inscii serenior instructor (ideo reverenter audiendus) ...";

ff. 16v-25, *De cognitione*, incipit, "Cognoscere. Loquenti de cognitione que homini primo necessaria est, sciendum quod dicitur Jo. 3...";

ff. 25-30v, *De vita*, incipit, "Vita sive vivere. Loquenti de vita spirituali sive de vivere occurrit advertere ergo scilicet a quo distillatur, in quo radicatur (...), in quo demonstratur, a quo expugnatur, a quo exsufflatur...";

ff. 30v-40v, *De visione humana*, incipit, "Videre. Volenti loqui de visione humana que ideo homini data est non solum sensus corporalis, sed intellectus spiritualis super animalia ...";

ff. 41v-50, *De "vadere"*, incipit, "Vade. Loquenti de vadere sive vade, quia sepe homini dicitur in Scriptura est et non rediens, ut dicitur in Psalmo, est sciendum ...";

ff. 50-58v, *De vocatione*, incipit, "Vocare. Loquenti de vocatione sciendum est quod Deus vocat omnes homines scilicet ad diversa. Ideo quilibet attendere debet ad quod vocatur et illud pro viribus adimplere...";

ff. 58v-64, *De "servire"*; incipit, "Servire. Loquenti de servire notandum quod Deus ad modum magni domini et potentis habet servos et famulos sibi in variis officiis et diversis obsequiis servientes...";

ff. 64-73v, *De "facere"*, incipit, "Facete. Sepe queritur in Scriptura quod faciendo vitam eternam optinebimus sub diversis verbis in hoc interrogat iste legis peritus...";

ff. 73v-86, *De humilitate*, incipit, "Humilitas. Loquenti de humilitate que secundum Johannem est prima virtus christianorum est sciendum quod summe humilitati est insistendum...;

ff. 85-98v, *De dilectione sive de caritate*, incipit, "Dilectio. Loquenti de dilectione sciendum circa Dei et proximi dilectionem est super omnia insistendum que est congruitatis, facilitatis, nobilitatis, utilitatis...";

ff. 98v-114v, *De adventu Christi*, incipit, "Venire. Loquenti de venire, notandum quod Dei filius dominus Ihesus Christus in mundum venit propter quatuor, scilicet ad honorandum matrem, mitigandum patrem, confutandum mortem, liberandum fratrem...";

ff. 114v-124v, *De surgere*, incipit, "Surgere. Loquenti de surgere occurrit advertere quod homo a principio fuit institutus ad sydera rectus...";

ff. 124v-133v, *De peccato*, incipit, "Loquenti de peccato est sciendum quod peccatum summe est fugiendum, summe odiendum, summe cavendum..."

ff. 133v-153, *De sancto ut filio Dei--de sancto magno*, incipit, "Loquenti de filio est sciendum quod licet omnis homo sit filius Dei creatus, a Deo tamen per gratiam adoptionis; per adoptionem eterne mansionis ...";

ff. 153-161v, *De sapientia*, incipit, "Loquenti de sapientia qua summe homo in ista vita exornatur ...";

ff. 161v-168, *De sancto justo*, incipit, "Loquenti de justo occurrit advertere illud quod decet gloria: dicitur Mt. 5[6] 'Beati qui exuriunt' ...";

ff. 168-176, *De sanctitate*, incipit, "Volenti loqui de sancto qualis fuit ille beatus cujus festum colitur, occurrit quod ipse perfectissime fuit, omni sanctitate plenus ...";

f. 176, Colophon: "Laus et honor sit Christe, amen."

Contains a hitherto unedited collection of *distinctiones*, or distinctions, the only extant writing by Raimundus de Bretis (fl. c. 1300), a Franciscan preacher, whose name is found at the end of one of the manuscripts Schneyer titles *Distinctiones temporales et sanctorum cum thematibus connexae* (Paris, BnF MS lat. 546: *Expliciunt Distinctiones sanctorales fratris Raimundi de Bretis*; see Schneyer, vol. 5, pp. 18-34, for a list of "themata" and manuscripts).

Little is known about the author. Certainly a mendicant and probably a Franciscan (e.g., "fraters"), Raimundus lived c. 1300 as we can surmise from reflections on contemporary events found in his writings, and it is assumed his works date from the early fourteenth century (cf. *HL*, 27, pp. 162-63). Because he uses many latinized French words, he was most likely French, but the name "Brette" or "Brets" applies to many different towns in the Languedoc, in Maine, and in the Dauphiné. Along with his scriptural citations, he often cites the work of Aristotle, sometimes Seneca, and even Ovid.

Schneyer lists only nine manuscripts, of which the present manuscript is evidently one of the more complete (Erlangen, UB, 321; Heidelberg, UB, Salem 9, 72; Oxford, Bodl. Lib., MS 4; Paris, BnF, lat. 3546; Prague, UB XII. A. 14; Toulouse, Bib. Mun. 334; Rome, Vat. Lat. 1266 and Vat. Burghes. 342; and Venice, Bib. Marciana, fond. Antic. 158).

Considerably more abbreviated than our compilation are the Paris and Toulouse copies (Schneyer, 5, p. 34: the Paris copy contains only 22 folios; Toulouse, Bib. Mun., MS 34 only 24 folios). Raimundus's *distinctiones* were thus not widely circulated: "contemporaries were perhaps not shocked by the vulgarity of his style; but they must have found, as we do, that he lacked imagination" (*HL*, 27, p. 162). Interestingly, however, our exemplar demonstrates that his distinctions reached Italy and were certainly still appreciated more

than a half-century after his activity, for the present copy originates in Venice, c. 1360s-70s, and received rich prefatory illumination.

The present work is a late example of the genre of biblical distinctions. Such compilations proliferate primarily in the thirteenth century, the earliest collection being the *Summa Abel* of Peter the Chanter (d. 1197). Virtually no new examples date as late as the early fourteenth century; the collection of Nicolas Biard in the late thirteenth century is one of the last to be composed. Used as instruments in the teaching of theology, compilations of distinctions were “designed and employed equally, if not predominantly, for the writing of sermons” (Rouse, 1974, pp. 29-31, esp. p. 30). Distinctions “distinguish” the four levels of meaning (literal, allegorical, anagogic, and tropologic), and for each meaning a scriptural illustration is furnished. Typical of such collections, Raimundus includes among his themes mercy, the Lord, knowledge, life, human vision, the verb “to go,” vocation, to serve, to do, humility, charity, the coming of Christ, getting up, sin, the saint as the son of God, wisdom, and holiness.

In our manuscript, the layout of the page is structured to enhance the didactic content of the text. The principal divisions (sub-themes of the explanation) are written one under another on the left next to the margin, and the first explanations for each title are written utilizing the free space with connecting lines to guide the reader (e.g., f. 106v). This functions exactly as dashes in modern teaching manuals. With obvious recourse to mnemonic techniques, the sub-themes are often outlined with parallel syntax and in forms that rhyme.

ILLUSTRATION

f. 1, historiated initial of Saint Paul, dressed in pink, covered with a blue mantle, holding a red book, his sword in his right hand, protruding out of the initial into the border, on a highly burnished gold ground.

The figure of Saint Paul relates to the content of the manuscript because during the Middle Ages he was named in Latin simply *Apostolus*, the apostle par excellence and the model of the apostolate. His elongated face, his features defined by striated white-gray lines, his large almond-shaped eyes, and elongated hands with well-defined fingers separated by black outlines, compares closely with the style of Giustino di Gherardino da Forli, an artist who came to Venice from Forli and who was active in the second half of the Trecento. He reveals a familiarity with Bolognese illumination, not only in his palette but in the marked *chiaroscuro* and intense modeling. (see Mariani Canova, 1978, figs. 47-50; and Todini, et al, 1996, no. 31).

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ONLINE RESOURCES

On Franciscan writers: Raimundus de Bretis

<http://users.bart.nl/~roestb/franciscan/franautr.htm>