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GREGORIO D'ALESSANDRIA, *Confessione generale or Trattato o formola di confessione*
In Italian and Latin, manuscript on parchment,
[Northern Italy, perhaps Ferrara or Venice, c. 1450]

32 folios [preceded by 2 parchment flyleaves], on parchment, complete (collation: [II] parchment flyleaves + i⁸, ii⁶, iii⁸, iv⁸), written in light brown ink in a rounded italic script, text copied on up to 19 long lines (justification 75 x 90 mm), catchwords, ruled in lead. BOUND IN A CONTEMPORARY NORTH ITALIAN BLIND-STAMPED BINDING, calf over wooden boards, the covers paneled with triple blind fillets, a border of curved hatched tools repeated to form interlaced ropework, enclosing triple fillets at corners and central interlaced ropework, spine sewn on 3 thongs, upper cover detached (excellent candidate for restoration) (for comparisons see bindings attributed to Ferrara: Tammaro de Marinis, II, 1425 ter [Manuscript, Terentius, dated 1454: Oxford, Bodl. ms. lat. class. d. 2: II, 1442; Tommaso da Ferrara: Milano, Bibl. Castello Sforzesco, 81.2.86]). Dimensions 115 x 160 mm.

In a beautiful original binding, this manuscript preserves a very rare work by a little-known Italian preacher, cleric, and theologian, Gregorio d'Alessandria of the Order of the Augustinian Hermits. Never printed, this penitential manual exists in only two other copies, both in Italian libraries, and there is no critical edition. Its compact format is typical of works of this genre, made for daily and private use, and its early date suggests that it may have been transcribed during or just after the author's lifetime.

PROVENANCE

1. Script, language and binding all secure an Italian origin in the middle of the fifteenth century: binding and added contemporary annotations point towards a Venetian or a Northern Italian origin.
2. Contemporary annotations copied in a near contemporary hand [f. 31v-32]: "La istoria over rechonziliazio de questo fu depenta chon questi verssi i era in Roma ne la giexia de

san Zuane Laterani. Ma in tempo de papa Clemente quinto [1305-1314] entrando fuogo ne la dita giexia, bruxo e destrusse quela pentura ch'era in essa.

Reddidit hec Venetos sinodi presentia letos / Anno millenno centeno setuageno [1170] / Cessit Alesander tunc papa beati / Ecclesie Marci tertius ille fuit / Si quis in ascenssa domini cum venerit illuc / Confessus vero corde per penitens / Vesper utrumque lavat totum quod inter utrumque / Tempus eum culpa penaque nula manet / Additur et rursus octavo tempore toto / Septima peccati pars relevatur ei.

Portado el dito epitafo de Franza.

La presenza de questa sinodo rende aliegri i Veneziani in pero che nel'ano mile zento setenta [1170] allora papa Alesandro terzo [1159-1181] chonzesse a la giexia de san Marco nel tempo de la ascension del signor se algun vignera a la dita giexia chonfesso e veramente chum chur penitente che da uno vesporo al altro se lava tuto [...] mondi da ogni cholpa e pena.

E anchora a zonze tuto el tempo de la otava che la setima parte di pechar sia tolta via zoe per donada achi entrera nela dita giexia per elmuodo dito..."

3. A nineteenth-century hand wrote on the second flyleaf the following commentary: "Con questo libro si espose da fra Gregorio di Alessandria il metodo per far' bene la confessione generale. Era eremitano di S. Agustine. E scritto secondo il metodo di S. Antonio arcivescovo di Firenze che puo dirsi a lui contemporaneo. L'opusculo forse e inedito, come sono inediti lavori simili, che furono composti nel decimo quinto secolo. Questa scrittura appartiene all'anno 1436 o a quel torno. In fine sono riportati alcuni versi, che si leggevano nella Chiesa di San Giovanni in Laterano prima dell'incendio. Di detto Fra Gregorio si conoscono i discordi quadragesimali, e dei Santi."
4. On the lower inner cover: "Donato dal P. Lettore Bonaventura di Ascoli Min. [...] nel marzo 1840."
5. Nineteenth-century owner's stamp on inner upper board.

TEXT

ff. 1-31, Gregorio d'Alessandria, *Trattato o formola di confessione*: heading, *Questa e una confessione generale conpillata per lo reverendo padre frate Grigorio d'Alixandria della sacra theologia doctore egregio de l'ordine de frati heremitani di sancto Augustino, in la cita di Lucha de l'anno 1436 die 25 ma[r]tii nella dicta citade predicatore della chiesa maggiore della dicta citade*, incipit, "In nomine patris et filii et spiritus sancti Amen. / Benedicte respondeat sacerdos dominus te benedicat et ab omni malo te defendat et ad vitam eternam te perducatur... ; explicit, "[...] afflictos non consolari. Admonitoribus non acquiescere. Hec omnia peccati sunt fere que committi possunt" (see Perini, 1929, p. 21-22);

ff. 31v-32, Added contemporary annotations: see transcription above in "Provenance."

Little is known about Gregorio di Alessandria (died in Milan in 1447) who entered the Augustinian Order and studied in Bologna between 1418 and 1421. He preached extensively in a number of cities (Mantua, Milan, and Florence), and his unpublished and unedited sermons are preserved in two manuscripts of different texts, both paper copies of the fifteenth century (Florence, Bibl. Riccardiana, Cod 1281 [P. III.12] and Venice, San Marco, 125, Classis XXI) (see Perini, p. 21). The present treatise *Confessione generale* or *Trattato o formola di confessione* also seems to be extremely rare; it is known in only two other copies, both in Italian collections: Florence, Bibl. Riccardiana, Cod. 1694 (P. IV. 7) and Siena, Bibl. Communale, C. VII. 6. Our manuscript could have been copied contemporary with Gregorio's lifetime or just shortly after his death in 1447. It was never printed, and there is no critical edition.

Gregorio's *Confessione generale* or *Trattato o formola di confessione* belongs to a group of penitential manuals written in Latin and the vernacular called "confessionals," which circulated widely throughout Europe from the thirteenth century through the late fifteenth century. In the standard work on the subject, Michaud-Quantin notes that Italian examples first appear at the beginning of the fourteenth century (p. 95). Written mostly in the vernacular, our text begins with the formula common in confessionals, where, after an introduction, the sinner is asked to identify himself to the confessor. A list of possible transgressions follows; the largest portion of Gregorio's text comprises the seven deadly sins (begins on f. 1v, "Dico mia copia de sette peccati mortali" and continues to f. 24). This is followed by the "Forty rules for the perfect confession" (f. 24v), the "Three discretions" (f. 25), the "Sixteen conditions of confession" (f. 25v) and other short sections, such as the fourteen ways in which the mortal sins can be aggravated, etc. Michaud-Quantin notes that there is no systematic study of penitential texts in the vernacular, but that in general they appear to be closely inspired by their Latin models (p. 97).

LITERATURE

Fumagelli. *L'arte della legatura alla corte degli Estensi, a Ferrara e a Modena*, Florence, 1913.

Gasparolo, F. *Gli Agostiniani in Alessandria*, 1897 [not seen: could provide more information].

Michaud-Quantin, P. *Sommes de casuistique et manuels de confession au Moyen Age (XIIIe-XVIe siècles)*, Louvain, Ed. Nauwelaerts et Lille, Giard, 1962 [Analecta mediaevalia Namurcensia, 13].

Ossinger, J. *Bibliotheca augustiniiana, historica critica et chronologica in qua mille quadringenti augustiniani ordinis scriptores...*, Ingolstadii et Augustae Vindellicorum, J. F. X. Craetz, 1768, pp. 415-416.

Pamphilus, Joseph. *Chronicis Ordinis FF. Erem. S. Augustini*, Rome 1581, p. 78.

Perini, David Aurelius. *Bibliographia Augustiniana, cum notis biographicis. Scriptores Itali*, Florence, Tipografia Sordomuti, 1929, Vol. 1, p. 21-22.

Tammaro di Marinis. *La legatura artistica in Italia nei secoli XV & XVI*, volume II, Bologna, Cesena, Ferrara, Venezia, Florence, 1960.

ONLINE RESOURCES

Perini's *Bibliographia Augustiniana*: on Gregorio d'Alessandria:

<http://web.tiscali.it/no-redirect-tiscali/ghirardacci/perini/perini.htm>