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GREGORY THE GREAT, *Dialogues*
 In Latin, decorated manuscript on parchment
 Northern France (Paris), c. 1240-1250

i (paper) + 92 + *i* (paper) folios on parchment (thin and well-prepared), modern foliation in pencil, top, outer corner, recto, (collation, i-v¹⁶ vi¹⁴ [-13 and 14, cancelled with no loss of text]), horizontal catchwords, no catchwords or leaf and quire signatures, ruled visibly in lead with the top three, middle three, and bottom three horizontal rules usually full across, ruling continues across the columns, with full-length vertical bounding lines, inner and outer margins and between the columns, and extra full-length vertical bounding lines in the far inside and outer margins, sometimes double, and often trimmed away, (justification 122 x 90-87 mm.), copied below the top line in an upright gothic script in two columns of thirty-five lines, guide notes for the rubricator in the far inner margin, majuscules within the text touched with red, red rubrics, names of the speakers (Gregorius and Petrus) in red, chapter lists with one-line alternately red and blue initials, two-line alternately red and blue initials with contrasting pen flourishes at the beginning of chapters, books begin with six-line parted red and blue initials, some including short red and blue cascades, in excellent condition, with some cockling, and some minor staining from damp on the closing folios. Bound in 18th-century dark brown leather over pasteboard, rebacked with the spine laid down (?), spine decorated with gilt fleurons, with five raised bands and a title on red leather lettered "Dialo/ Sancti/ Gregor/ P.," speckled edges, in very good condition, with slight wear on the covers. Dimensions 162 x 116 mm.

Very attractive manuscript of one of the most revered texts of the Middle Ages, the *Dialogues* by Pope Gregory the Great, which exhibits all the characteristics of books made in Paris in the middle of the thirteenth century in the bustling environment of the professional book shops. Such a patristic text is unusual in this context and prompts us to wonder for whom it was made (the use of the *Dialogues* by preachers merits further consideration). Despite the large number of extant manuscripts, thirteenth-century copies are now rare on the market.

PROVENANCE

1. Written in Northern France around the middle of the thirteenth century; the script, format, and decorated initials strongly suggest that the manuscript was copied in Paris, c. 1240-1250 in a professional shop. The pen decoration appears similar to Paris, BnF, MS lat. 15756, Guillaume de Avernia, *De universo*, copied in Paris, c. 1240-50, and Paris, BnF, MS lat. 9970, Calendar and Martyrology, datable to 1242-1249, see P. Stirnemann. 1990, pp. 68 and 73.

A patristic text like Gregory's *Dialogues*, is unusual in this context; the Paris shops are instead known for numerous Bibles, liturgical books, as well vernacular translations and texts used in the Schools, including Glossed Bibles, Aristotle, and Canon Law texts. Was this manuscript commissioned by a student or young cleric as a source for exempla to be used in preaching? The contemporary marginal notes in the manuscript support this hypothesis (discussed below). This manuscript is thus evidence of the readership of the *Dialogues* – commonly thought of as a monastic text, and one which also was popular later in humanist circles – in a different context.

2. Late medieval flourished signature "Brossart," on f. 92v (erased, but said to be legible under ultra-violet; not verified).
3. Traditionally said to have been part of the collection formed by Giovanni and Giulio Saibante of Verona in the eighteenth-century; a sales description records that "E Mus. De Verone" was once inscribed on f. 1 in an early nineteenth-century hand (erasure, top margin); the manuscript was among the Canonici and Saibante manuscripts sold in London, Sotheby's, February 26, 1821, lot 241 (Schoenberg Database 29724);
4. Modern sales include, Sotheby's, December 2, 1986, lot 41 (Schoenberg Database 1199); Dorling, June 11, 1987, lot 3 (Schoenberg Database 29708); and Quaritch in 2005, lot 14 (Schoenberg Database 61006).

TEXT

ff. 1-16v, *Incipiunt capitula i. libri*, incipit, "De honorato abbate monasterii fundensis, ..."; f. 1, *Incipit primus liber de dyalogorum*, incipit, "Quadam die nimis quorumdam secularium tumultibus depressus ... de eo exordium sumamus."

ff. 16v-34v, *Incipiunt capitula secundi libri*, incipit, "De capisterio fracto et consolidatio ..."; f. 28, *Incipit secundus liber dyalogorum sancti gregorii pape urbis romane*, incipit, "Fuit uir uite uenerabilis gratie benedictus et nomine ... per silentium reparentur."

ff. 35-62, *Incipiunt capitula tertii libri*, incipit, "De Paulino nolane ciuitatis episcopo ..."; f. 35, *Incipit liber tercius de dyalogorum sancti gregorii pape urbis rome*, incipit, Gregorius, Cum uicinis ualde patribus ... hoc quarto uolumine demonstrabo."

ff. 62-92v, *Incipiunt capitula in libro quarto dyalogorum*, incipit, "Quod eterna spiritualia ideo a carnalibus ..."; f. 63, *Incipit liber quartus dyalogorum*, incipit, "Postquam de paradisi gaudiis culpa exigente ... si ante mortem deo hostia ipsi fuerimus." *Explicit liber quartus dyalogorum sancti gregorii papis urbe rome.*

This is a well organized copy of the *Dialogues* by Pope Gregory the Great with chapter lists at the beginning of each of the four books. Book I was copied without chapter divisions, but the chapters in the remaining books are numbered and begin with a decorated initial in color. A closely contemporary hand added chapter titles in the margins (and in the first book, marked the divisions for the chapters). Of special interest are the slightly later notes added in Book I marking passages

that include an *exemplum* of interest (cf. ff. 3, 3v, 4v, etc.), occasionally including a description of the *exemplum* (for example ff. 10v, 12 and 14); see also the notes on ff. 44v and 45v, probably in this hand, or by a contemporary. Throughout the manuscript there are also numerous trefoil reader's marks in the margins. The text, as the name indicates, is a dialogue between Gregory and Peter, and their names are copied in red in the manuscript.

There are two modern editions of the text: Gregory Magno, *Storie di santi e di diavoli, dialoghi*, ed. Manlio Simonetti and Salvatore Pricoco, Roma, Fondazione Lorenzo Valla, and Milano, A. Mondadori, 2005-2006; and A. de Vogüé, ed., *Grégoire le Grand. Dialogues*, Sources chrétiennes, 251, 260 and 265, Paris, Cerf, 1978-1980. At this time there is no published census of the manuscripts of the *Dialogues*, although a census of the manuscripts of all Gregory's works is being prepared by Fabiana Boccini and Francesca Sara D'Imperio, which will collect in one database all the available information on 8,412 manuscript witnesses of the writings of Gregory the Great, *Bibliotheca Gregorii Manuscripta: censimento dei manoscritti con opere di Gregorio Magno e della sua fortuna (epitomi, florilegi, pseudoepigrafi, agiografie, liturgia*, Florence, SISMEI, forthcoming.

The *Dialogues* are a collection of stories, recounting the lives and miracles of the holy men of sixth-century Italy; the second book is entirely devoted to Saint Benedict of Nursia, the founder of Benedictine monasticism. The work exercised an immense influence on the subsequent literature of the Middle Ages and survives in numerous manuscripts in both Latin and the vernacular. It was translated into Greek by Pope Zacharias I (741-752) and into Anglo Saxon c. 890 at the urging of King Alfred the Great. Later vernacular versions including those in French and Dutch were popular. An informal survey suggests, however, that this manuscript is unusual since it was copied in Paris in the thirteenth century, and in such a small format. Of the 185 manuscripts of the *Dialogues* in the Schoenberg Database, for example, twenty five are described as thirteenth century, but our manuscript is the only thirteenth-century copy from Paris.

Gregory was born around 540 into a wealthy Roman family, but abandoned his secular career to become a monk. He was elected pope in 590, and died in 604. He was a prolific writer; works such as his commentary on Job, the *Moralia in Job*, and the *Liber regulae pastoralis*, on the duties of a bishop, earned him his place as one of the Latin Fathers of the Western Church. His career and writings are distinguished by his intelligence, administrative skills, common sense, and perceptive knowledge of human nature.

The *Dialogues*, revered and loved by diverse audiences throughout the Middle Ages, has had a mixed reception in the modern world and recently has been the subject of a lively debate. Beginning in the sixteenth century, writers expressed contempt for the miracles and wondrous events that are so important in the *Dialogues*. These critics found it almost impossible to believe that a man they admired so much could have believed in all the stories that they dismissed as silly and superstitious. As Joan Petersen summarizes, the *Dialogues* were seen "as an aberration of an otherwise noble mind." Gibbon, for example, mentions "the entire nonsense of the *Dialogues*." Francis Clark, in two exceedingly lengthy books, presented the argument, now accepted by very few scholars, that the *Dialogues* should not be accepted as an authentic work by Gregory, but were rather a forgery from the end of the seventh century. More nuanced views presenting the *Dialogues* in their proper historical context, have been presented by Paul Meyvaert, Joan Petersen, and William McCready

(cited below), among others. These studies have contributed greatly to our understanding of Gregory the Great's complex and fascinating personality.

In spite of the large number of extant manuscripts, thirteenth-century copies have become rare on the market. Since 1981 the Schoenberg Database records fourteen transactions involving the Dialogues (three of which are our manuscript); with the exception of one twelfth-century manuscript, all of these are later than our manuscript.

LITERATURE

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ONLINE RESOURCES

English translation of Gregory the Great, *Dialogues*:

http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/gregory_01_dialogues_book1.htm

On Gregory the Great:

<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06780a.htm>

James O'Donnell, "The Holiness of Gregory the Great"

<http://www9.georgetown.edu/faculty/jod/holiness.html>

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