

The Epistolary of the Church of St. Martin-au-Bourg, Amiens
In Latin, illuminated manuscript on parchment
Northern France, Amiens, first decades of the fifteenth century (perhaps c. 1400)

iii (parchment) + 171 + ii (parchment) folios on parchment, foliation in modern pencil in upper outer corner, 1-171 (collation: i-xxi⁸, xxii³ [-1, cancelled blank with no apparent loss to text], ruled lightly in light brown ink with vertical bounding lines mostly visible, written in a large and fine square gothic bookhand, (justification, 200 x 112 mm.), additions to ff. 169v-171r in another formal liturgical hand, in twenty lines, capitals touched with penwork cross-strokes and heightened with yellow, rubrics in red, one- and two-line initials in alternate red and blue with contrasting penwork tracery often trailing far into the margins, three-line initials in both red and blue with similar penwork, **FOURTEEN LARGE ILLUMINATED INITIALS** in blue and pink heightened with white penwork, enclosing colored ivy-leaves sprays on burnished gold grounds, with single-line foliate extensions into borders terminating in gold bezants, leaves and buds and small colored flowers: two two-line (ff. 9v and 129r); nine three-line (ff. 12r, 85r, 91v, 93r, 121v, 124r, 126r, 138r and 140r); two four-line (ff. 71r and 80v); and one five-line (f. 135r), **FRONTISPIECE** with a three-line initial in same with three-quarter text frame in gold and colors with scrolling ivy-leaves at its corners and centerpoint on one side, and full decorated border of single-line foliage terminating in gold buds, ivy leaves, bezants and colored quadrilobed flowers, a few small textual corrections in near-contemporary or later hands, first leaf very slightly discolored and scuffing to borders in places, some small spots, very slight cockling, and some small areas of text and borders thumbed, but overall in excellent and fresh condition. Bound in early, and perhaps original wooden boards, sewn on six double thongs, and covered in vellum and crimson velvet in the seventeenth century, beads of metal pins and traces in the velvet from numerous metal fittings once attached to both boards, with marks of a shield, corner-pieces and two clasp-supports on front board and the figure of St. Martin mounted and cutting his cloak in half for a poor man all before a tower with a portcullis within four geometric flourishes and metal edges on back board (see below for description of gold semi-relief metalwork once attached), gilt edges, slight wear at corners but overall sound, in fitted green cloth-covered case. Dimensions 287 x 206 mm.

This is the long-lost Epistolary of the Church of St. Martin-au-Bourg, Amiens, which appears in the inventory of Jean Pagès of c. 1700. It is a large and impressive liturgical codex in crisp and fresh condition, with a nearly unbroken line of provenance from the community who made it to the present day. The manuscript fills a significant gap in our knowledge of manuscript production in Amiens around the year 1400, since it is one of only a small number of surviving productions from the city from the first three decades of the fifteenth century

PROVENANCE

1. Written and illuminated in Amiens for the church of St-Martin-au-Bourg in the center of the city, facing the town hall and at the opposite end of the short Haute rue Notre Dame from the cathedral. The church was built in the thirteenth century, traditionally on the site of the building in which St. Martin of Tours was staying when, as it states in his legend, he divided his cloak before the walls of Amiens to clothe a poor man, who then revealed himself to be Christ. Their erased fifteenth-century ex libris is on f. 170v, visible under ultra-violet light: "Hic epistolarius liber est sancti martini ecclesie ambianis civitatis," and "S. MARTIN" in ornamental capitals of the same date on the verso of the next leaf. The book was recorded there at the turn of the eighteenth century as one of a pair of treasured liturgical volumes kept among the reliquaries and goldwork of the

church, "On place encore . . . deux beaux livres dans lesquels, sur des feuilles de velin, sont écrits en caractères gothiques les Évangiles et les Épitres que l'on chante à la messe, dans les festes solennelles" (Pagès, vol. I, 1856, p. 69.) The volumes were in the matching crimson velvet bindings still found on the present volume, and Pagès goes on to describe the now missing metalwork on the covers, "Ces livres sont couverts d'un velours cramoisi . . . les Épitres est orné d'un côté de la figure de Saint-Martin monté à cheval, dans l'attitude d'un cavalier, coupant de son sabre la moitié de son manteaux pour donner à un pauvre place près de lui, proche la porte d'une ville entre deux tours. Les figures délicatement travaillées en demi-bosse sont aussi de vermeille doré."

Medieval Amiens was a wealthy and splendid city. In 1471 Louis XI described it as "une des meilleures, plus anciennes, somptueuses, notables et puissantes villes du Royaume." It was placed strategically on the north-eastern border of France with the wealthy Burgundian Netherlands, and was ideally placed on the River Somme for international trade, connecting Flanders and France with the English markets. It had an estimated population of 14,000 in 1386 and 20,000 in 1500, making it one of the largest cities in the French kingdom, and had twelve churches, ten monasteries and religious institutions, and at least nine chapels within its city walls. Since 1206 the cathedral there had held the relic of the head of St. John the Baptist, ensuring that it was an important pilgrimage site; and causing John, duke of Bedford, the owner of the Bedford Hours in the 1420s (now British Library, Add. MS. 18850) to request to be buried there near to the relic. The city was run by the powerful échevinage, the town council, who regularly commissioned works of art and illuminated manuscripts for the churches of the town and for presentation to visiting nobles; with thirty-seven manuscripts recorded as produced by their orders between 1389 and 1500. They may well have commissioned the present manuscript and its lost sister volume for the church of St-Martin-au-Bourg from one of the many *libraire* recorded in the city, like that of Colart du Bos, both "escripvaint" and "librairier," who owned a house in front of the Church of Saint-Martin. The Church of St-Martin-au-Bourg was demolished along with several other churches in the city, in a process of urban redevelopment between 1793 and 1812, and this manuscript was probably sold then, perhaps directly to the Amiens bookseller Dolin.

2. J. A. J. de Lignières de Bommy, early nineteenth-century bibliophile and local antiquary of Abbeville. By early 1818, the present volume was in the hands of Dolin, who on 23 July that year at a fair in Abbeville sold it for 76 francs to the author of the nineteenth-century note in French on the recto of the first endleaf after the pastedown. The account faces de Lignières' armorial bookplate (*argent* with a band *gules*), and is presumably in his hand. He had an impressive collection of 119 manuscripts, of which the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris, now owns a collection of charters relating to Ponthieu (nouv. acq. MS lat. 2119), a manuscript of the *Consolation of Philosophy* by Boethius in French translation, copied by Raoulet d'Orléans (nouv. acq. MS fr. 1982; see L. Delisle, II, p. 317, and *Bibliothèque de l'école des chartes*, 34, 1873, pp. 21 and 29), and a record of obituaries, services and special Masses for the church of St-Sepulchre, Abbeville (nouv. acq. MS fr. 764; see Omont, vol. I, 1899, p. 105). His fifteenth-century *Le Château périlleux* and *Le Pelerinage de Damoiselle Sapience* in Middle French is now University of Pennsylvania Rare Book & Manuscript Library, MS Codex 660. The present volume was in his sale in Abbeville, 27 May 1872, p. 39, lot 4.

3. Charles E. Roseman, Jr., of Cleveland Heights, Ohio (de Ricci, *Census*, II, 1937, pp. 1964-1965, no. 29, but identified as a "lectionary"), bought from Gilhofer and Ranschburg, Vienna, in 1935; sold by his descendants in Sotheby's, 6 December 2005, lot 34.

TEXT

ff. 1r-121r, rubric, *Dominica prima in adventu domini. Lectio epistolae beati pauli apostoli ad romanos*, incipit, "Fratres: Scientes quia hora est ... ihesum christum dominum nostrum."

ff. 121v-140r, rubric, *Incipit de festes sanctorum. et primo in virgilia beati andree apostoli ad missam epistola*, incipit, "Benedictio domini ... iustus si morte."

ff. 140r-166r, rubric, *Incipit commune sanctorum. et primo in virgilia unius apostolic*, incipit, "Benedicto domini super caput ... eam in portis opera eius."

ff. 166r-168v, rubric, *In dedicatione ecclesiae*, incipit, "In diebus illis ... ut a peccatis solvantur."

ff. 169rv, rubric, *in octavas assumptionis beata marie virginis*, incipit, "Egredimini filie syon ... terribilis ut castrorum acies ordinata."

Epistolaries are among the rarest of liturgical manuscripts. They take their name from the type of liturgical readings they contain, which are most commonly from the Epistles of Saint Paul (but which also included readings from the Catholic Epistles, Acts, the Apocalypse and the Old Testament). In the early Middle Ages, the readings from the Bible were organized into separate volumes for each reader or singer within the Mass, collecting together the liturgical epistles (the Epistolary) and the Gospels (the Evangeliary), arranged according in their liturgical order, rather than in the order of the Bible, in separate volumes. The Mass Lectionary included both types of readings. This volume is evidence of the continued use of the Epistolary later in the Middle Ages.

The present manuscript contains the Epistles and other biblical readings for the first reading at Mass from the first Sunday in Advent (ff. 1r-121r) to the eve of Advent in the following year. This is followed by the Sanctoral, from the eve of Saint Andrew (ff. 121v-140r) to Saint Linus, and the Common of Saints (ff. 140r-166r). It ends with readings for the Mass for the dedication of a church (ff. 166r-168v) and readings for the octave of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary (ff. 169r-171r).

Local features in the rite here are found in the importance given to Saint Firmin the martyr, a missionary bishop who died on 25 September c. 303 in Amiens. His body was one of the Cathedral's most treasured relics and was placed below the main altar, being taken out and carried in procession through the city on the feast of the Ascension. Readings for him occur here on ff. 135r and 136v, with his octave and procession on f. 137r. A reading for another local Saint Firmin, commonly named Firmin the Confessor, who is celebrated on 1 September, is found on f. 135v. This later Firmin was the third bishop of Amiens, and his remains were translated into an elaborate gold and silver reliquary next to the cathedral altar in 1279 in the presence of King Edward I of England and King Phillip III of France. Saint Fuscian, who was martyred near Amiens in 287, and whose relics were also in the cathedral is offered a reading for his martyrdom on f. 121r, and the feast of the beheading of John the Baptist, an act which gave Amiens its most important relic, is noted on f. 135v. Of particular interest to the Church of

Saint-Martin-au-Bourg are the readings for Saint Martin's death on f. 140r and the translation of his relics on f. 132r.

The present manuscript fills a significant gap in our knowledge of manuscript production in Amiens around the year 1400. It is one of only a small number of surviving productions from the city from the first three decades of the fifteenth century (see Nash, 1999, pp. 149-169; and note that while she alludes in passing to Pagès' description of this manuscript she was unaware that it survived and does not comment on it.) In her seminal study of Amiens manuscript production, Nash lists only a handful of others from this early period, all of which are Books of Hours, and only two of which may be as early as the manuscript in question here:

(i) Rouen, Bibliothèque municipale, MS P.12, from the early years of the fifteenth century (note that in its border decoration this is most closely related to the present manuscript, see Nash, 1999, fig. 95 for comparison);

(ii) that sold in Sotheby's, 6 December 1993, lot 65, datable to c. 1400, but with little decoration;

(iii) Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawl. liturg. E 32, from perhaps a decade or so later;

(iv) Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum, MS 65, from c. 1420 (the flowers in the border decoration here with a close relationship to those in the present manuscript, see Nash, 1999, fig. 98);

(v) the Waddesdon Hours, Waddesdon Manor, James A. Rothschild collection, MS 6, composed c. 1420 and remodelled c. 1440.

Thus, the re-emergence of this manuscript and its identification as the volume in Pagès' inventory contributes greatly to our knowledge of book production and illumination in early fifteenth-century Amiens, and the present manuscript promises much to future scholarship.

LITERATURE

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ONLINE RESOURCES

Jean-Baptiste Lebigue. "Les livres de la messe Les livres des lectures de la messe," in *Initiation aux manuscrits liturgiques*, Paris-Orléans, IRHT, 2007 (Ædilis, Publications pédagogiques, 6)
<http://aedilis.irht.cnrs.fr/initiation-liturgie/lectures-messe.htm>

Introduction to liturgical manuscripts:
"Celebrating the Liturgy's Books"
<http://www.columbia.edu/itc/music/manuscripts/>

http://wpc4783.amenworld.com/ow2/Ceres2/voir.xsp?id=00101-52193&qid=sdx_q0&n=8&e=

A lithograph of the church of St-Martin-au-Bourg and some historical materials on it.

<http://books.google.se/books?id=LkQitvZJtvIC&printsec=frontcover&dq=inauthor:%22Jean+Pag%C3%A8s%22&hl=sv&sa=X&ei=3L0xUtjRM-K14ASK-YDYDA&ved=0CEkQ6AEwAw#v=onepage&q&f=false>

A digitized version of Pages' account of the church (pp. 67-86; the ms mentioned on p. 69)

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