

AMBROSE, *Exameron* ("On the Six Days")
In Latin, illuminated manuscript on parchment
Western Germany, 1488

iii (modern parchment) + 56 + iii folios on parchment, modern foliation in pencil, top, outer corner recto, complete (collation, i-iv¹² v⁸), catchwords, very bottom inside margin in quires two and four, no leaf or quire signatures except f. 14, very bottom outer corner, ruled in lead, often with the top two, and sometimes the bottom two horizontal rules full across (only these rules extend full across the columns), single full-length vertical bounding lines, inside, outside and between the columns, prickings top and bottom margins, and in outer margin on ff. 42-48 (justification, 227 x 223 x 155-150 mm.), written below the top line in a practiced hybrida script in two columns of forty- to thirty-nine lines, no running titles, notes for rubricator, lower margin, f. 14, and letters, 'b' and 'r' in faint lead alongside many initials, indicating the color, rubrics (usually chapter numbers in Roman numerals) in red, majuscules within the text stroked with red, two-line alternately red and blue initials, four six- to seven-line parted red and blue initials, ff. 8v, 24, 30v, and 48v, infilled with delicate purple pen-work, with touches of green and yellow, with purple pen-work borders extending half to full column, similar initial, f. 12v, in blue with decorate void spaces within the initials, with red pen decoration with touches of green, one large eight-line white-patterned light blue initial, f. 1, infilled with a red, pink and green flower (or vegetable?) on a scalloped gold ground, with curling white-patterned pink acanthus at the edges, and with a delicate border extending the full length of the text of black pen scrolls with small gold disks and red, pink and green flowers, in excellent condition, most leaves are white and pristine, a few leaves with slight stains and damage from damp on f. 1, and ff. 10v-13. Bound in red pigskin in 1914 by Katharine Adams (1862-1952), an accomplished bookbinder who worked for private presses including the Doves Press, Ashdene Press, and Kelmscott Press, as well as rebinding books and manuscripts for collectors, her binder's mark, tail turn-in on the back board, spine lettered in gilt, vellum doublures and flyleaves, minor wear to edges and small scratches and scuffs on covers, but in excellent condition. Dimensions 327 x 215 mm.

In its handsome binding by Katharine Adams, this is a very attractive, almost pristine copy of a fundamental text by St. Ambrose, signed by the scribe, Petrus Arnoldus, and dated 1488. The script, pen-work initials, and the illuminated initial at the beginning of the volume all exhibit a very high level of craftsmanship. This commentary on the six days of creation was St. Ambrose's most popular work; its subject matter allowed for numerous comments on natural history and science, in addition to its religious and moral content. Manuscripts of this text are rarely for sale; the Schoenberg Database lists only six sales since 1965.

PROVENANCE

1. Copied by Brother Petrus Arnoldus, who completed his work on 30 April 1488, colophon f. 55v. He also copied and signed a manuscript of Jerome, *Super evangelium missus est angelus Gabriel* in June 1493 (Brussels, BR, MS IV.1163; *Manuscrits datés conservés en Belgique*, vol. V, p. 41, no. 653). Based on the style of script and decoration, the manuscript was copied in Western Germany. Every aspect of this manuscript, from the well-prepared parchment, generous margins, disciplined script, and the lovely, restrained decoration, suggests it was the product of a disciplined scriptoria or workshop; the punctuation is sophisticated, and includes, if sparingly, the *punctus flexus* and *elevatus*, which may suggest the manuscript was

copied in a Carthusian monastery, or perhaps, most likely, in a circle influenced by the Brethren of the Common Life and the *Devotio moderna*, both known for their book production in the late Middle Ages.

This is a remarkably clean copy, with almost no signs of use, although there are a few corrections in a formal hand, probably by the scribe, for example, on f. 24v, column a, line 15, a single omitted word is fitted in above the line; a longer omission is supplied below the column, with a symbol marking the place where the text should be inserted (other corrections on ff. 27v, 42v, and 51). A reader added a few very neat "nota" marks ff. 18, 25, and a variant reading in a very minute hand on f. 44.

2. Belonged to Wilfred Merton (1888-1967) of Richmond Surrey, the prominent book collector, and friend of Chester Beatty; front flyleaf, f. iii, his ownership inscription in ink, "<erased> Richmond, Surrey, MS 20." The manuscript was bound for him in 1914 by Katherine Adams (1862-1952), and it is described in her records for that year. Adams was an accomplished bookbinder who worked for private presses including the Doves Press, Ashendene Press, and Kelmscott Press, as well as rebinding books and manuscripts for collectors. In common with most of her bindings, this binding is notable of its careful craftsmanship and sound materials; its decoration is confined to the careful lettering in gilt on the spine. The printer Emery Walker wanted to see her recognised as the first artist binder in England.
3. Belonged to W. A. Foyle (d. 1964) of Beeleigh Abbey, red and gold bookplate, inside front cover; Foyle was the owner of Foyles Bookshop of Charing Cross Road, London; his collection of over 4,000 books was sold in 2000 upon the death of his daughter Christine.
4. Front flyleaf (now loose, laid in, once partially attached), typed description in English.
5. In pencil, inside front cover, price code; f. 56v, rather faint numbers in pencil in a large, quickly written script; pencilled number '237' in a circle, penciled note 'List 1.A.10', penciled shelfmark 'I.h.I' on back flyleaf.

TEXT

ff. 1-55v, *Incipit liber primus exameron beati Ambrosii episcopi de die primo*, incipit, "Tantum ne opinionis assumpsisse homines ... Ego dormiui et requievi et surrexi quoniam dei suscepit me. Ipse enim requieuit qui fecit. Cui honor gloria perpetuitas a seculis et nunc et semper et in omnia secula seculorum. Amen." *Explicit liber sextus beati Ambrosii episcopi in exameron scriptus per fratrem petrum arnoldi. Anno domini m. cccc. octuagesimo ultima die aprilis.*

Ambrose, *Exameron*; edited in C. Schenkl, *Sancti Ambrosii opera, pars prima*, Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum 32.1 (Vienna 1890) pp. 3-261; and in PL 14:123-274; English translation by John Savage (listed below), Italian translations by Emiliano Pasteris, 1937 and Gabriele Banterle, 1979 (listed below); *Clavis Patrum Latinorum* 123; Stegmüller, *Repertorium biblicum* no. 1227.

The text in this copy is divided into the usual six books, beginning on f. 1, 8v, 12v, 24, 30v, and 43v. It is very professionally written and decorated, with sophisticated punctuation and careful corrections (see Provenance, above), but it is also noteworthy that it lacks the type of practical aids to using the text, which we might expect, especially running titles and any means of distinguishing the biblical citations within the text.

The text survives in a number of early manuscripts; it was edited by Schenkl from two manuscripts dating from the seventh and eighth centuries, with comparisons from nine additional manuscripts from the eighth through the eleventh century; he also consulted seven additional manuscripts from the eleventh and twelfth century. The text was printed in Augsburg, 1472, Milan, 1477, and in Cologne, c. 1480-3 (GW nos. 1603-1605); further study would be necessary to see if this manuscript reflects any of these printed editions. There seems to be no comprehensive census of the surviving copies, although it is said to be Ambrose's most popular work. An informal survey suggests that it was very popular in the twelfth century, and there was a renewed interest in the text in the fifteenth century, demonstrated by its survival in numerous manuscripts from both Italy and northern Europe.

Saint Ambrose, one of the four doctors of the Latin Church, was born c. 339 to a Christian family in Trier, and died in Milan in 397. He was educated in Rome in rhetoric and law. In 374 he was baptized and became bishop of Milan. Some scholars have dismissed him as a derivative thinker, but modern scholars have emphasized that his works not only show a creative engagement with earlier works, but also successfully adapt these works to the pastoral needs of the Church.

Ambrose had a working knowledge of Greek, and an extensive knowledge of classical as well as Christian sources. His numerous works include *De officiis ministeris* (*On the Duties of the Clergy*), several treatises on Virginité, and *De Sacramentis*. Most of his works, like the *Exameron*, were the product of his preaching, an important duty of the fourth-century bishop. His biblical commentaries include numerous works that focus on Genesis, where he found the essential foundations for Christian life, including in addition to the *Exameron*, *On Paradise*, *On Cain and Abel*, *On Noah*, *On Abraham*, *On Isaac and the Soul*, *On Jacob and the Happy Life*, *On Joseph* and *On the Patriarchs*, as well as commentaries on particular Psalms, notably Psalm 118, Isaiah, and Luke (see *Clavis patrum latinorum*, nos. 123-143, and Stegmüller, *Repertorium*, nos. 1227-1243). His knowledge of the Bible was prodigious, and his commentaries combine the Christian allegorical interpretation based on Philo and Origen, earlier Greek theologians, with his admiration of the ethical teachings of classical authors including Cicero, Virgil, Seneca and Livy.

The *Exameron*, or *Hexameron*, as it is often spelled, can be translated as *On the Six Days*, and consists of nine homilies on Genesis 1:1-26, based on the Greek work of the same title by Basil. "Exameron" refers to the six days of creation. It originated as a series of homilies delivered during Holy Week in Milan, c. 386-390, which was then revised by Ambrose; the division into six books reflects the earliest surviving manuscripts. In addition to its discussion of religious and moral topics, the text is of interest since he comments on an array of natural sciences from astronomy to zoology, and uses the natural world to point out moral lessons. The *Exameron* has been called "a compendium of popular science of his day" (Ramsey, p. 56).

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