

GREGORIUS MAGNUS, *Dialogi*, Book 2: *De Vita et miraculis sancti benedicti* ("On the Life and Miracles of St. Benedict"); JACOPONE DA TODI, or LEONARDO GIUSTINIANI (?), *Donna de paradiso* ("Lady of Paradise")

In Latin and Italian, decorated manuscript on parchment

Northern Italy, 27 November 1431

i (paper) + 48 + *i* (paper) folios on parchment, original foliation in red roman numerals top margin, lx-cviii (60-108), modern foliation in pencil top outer corner recto, incomplete, missing the first fifty-nine folios, and the original f. lxxviii (collation, i¹⁰ [-1 and -10, following f. 8, with loss of text] ii-v¹⁰), decorated catchwords, lightly ruled in ink, horizontal rules only, with a single pricking in the upper margin, (justification, 68 x 50 mm), copied in a rounded southern gothic bookhand in twenty long lines, majuscules within the text highlighted in pale yellow, original red foliation, top margin, red rubrics and chapter numbers, two-line red or blue initials with very pale red (now faded) and red pen decoration, lower part of many leaves with brown stains, through f. 28 including lower half of the text although the text is legible, darker black (ink?) smudges, ff. 7 (with some loss of legibility), 10v-11, and 27, ink is worn/flaked on some folios, occasionally making a few words difficult to read. Bound in modern brown leather blind-tooled with three intersecting fillets and a rectangular center panel, which is filled with spiral tooling, spine with three raised bands on the upper board, in excellent condition. Dimensions 107 x 77 mm.

The juxtaposition of Gregory's life of St. Benedict (Book two of the *Dialogues*) in Latin, with a *lauda* in Italian, in this remarkably small manuscript, sheds interesting light on the readership of these seemingly dissimilar texts. Securely dated by its scribe, the format, ruling, script, and original foliation are of special interest to students of paleography and codicology. The *lauda* is based on the famous poem by Jacopone da Todi, but deserves study as an independent composition, possibly by Leonardo Giustiniani; its presence here in a dated copy is important.

PROVENANCE

1. The scribe completed the text on f. 42v, stating that it was copied on 27 November 1431. Based on the script and decoration, an origin in Northern Italy seems most likely. Because the manuscript is now missing the first fifty-nine pages, there is unfortunately no way to guess at its original contents. Nonetheless, since book two of the *Dialogues* concludes on the fourth leaf of the last quire, and the laud that follows is continuous in terms of the style of script, decoration and folio numbers, we can say with some confidence that it never included books three and four of the *Dialogues*. It is possible that it once began with the first book of the *Dialogues*, but it is equally possible it may have included other texts – perhaps religious lyrics, saints' lives, or prayers?

The contents of the volume that are preserved – the Latin account of St. Benedict's life and miracles from Gregory's *Dialogues*, and the "Donna de paradiso," a version of the famous laud by the Franciscan, Jacopone da Todi, in this manuscript form an interesting pair, especially since this

exceptionally small manuscript (no other manuscripts with the *Dialogues* listed in the Schoenberg Database are copied in a similarly small format) was copied in a formal southern gothic bookhand with initials decorated in the traditional style (numerous texts, including religious volumes, Choir books, and even documents for confraternities were copied with similar scripts in towns like Padua well into the fifteenth century, at the same time as texts of other types were copied in humanist scripts; see for example Baldissin Molli, Canova Mariani and Toniolo, pp. 229-30, and 234-5, nos. 88 and 91). It seems likely that this was a manuscript copied for personal devotion, possibly for use within a monastery, but more likely for a mendicant friar, member of the secular clergy, or even for a devout layman.

The manuscript shows signs of use, and includes occasional contemporary or slightly later corrections in a humanistic minuscule; on f. 48 there is a request in Latin for prayers from the readers of the text.

2. Sold in 2000 by Laucournet, 11/16, lot 23, typed description in French, glued inside front cover (Schoenberg Database no. 88646).

TEXT

ff. 1-42v, incipit, “//in qua prius conuersatus fuerat preest per silencium reparemus.” *Explicit secundus liber dyalogorum Gregorii pape urbis rome de uita et miraculis beatissimi patris benedicti abbatis. Anno domini m cccc xxxi die xxvii mensis nouembris hora xii ante die.*”

Gregorius Magnus, *Dialogi Libri IV de vita et miraculis patrum Italicorum*, Book two, ed. A. de Vogüé, Paris, 1979, pp. 120-248 (with French translation); and Simonetti and Pricoco, 2005-2006, 1:104-216 (with Italian translation); numerous English translations, including Zimmerman, 1959. 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 (see Online Resources, below), which will collect in one database all the available information on 8,412 manuscript witnesses of the writings of Gregory the Great. A. de Vogüé (Paris, 1978-1980) discusses the manuscript tradition in his introduction; see also L. Castaldi, 2003. The transmission of the second book of the *Dialogues* as an independent work, especially within a liturgical context, when it was read for the feast of St. Benedict, is discussed in Boccini, 2006.

The text now begins imperfectly at the end of the prologue, Simonetti and Pricoco, ed., 1:106, line 2, and is missing one folio after f. 8, with the end of chapter 4 and beginning of chapter 5, so that f. 8v, ends, “ . . . proprium reuersus uagari tempore//” (book 2, ch. 4, line 10; Simonetti and Pricoco, ed., 1:126) and f. 9, incipit, “//diucius orauit et oratione completa . . .” (book 2, chapter 5, line 13; ed. 1:128).

The text of this manuscript is divided into forty-three chapters, rather than the thirty-eight of the modern editions (for example, book 2, chapter 3, line 107, is designated chapter four, so that chapter four in the edition is here chapter five and so forth).

ff. 43-48, *In cena domini per tres dies lau[d]e*, incipit, “Donna de lo paradiso. Lo to figlolo lo sy e preso, Ihesu christo beato/ Ancconi donna non demorare. Che le preso per menare. Credo che lo uol clamare. Che como

latrone e ligato/ Anccori madre di dolore . . ./ E questo non te basta ma tanto, E indurato da malicia excechato/
Che tu ay crucifigato, Fyglolo cum madre in vno tracto. Deo gratias amen. Donna de lo paradiso etc." [Ends
mid f. 48; remainder and f. 48v blank].

The poem here is certainly based on Jacopone da Todi, *Donna de Paradiso*, edited Mancini, 1974, laud 70, pp. 201-206; also edited by Ageno, 1953, English translation, Serge and Elizabeth Hughes, 1982. The version in this manuscript, however, differs so substantially from the printed edition of Jacopone's famous poem that it must be considered an independent composition. It is very close (although with some variation) to the text edited by Luisi, 1983, no. 94, volume 1, pp. 324-327 (see also no. 60, 1:295) from a manuscript that includes lauds by Leonardo Giustiniani. The version in this manuscript is shorter, ending with verse 212 on p. 326 (it is complete, and never included the additional verses found in Luisi); Luisi, p. 250, and tav. 37, no. 48, cites evidence that this laud is most often attributed to Jacopone, but it is unclear whether all his sources recognized the existence of these two different, if related texts, that both begin "Donna de paradiso."

We know of no scholarly studies that analyze this text and the question of its author. Since both versions begin with identical verses (and indeed have substantial similarities throughout), the relationship between the widely studied version by Jacopone and the variation found in this manuscript and in the fifteenth-century Venetian manuscript edited by Luisi deserves careful examination to determine whether it can be attributed to Leonardo, or whether it is an anonymous composition based on Jacopone's poem. Since this copy dates from Leonardo's lifetime, it could be important to any editor interested in this text.

The first edition of the lauds of Jacopone da Todi (c. 1230-1306) was printed in Florence in 1490, and included 102 Italian poems. Modern editors generally accept ninety-two or ninety-three as authentic; manuscript transmission is studied by Leonardi, 2001, see also Leonardi, 2007). The lauds attributed to the Venetian patrician Leonardo Giustiniani (c. 1383-1446) are much less well-known, the manuscript evidence and the fifteenth-century editions are studied in Luisi, 1983.

The Dialogues by Gregory the Great is 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 (c. 480-543), the founder of Benedictine monasticism. Although Gregory's text is our most important source for St. Benedict's life, his account is far from a conventional biography, and instead it consists of a series of miraculous incidents that illustrate the life of the saint. Nonetheless, this book of the *Dialogues* has endured as a classic of Christian spirituality – it is certainly the one part of the *Dialogues* still frequently read today, and it has been published on its own in numerous editions and translations. In the Middle Ages, its importance as a text read for the feast day of St. Benedict ensured its transmission as an independent text. St. Benedict emerges from these stories as a warm and sympathetic personality, exhibiting care for his monks, love for his sister, and even sharing his bread with a crow, who visited the monks at dinner.

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 he 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*, and certainly form the major part of the text of the second book. 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 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 was rather a forgery from the end of the seventh century (Clark, 1987, 2003). More nuanced views presenting the *Dialogues* in its proper historical context, have been presented by Paul Meyvaert, Joan Petersen, and William McCready (Meyvaert, 1988, 2004, Petersen, 1984, McCready, 1989) among others.

Jacopone da Todi, (c. 1230-1306), one of greatest authors of religious poetry in Italian, was born in Umbria in Todi to a noble family, and studied law, probably at Bologna. He married and pursued his profession, until the abrupt death of his wife at a banquet (crushed to death when the platform where she was sitting collapsed) led him to a dramatic conversion. Abandoning his wealth and profession, he adopted the life of the Franciscans, first as a wandering tertiary, and later as an ardent member of the Spirituals. He is known chiefly for his numerous *laude* (laude are non-liturgical religious ballads) in Italian, which expressed a wide variety of sentiments, from praise for the Virgin Mary, St. Francis, and Franciscan poverty, to warnings against temptation, and exhortations to live a moral life.

His poems were adopted by the *Laudesi*, religious confraternities who gathered together to sing hymns of praise and penitence – creating and responding to the demand for religious lyrics in the vernacular. The *lauda* in this manuscript, "Donna de paradiso," is one of his most loved poems; it re-tells the story of the Passion of Christ from Mary's point of view. Although some critics have criticized it as unsophisticated, it is notable for its emotional intensity. Possibly composed for recitation or even reenactment during Holy Week, it is also important for its use of the dialogue form and as a step in the development of mystery plays in Italy.

The Venetian patrician, Giustiniani Leonardi (c.1383-1446) is a less well-known figure than Jacopone; nonetheless, his importance to the history of music in Venice is indisputable. The corpus of religious lyrics edited by Luisi in 1983 underlines his importance as an author of *laude*, although the question of the attribution of each poem in this corpus, including the one in this manuscript, still remains unclear (see Glixon, 1988).

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ONLINE RESOURCES

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