

BERNARDUS AYGLERIUS, *Expositio in regulam S. Benedicti*

In Latin, decorated manuscript on paper

France, Central or Southwest, c. 1480-1500

ii (paper flyleaves, detached) + 85 + ii (parchment flyleaves from other manuscripts) on paper (watermark, St. Catherine's Wheel, similar to Briquet 13290, Périgord, 1491; cf. also Briquet 13252, Decizes 1499, 13275, Bourg 1496, and 13281, Châteaudun, 1540), incomplete original foliation in roman numerals, very bottom outer corner, on the first, third and fifth leaf of each quire (i.e. ff. 1, 3, 5, 13, 15, 17, etc.), modern foliation in pencil, top outer corner recto (collation, i-vi¹² vii¹² [+1, f. 85, following 12]), middle of each quire reinforced with parchment strips from another manuscript, no catchwords or signatures, ruling is very hard to see, but it appears to be frame ruled in blind, with full-length vertical bounding lines (justification, 110-107 x 80-75 mm.), written in an elegant, cursive gothic bookhand in thirty to twenty-seven long lines, some majuscules in text filled with pale yellow, red paragraph marks and rubrics, two-to one-line red initials, in good condition, with a stain from damp in the lower corner, f. 79 to end, and a worm hole, upper margin, f. 81 to end, with no damage to the text. Bound in an unusual binding, probably contemporary, made from two pieces of brown leather, sewn together horizontally, which is stitched over paste-boards formed from ten leaves from other manuscripts (now partially visible at the top, front, and along the fore edge, back), the leather turn-ins are covered with a paper leaf, now fragmentary, in the front, and by leather in the back, part of this leather is broken off, and is now laid in, sewn on three leather bands, stitched through the inside of the covers in a "v" pattern, lighter brown leather (sheepskin?) spine, probably later, with three raised bands with the title in gilt between the first and second in a gold square, "Regl de S. Benoit Manuscr 13 Sciecl [sic]," remains of leather tie, front cover, with a hole in the back cover, presumably from another tie, now missing, in sound condition, but showing considerable wear, including a second small hole in the back cover near the spine, and with corners and some edges of the leather covers worn away. Dimensions 145 x 102 mm.

The *Commentary on the Rule of St. Benedict* by Bernard Ayglerius (d. 1282), Abbot of Monte Cassino, has never been the subject of a modern scholarly study, despite the importance of its author in the history of that preeminent Benedictine monastery. Copied widely in the fifteenth century, especially in Germany and Austria, this copy is of special interest because of its French provenance and its unusual, likely original binding and is a rare example of an inexpensive, rather makeshift solution to protecting the text. The Schoenberg Database lists only one sale; there appear to be no copies of the text in United States collections.

PROVENANCE

1. Written in the later decades of the fifteenth century, probably c. 1480-1500, in Central or Southwestern France, as indicated by the style of the script and the watermark. This text, a commentary on the *Rule of St. Benedict* by Bernard Ayglerius (d. 1282), was very popular in fifteenth-century Benedictine and Cistercian monasteries, and it is likely that this manuscript was copied for a monastic library. Only one sale of this text is listed in the Schoenberg Database; there are no copies recorded in De Ricci's *Census of manuscripts in the United States*, or in the *Supplement* by Bond and Faye.

The manuscript is bound in what appears to be its original binding, an interesting example of an inexpensive binding assembled from pieces of leather sewn together to

form the cover, with "boards" assembled from ten paper leaves, reused from other fourteenth- or fifteenth-century manuscripts; the back flyleaves are also leaves from other fifteenth-century manuscripts, f. i, from a sermon manuscript (on the recto "Quidam pulcri sermones ..."), and on the verso, part of a document in French; f. ii, fragment from a Prayerbook in Latin. Makeshift bindings such as this one have rarely survived, but it seems likely that this type of inexpensive solution to the problem of protecting a text was once quite common.

2. Medieval shelf-mark, bottom margin, ff. 1 and 83, "B 63," in both cases preceded by four erased words, "C de C.

3. Armorial bookplate, front flyleaf, f. ii, "Bibliothèque de Monsieur le Baron de Caix de Saint-Aymour," with motto, "Fortior in adversis"; the Baron Amédée Caix de Saint Aymour was the mayor of Corbie (1863-1920), educated at the l'Ecole des chartes and at the l'Ecoles des langues orientales.

4. Front cover, octagonal paper label, edged in blue, from a nineteenth-century French book dealer, "Manuscrit, 13ième siècle"; similar note, inside front cover.

TEXT

f. 1, *Incipit probemium bernardi cassinetum [sic] super regula beati benedicti*, incipit, "Legitur in prouerbiis xiiii doctrinam sapientiam facilis. Ideo ... [f. 2] Regulam istam beatam patrum benedictum edidisse non dubium est ... *Explicit probemium glose Bernardi cassinetum super regula sancti benedicti*. [f. 3], *Prima pars prologi*, Prologus dicitur quasi prologus vel quasi ... Auscultus, aliqua littera habet obscura ... [f. 6v] *De generibus vel vita monachorum, capitulum primum*, Monachorum, etc. manifestum est quod quatuor modis conuersantur ... cum sanctis suis ad gloriam regni sui perveniamus eternam." *Deo gracias. Explicit expositio regule*. [f. 83v-85v, blank].

Bernardus Ayglerius, *Expositio in regulam S. Benedicti*, edited by Anselmus Maria Caplet in 1894 from Monte Cassino, Archivio dell'Abbazia, MS 440, probably the earliest manuscript of the text, datable c. 1278-82 and copied in Beneventan script (see Lowe, p. 350), with corrections from Subiaco, Bibl. Del Monasterio di S. Scolastica, LXXX.8; this edition is not widely available, and it was not consulted by this writer.

This text has never been the subject of a modern scholarly study. Hilarius Walter, in his study of Bernard's *Speculum monachorum*, listed seventeen manuscripts in Austrian and German libraries (Walter, 1901, p. 32, note 2), and James Clark listed four additional manuscripts from English monasteries (Clark, p. 31, note 35), but the text circulated much more broadly. A preliminary survey of online catalogues suggests that in fact this text survives in at least forty-one copies, including the manuscript described here (although this survey would need careful revisions to be completely trustworthy). Even this preliminary list suggests that a study of the use of this text in fifteenth-century monasteries would be very interesting—its circulation in German and Austrian monasteries of this period is quite marked, and there are also a number of copies from England. Its circulation in Italy and France, by contrast, appears to have been more modest, although it was certainly known in France, and it was translated into French by Guillaume de Précy in 1340 (Paris, BnF, MS fr. 17250). This manuscript's French provenance is thus noteworthy.

Bernard Ayglerius (or Aiglerius, Ayglier, etc), also known as Bernardus Cassinensis (d. 1282), was a figure of considerable importance in his own day; E. A. Lowe called him perhaps “the last striking figure in the literary annals of Monte Cassino” (p. 14). He was born in Lyon in the beginning of the thirteenth century, and entered the Benedictine monastery at Savigny at a young age. He became Papal chaplain to Pope Innocent IV sometime before 1244. In 1256 he was made abbot of the monastery of Lérins. A follower of Charles of Anjou, the younger brother of King Louis IX of France, he was appointed Abbot of the Benedictine monastery of Monte Cassino by Pope Urban IV in 1263, and took possession of his office in 1266 when King Manfred of Sicily was killed in the battle of Benevento, and Charles of Anjou was established as the ruler of Southern Italy and Sicily.

Monte Cassino was founded c. 529 by St. Benedict; it had a turbulent history, and it was destroyed and rebuilt numerous times. It reached its apogee under the Abbot Desiderius (1058-1087), when it was an extremely important political, as well as religious, literary and artistic center in southern Italy. It suffered in subsequent years under the Hohenstaufen rule, and its monks were expelled in 1240 by Frederick II. Bernard’s appointment as abbot by the Pope represented a new start for the monastery, and he vigorously pursued both the reestablishment of a regular monastic life, and the political and temporal rights of the abbey.

Bernard’s tenure as abbot was an important one. His concern for the religious life of the community is reflected in his two works, the *Speculum monachorum* and this *Commentary on the Rule of St. Benedict*. Although some earlier scholars believed that he was made a cardinal by Pope Clement IV in 1265 or 1268, there is no evidence to support this; nonetheless, he was active as a papal legate. Bernard died at Monte Cassino in 1282 and was buried there.

The *Rule* of St. Benedict, written in the sixth century, was the foundational document for the life in Benedictine monasteries throughout the Middle Ages (and indeed, it remains so today). A chapter of the *Rule* was read to the monks each day in the monastic Chapter House. The *Rule* consisted of a prologue and seventy-three chapters, and discussed the basic monastic virtues of humility, silence, and obedience as well as directives for daily living. Commentaries on the *Rule*, like this commentary by Bernard Ayglerius, were also read in the chapter, and were an important part of the education of monastic novices. As James Clark has observed, the manuscript tradition of Bernard’s *Commentary* shows that there was greater interest in this text after c. 1350 than ever before. He concludes, “In fact, in the late medieval cloister Bernard seems to have come to be regarded as one of the principal authorities on the monastic life, on the same footing as Augustine, Bernard of Clairvaux, and even St. Benedict himself” (Clark, p. 31). This is a remarkable statement, and a modern study of Bernard’s text that explores its later medieval circulation, as well as its contents, is certainly called for.

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