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BESTSELLERS

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Each volume in the series of “primers” introduces a genre or a problematic of medieval manuscripts to a wider audience by providing a brief general introduction, followed by descriptions of the manuscripts, study aids, and suggestions for further reading.

What people read most in the Middle Ages is not necessarily self-evident even to the experienced medievalist. The present “primer” assembles a group of manuscripts that survive in many hundreds of copies to explore the idea of the medieval “bestseller.” As the fascinating introduction by Professor Pascale Bourgain demonstrates, medieval “bestsellers” were the texts considered truly important, and thus preferentially copied, during the Middle Ages. Her introduction, significantly, also argues for the careful interpretation of this data, which must be understood in the context of the very complicated circumstances that affected the survival of manuscripts. The texts in this collection include some that are still read today, alongside others of equal import that are hardly known even to scholars, and almost certainly seldom read. Manuscripts of most of these texts are common and still appear regularly on the market – but it is the very fact that they are common that underlines their importance in the past and should earn them a place in collections today.

primer | 4

general editor Sandra Hindman

BESTSELLERS

Pascale Bourgain and Laura Light

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## Survival and Success: Medieval Bestsellers

**Medieval manuscripts are material witnesses** to the rich cultural life of the past that was expressed in manifold ways, both oral and written. Texts transmitted in manuscripts, although limited to the written word, together with the visual arts, are the physical embodiment of memory that has best survived the ravages of time, even if what remains with us in the form of written texts is only a small fraction of what once was.

**Despite this, one way to discover the expectations** and needs of a past era is to identify which texts were considered truly important – which texts, in other words, were deemed worthy of being reproduced (in a manuscript culture this entailed a much greater expenditure of effort and expense than it does today), therefore preserving these texts and ensuring their survival. The study of the texts that survive in significant numbers of manuscripts – texts that we can call “best-sellers” – can provide us with important insights into the cultural and intellectual contributions of the past.

### Factors influencing survival

**This is not without difficulties.** Indeed, the more successful a text has been, the more difficult it is to discover all its surviving copies, now dispersed in collections throughout the world, both public and private. Modern methods of collecting data have made the endeavor easier, but even modern surveys are far from perfect. Luckily, one can evaluate the impact of a text on a culture even without a complete

inventory. Let us begin by reviewing the numerous circumstances that can affect the survival of a text.

**Texts from ancient Greece and Rome**, the foundation of Western culture (no. 1), survived the disappearance of their original audience only because they were considered important enough to be copied. Only the best literature of antiquity has come down to us – the very small proportion of texts that were good enough to survive the winnowing at the end of antiquity. Many texts were doubtless lost when they were unable to emerge from the bottle-neck represented by the change in the format of the book from the roll to the codex, as well as the emergence of new scripts. The adoption of Christianity was another tipping point, after which new Christian texts were inevitably favored over minor texts from the ancients that appeared obsolete.

**The transition from pagan Antiquity to the Christian Middle Ages** was a clear divide. But even without such a clear-cut transition, the process of selection continued for the thousands of years when texts were transmitted by copies produced by hand. A manuscript, in principle, can survive for centuries. Even as scripts used to copy manuscripts evolved, older, outmoded scripts could still be read, up until the point when the change was so marked that the script became illegible. Times of marked change in script thus endangered the survival of less-appreciated texts, and often coincided with transformations in taste and needs that made some texts less popular, and then obsolete: Merovingian texts at the moment of the Carolingian Renaissance, texts from the Carolingian Renaissance at the end of the eleventh century, Romanesque texts at the moment of the growth of the universities, scholastic texts rejected by the Renaissance as products of the barbarous Middle Ages. This last moment of cultural transformation also coincided with the technological revolution of printing. From this point on, the texts that mattered were printed. By the same token, manuscripts that were not yet worn out or obsolete at the end of the fifteenth century were less likely to perish than manuscripts from earlier periods; used less frequently and thus preserved in better condition, they were put aside relatively soon as objects for study and collecting.

**Literary genres, the place of conservation, and the material form of books**, were also factors influencing the survival of texts. The significant investment in time that copying very long works entailed hampered their transmission; fewer copies were made of lengthy works than of shorter works on the same subject, even if they were cited more frequently. For example, the monumental encyclopedia, the *Speculum maius* of Vincent of Beauvais (d. 1264), is often cited, but survives in many fewer copies than the *De proprietatibus rerum* ("On the Properties of Things") of Bartholomeus Anglicus (d. 1272). A very short work, noted down on a single sheet or in a booklet, was easy to move and to carry, but also to lose, and texts of this sort survive only when they were gathered into larger volumes – a circumstance that also changed how they were used. This is the case of the chansonniers containing the lyrical poetry of the troubadours or the trouvères, which survive only in late copies, when the oldest poems had already disappeared. All texts that are anchored in time, tied to a single circumstance or to a certain mode of diffusion, are fragile. Finally, the economic value of books played a role, although an ambivalent one. Expensive illuminated manuscripts, such as Choir Books and the deluxe manuscripts made for the aristocracy at the end of the Middle Ages, were so costly that they were in a sense timeless, and were certainly admired and carefully cared for, factors that contributed to their survival. But books such as these inevitably aroused covetousness, and they were the first to disappear in the case of looting, or to be sold in times of need.

**Where texts were copied, and the efforts made to store them safely**, also influenced their chances of survival. If texts were copied for institutions that were part of networks sharing the same cultural interests, copies were shared between establishments, and they were thus likely to survive in greater numbers. The more stable an institution, the more likely it was not only to acquire and copy manuscripts, but also to keep them safely, without the risk of loss or alienation. Private owners, destined to die or go bankrupt, collected books for the moment; such books then wandered until they arrived by gift or legacy at long-lived, stable institutions. This explains the high proportion of medieval bestsellers that were texts central to monastic culture, probably over-represented in this list. It was

monks who copied books, who bound them, and who could lend them to others to serve as exemplars. Starting in the thirteenth century, the mendicant orders and the university colleges took over from the monasteries, copying somewhat fewer manuscripts, but with strict rules designed to keep their collections safe. The universities played an important role: students came to Paris or Oxford in the thirteenth century from everywhere in Europe, procured the texts necessary for their studies, and once their studies were finished took them home, thus contributing to the broad transmission of the most current texts. From the fourteenth century, when other European countries founded their own universities, this diffusion continued, but often in a more local fashion within individual countries.

**The percentage of loss** is another distorting factor that must be taken into account. This varies according to the time period with 1/5 to 1/10 of all manuscripts surviving (the proportion of loss for incunabula, books printed before 1500, is 90%). But for certain texts – either very unpopular or very common – the percentage of survival could be even less. One can calculate that only three-tenths and four-tenths of one percent (.3% and .4%) respectively of the *Rule* of Saint Benedict (no. 2) and the *Customs* of the Carthusians have survived (it was obligatory that each Benedictine monastery have a copy of the *Rule*). Works used often, such as liturgical and scholarly books, tend to be more quickly destroyed through continuous use, and were thus less likely to survive.

## Bestsellers

**Keeping in mind the factors that influenced the dissemination** and conservation of texts, we can now turn our attention to awarding the title of "bestseller." Note that the numbers of surviving copies suggested here are never more than orders of magnitude (and always a minimum), and must be interpreted with caution, especially since very widespread works discourage censuses and critical editions and thus are often, paradoxically, those whose textual tradition is the least well known.

**Certain works, held in the highest esteem**, can be said to defy time, and were continuously copied throughout the Middle Ages. Besides the Bible (clearly the most important), liturgical texts, and works by the four pillars of the Church, St. Ambrose (d. 397), St. Augustine (d. 430), St. Jerome (d. 420), and St. Gregory the Great (d. 604), the most common works were those that conveyed ancient knowledge, including rhetorical treatises (Cicero, *De inventione* and the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* that circulated as his), and Donatus's grammar (1000 copies). This elementary grammar was used throughout the Middle Ages, until it was partially replaced at the end of the twelfth century by the *Doctrinale*, a grammar in verse by Alexander of Villedieu (400 manuscripts). More advanced grammar was taught from the sixth-century *Institutiones* by Priscian, preserved in 850 manuscripts. Works designed to convey particular fields of knowledge, including *computus* (determining the date of Easter), astronomy, music, and medicine are extremely well represented, as are dictionaries (*Derivationes* ["Etymologies"] by Huguccio of Pisa, d. 1210, 210 manuscripts; the *Vocabularius ex quo* from the late fourteenth century, 250 manuscripts), and encyclopedias organized according to the origins of words (*Origins* or *Etymologies* of Isidore of Seville, d. 636, perhaps 1,000 copies). The most common work on poetics, the *Poetria nova* of Geoffrey of Vinsauf, c. 1210, is preserved in 200 copies. A collection of extracts arranged by subjects, the *Liber scintillarum* ("Book of Sparks") by Defensor of Ligugé from the end of the seventh century, which served as a source of citations, is transmitted by 360 manuscripts; another popular collection, arranged in a systematic fashion, was the *Excerptiones* ("Book of Notes") of Richard of St. Victor (d. 1173) (268 manuscripts).

**The *Consolation of Philosophy* by Boethius** (d. c. 524), a philosophical prosimetrum (i.e. a text written in prose and verse), with around 900 manuscripts surviving since the sixth century, counts among the foundational texts of the Middle Ages, at least since the Carolingian Renaissance, when this text was re-discovered.

**In this Christian culture, works that allowed one to assimilate the meaning** and value of the biblical text, such as the *Homilies on the Gospels* by Pope Gregory the Great (1270 copies), and the *Historia scholastica* by Peter Comestor (d. 1175) (800 manuscripts) that became a basic text for all students in the faculty of theology, and also texts that nourished monastic spirituality are extremely well represented. *The Moralia in Job*, also by Pope Gregory the Great, conveying a moral message from the difficult book of Job, is found in 1500 manuscripts and must have been included in almost every monastic library, just as the *Synonyma* (no. 3) and *Sententiae* of Isidore of Seville (589 and 500 manuscripts respectively). In the same vein one read *De miseria humana conditionis* ("On the Misery of the Human Condition") by Pope Innocent III (d. 1216), perhaps the most popular monastic text teaching the contempt of this world and the love of the next (672 manuscripts, no. 4). Texts by twelfth-century mystics from the Cistercians (in particular, St. Bernard of Clairvaux, d. 1153) and the Abbey of St.-Victor, were also studied within the monasteries: Hugh of St. Victor (d. 1141), *De arrha animae* ("On the Earnest Money of the Soul") and *De virtute orandi* ("On the Virtue of Prayer"); Richard of St.-Victor (d. 1173), *Benjamin minor*; Hugh of Fouillois (d. 1172), *De claustro animae* ("On the Cloister of the Soul"); and the anonymous *Stella clericorum* ("The Star of the Clergy") (more than 450 manuscripts) and *Speculum humanae salvationis* ("The Mirror of Human Salvation") (around 400 manuscripts). The prestige of St. Bernard contributed to the success of many Cistercian works circulating under his name, such as Arnulf de Boeriis, *Speculum monachorum* (198 manuscripts) (no. 3). Franciscan writers, including St. Bonaventure (d. 1274) (*De triplici via*, 300 manuscripts) are the link with the mysticism, less closely tied to monastic thinking, of the late Middle Ages.

**The world of the schools promoted the dissemination** of works that served the advanced faculties in law and theology. Peter Lombard's (d. 1164) *Sentences* (surviving in 1257 exemplars) became the basis of the systematic teaching of theology in the thirteenth century, and must have been a required text for all the advanced students; even some commentaries on the *Sentences* are preserved in hundreds of manuscripts (no. 5). As many as 800 manuscripts survive of the

*Compendium theologiae veritatis* ("Compendium of Theological Truth") (no. 6) of Hugh Ripelin (d. c. 1268), a Dominican from Strasbourg (the works of Dominican authors circulated throughout the Order, and even to Franciscan Convents, by means of their extensive network of houses of study). Nonetheless, in general, contemporary works, even those diffused by *pecia*, rarely attain these numbers; only the *Summa Theologica* of St. Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274) survives in more than 100 manuscripts; his other works are not so wide-spread. Even translations of Aristotle are less widely diffused than the apocryphal and much less complicated *Secretum secretorum* ("Secret of Secrets"), with 450 manuscripts, as well as translations in virtually every European vernacular including ten in French.

**In the context of the enormous development of preaching** encouraged by the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, there are collections of sermons that survive in numbers that can rival patristic sermons. The three collections by the Dominican James of Voragine (d. 1298), for example, are preserved in 1210 manuscripts. The importance of the liturgy to the life of the clergy ensured the success of liturgical commentaries, including *De missarum mysteriis* ("On the Mysteries of the Mass") of Innocent III (241 manuscripts), *Rationale divinatorum officiorum* of William Durand (d. 1296) (200 manuscripts), and *Tractatus super missam* of the Dominican Hugh of St. Cher (d. 1263) (around 200 manuscripts).

**Hagiography, including lives of saints and stories of visionary journeys,** circulated widely (*Visio philiberti*, 166 manuscripts; *Visio Tnugdali*, at least 50). Voluminous collections of saints's lives, such as the Cistercian Legendary (which occupied six large format folio volumes), compiled at the time of the "Summae," were simply too large to copy. The *Legenda aurea* ("Golden Legend") by the Dominican, James of Voragine, offered completeness in a conveniently condensed format and survives in 926 manuscripts.

**At the end of the Middle Ages,** the focus on devotional reading and copying manuscripts in the religious life of the *Devotio Moderna* was accompanied by a significant output of edifying works. There can be no argument that the *Imitation*

of Christ by Thomas a Kempis (d. 1471) (no. 10), which may survive in as many as 1000 manuscripts and 23,000 printed editions, was a medieval bestseller. The earlier work by Henry Suso (d. 1366), the *Horologium sapientiae* ("Little Clock of Wisdom") (no. 9), a classic of Rhineland mysticism, was also very popular among the Modern-day Devout (440 manuscripts).

**Contemporary political affairs rank** among the bestsellers only during the struggle between the papacy and the civil powers in the thirteenth century. *De regimine principum* (*On the Government of Rulers*) by Giles of Rome (Aegidius Romanus, c. 1243-1316) was written in 1279 for the future King Philip the Fair (IV) of France, and survives in 350 manuscripts.

**In general, historical works did not circulate** in numbers that rival the giants of theology and devotion. The most widespread is a very dry chronicle of the emperors and popes by Martin of Troppau (d. 1278), preserved in over 500 manuscripts. Valerius Maximus, *Facta et dicta memorabilia* ("Memorable Deeds and Sayings"), dating from the first century A.D., became a popular text only later in our period, much esteemed as a text from antiquity during the Renaissance (420 manuscripts). Its apologetic value and simplicity ensured the success of the fifth-century history by Orosius, *Historiarum adversus paganos libri septem* ("The Seven Books against the Pagans") (245 manuscripts), making it almost as popular as the *City of God* by St. Augustine (394 manuscripts). The twelfth-century montage of history and fiction by Geoffrey of Monmouth, *Historia regum Britanniae* ("History of the Kings of Britain") survives in 215 manuscripts; the similarly fictional history of Charlemagne, *Historia karoli magni* of pseudo-Turpin was also popular (175 manuscripts). Serious historians fared less well.

**Among the works that we would call secular,** two might be considered historical: the story of the destruction of Troy by Guido de Columnis (240 manuscripts), and the history on the same theme by the pseudo-Darius, telling the story from the Trojan point of view (200 copies). In verse, the attraction of the figure of Alexander ensured that the *Alexandreis* by Gautier de Châtillon, an historical

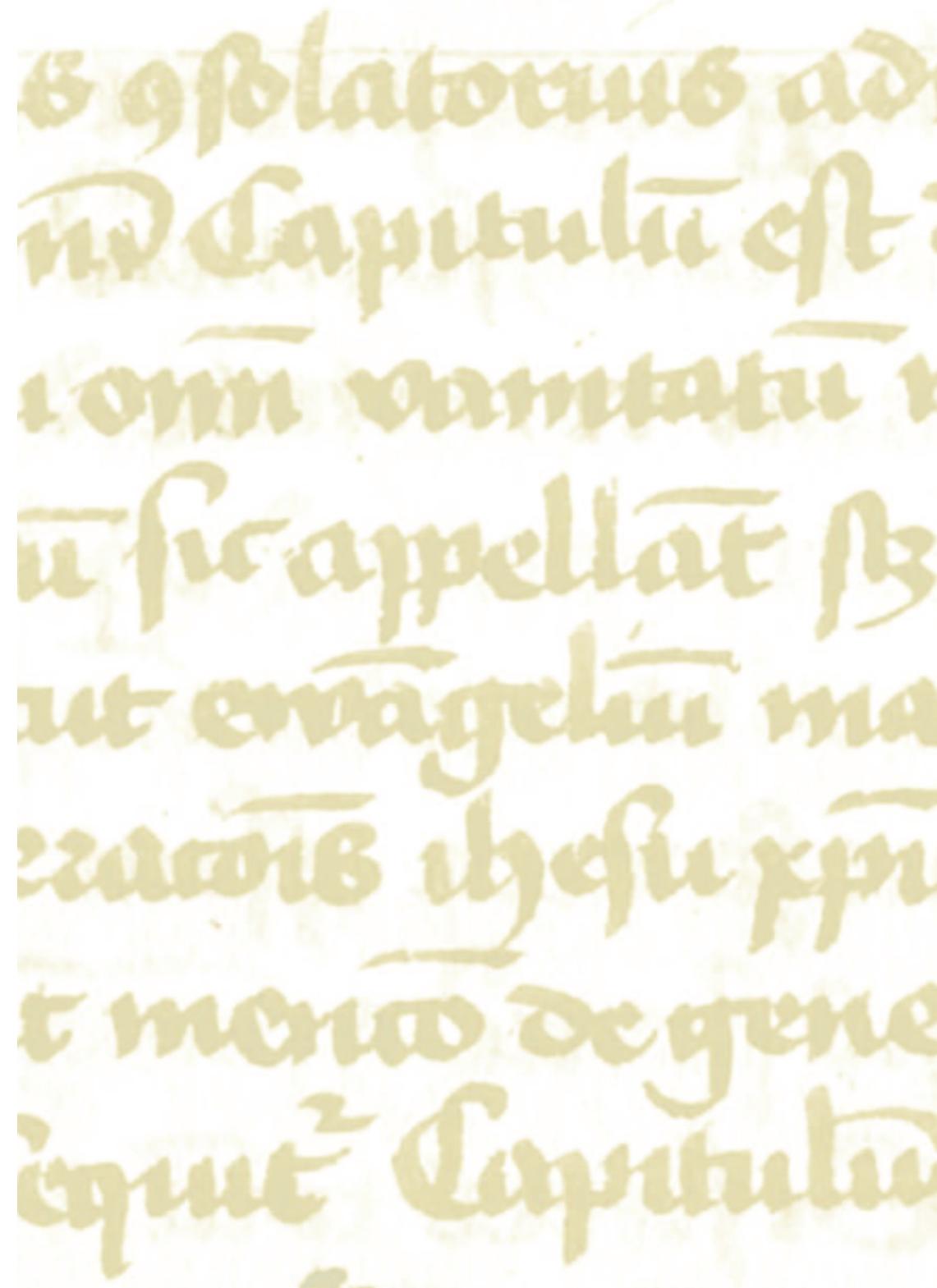
epic with philosophical themes (208 manuscripts), surpassed the rival work by Alan of Lille, the *Anticlaudianus*, which survives in only 117 manuscripts (although his allegorical prosimetrum, the *De planctu naturae* or “The Complaint of Nature” is known in 133 copies). No work of medieval lyric poetry can compete. The popularity of the “novel” relating the equally fictional story of Apollonius of Tyre (*Historia Apollonii regis Tyri*) is demonstrated by its 200 manuscripts.

**In contrast to texts used by scholars and clerics**, vernacular texts in general survive in many fewer copies, except for the three “crowns” of Italian literature: Dante Alighieri (d. 1321), Francesco Petrarca (d. 1374) and Giovanni Boccaccio (d. 1375), whose works all survive in several hundreds of manuscripts. The *Roman de la Rose* (no. 8), the bestseller of French literary texts, survives in 322 manuscripts. Nonetheless, Latin, used for centuries across Europe had a definite advantage, and the care taken to preserve manuscripts in the monasteries and other clerical institutions no doubt accentuated this difference.

**Viewed through the prism of its bestsellers**, the Middle Ages emerges as an era that was thirsty for knowledge. This knowledge, readily available in books, was in general still knowledge reserved for the elite. Mastery of reading and writing was a privilege, and this is reflected in the texts that figure among their bestsellers. But even during this period, one can see readers eagerly embracing works that promised an easier path to the knowledge they were seeking.

**The counterpoint to this pursuit of knowledge** was the salvation of souls and spiritual life. Indeed, in Latin there is but one word (*sapientia*) for “knowledge” and “spiritual wisdom,” and these medieval bestsellers demonstrate that they went hand and hand.

Pascale Bourgain  
Professor, École nationale des chartes, Paris



MARCUS TULLIUS CICERO, *Cato Maior de senectute*  
[On Old Age]; *Paradoxa stoicorum* [Stoic Paradoxes];  
*Somnium Scipionis* [The Dream of Scipio]

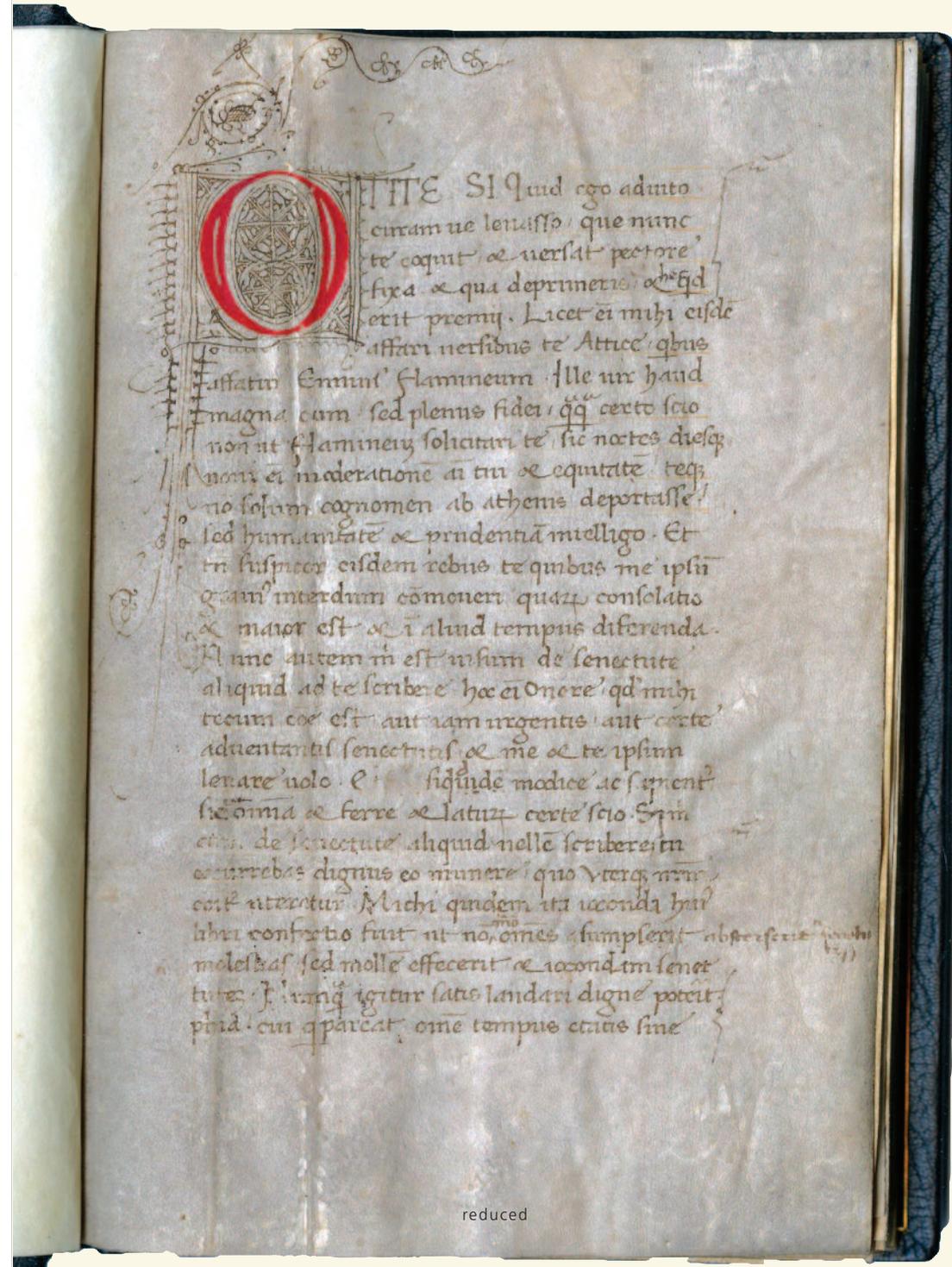
In Latin, decorated manuscript on parchment  
Northern Italy, c. 1440-1470

These three texts by Cicero (106-43 B.C.), together with *De amicitia* and *De officiis*, not included here but often copied together with them, were well-established as school texts in the Middle Ages, and became even more important during the Renaissance. Cicero's exceptional mastery of the Latin language appealed to medieval and Renaissance grammar teachers, and these texts were also used to teach moral philosophy. Copies of these texts are one of the most common of all surviving Italian humanist manuscripts – ample proof of their importance in the fifteenth century, and earning them a place in any modern collection that aims to be representative of the past.

The *Cato Maior de senectute* survives in between 400 and 500 manuscripts. Cicero wrote the work in 44 B.C. in the last year of his own life. In it, he argues that life should be used to cultivate the wisdom necessary to overcome the miseries of old age, disease, and death. The very brief *Paradoxa stoicorum* is a rhetorically persuasive defense of six Stoic principles (called paradoxes). The transmission of the *Dream of Scipio* (incomplete in this copy), describing Scipio's vision of life after death, is more complex, since it is the conclusion of Cicero's *De re publica*, a work that does not survive as a whole. This section, however, was transmitted independently, and survives in large part due to the popular commentary by the early fifth-century writer, Macrobius (c. 500 manuscripts, with or without the commentary). Although this manuscript is copied in a formal humanistic script with elegant pen initials, it is a palimpsest (copied on re-used parchment). [TM 657]

**DESCRIPTION:** 32 folios, palimpsest, incomplete at the end (includes only one folio of *Somnium Scipionis*), written in an accomplished humanist bookhand in 29 long lines, 3 penwork initials, first and last leaves darkened, some worm holes. Bound in modern blue morocco by Bernard Middleton. Dimensions 192 x 128 mm.

**LITERATURE:** Roberta Caldini Montanari, *Tradizione medievale ed edizione critica del Somnium Scipionis*, Florence, 2002; Reynolds, 1983; J. G. F. Powell, ed., *Marcus Tullius Cicero. De re publica; De legibus; Cato maior de senectute; Laelius de amicitia*, Oxford and New York, 2006; M. V. Ronnick, *Cicero's Paradoxa stoicorum*, Frankfurt, 1991.



BENEDICT OF NURSIA, *Regula*;  
AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO, *Regula*

In Latin, illuminated manuscript on parchment

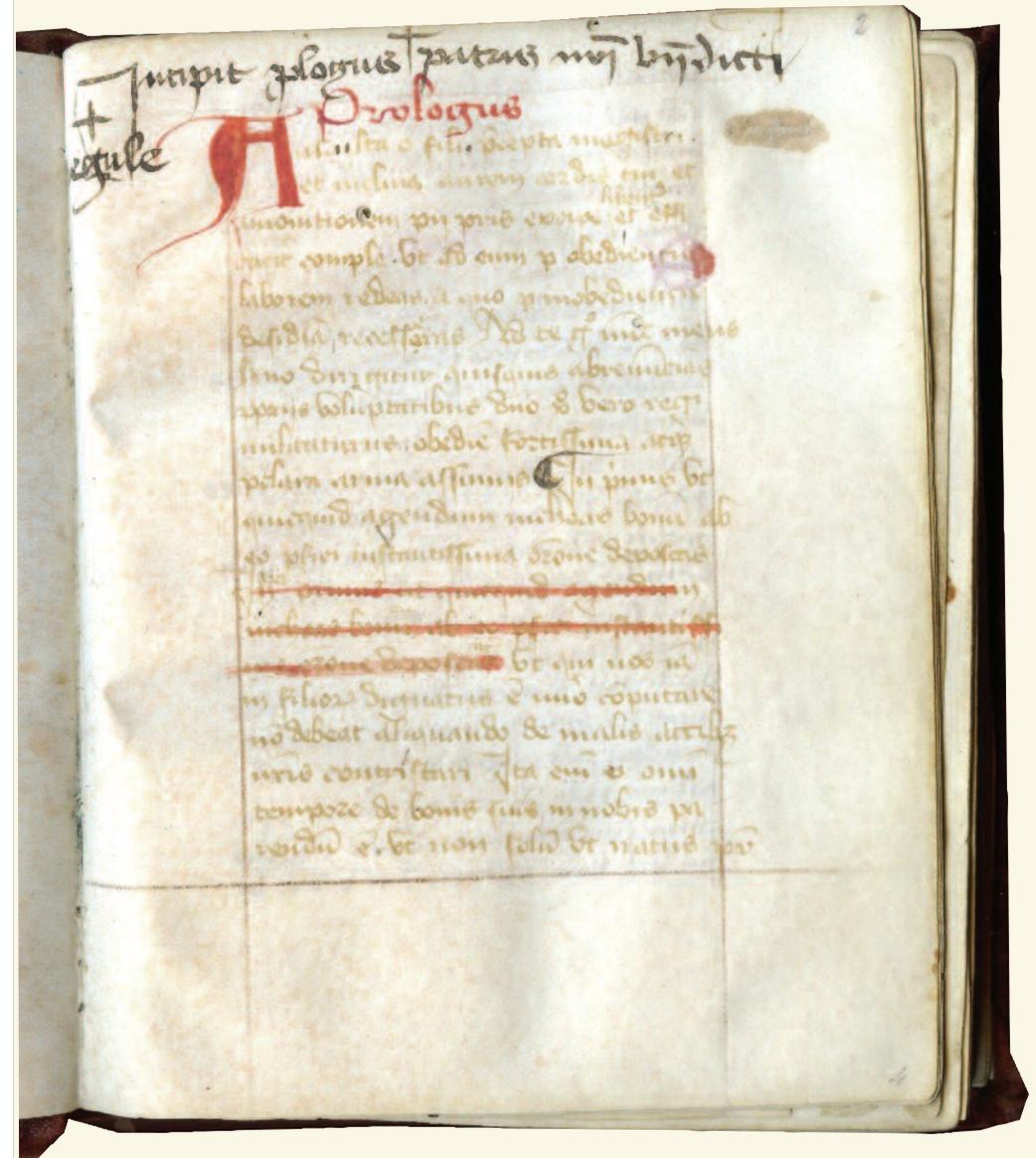
Northern Italy (?), c. 1350-1400, with 19<sup>th</sup>- or 20<sup>th</sup>-century added miniatures

The *Rule* of St. Benedict was the blueprint governing the lives of Benedictine monks and nuns (and Orders inspired by the Benedictines) throughout the Middle Ages and down to the present day. Although it does survive in numerous copies (editors of the text have identified 300), these represent only a small percentage (perhaps only .3%) of the many thousands of copies that must have once existed since each Benedictine monastery was required to own a copy. Copies circulated in many different types of manuscripts. A portion of the *Rule* was read aloud daily for the office in chapter after Prime, and it was therefore included in liturgical books known appropriately as Chapter Books (e.g. TM 680). It is also found in collections of monastic statutes (e.g. TM 666). This is an example of a small-format copy of the *Rule* especially suited for personal use; it includes evidence of early Benedictine ownership, which is not surprising; the inclusion of the *Rule* of St. Augustine, however, is certainly unusual.

St. Benedict of Nursia (c. 480- 547?) wrote his “little rule for beginners,” c. 540, setting straightforward rules to guide the life of monks living communally under the direction of an abbot. Probably no other single text had such a profound effect on the lives of religious men and women from the Middle Ages to the present day. The *Rule* of St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430), became the standard rule by which Canons Regular ordered their lives, and was adopted by many other religious Orders, including the Dominicans. The charming modern miniatures of St. Benedict and St. Augustine added to this manuscript add to its interest. [TM 388]

**DESCRIPTION:** 79 folios, complete, written in cursive gothic script in 23 and 18 long lines, red initials, 2 full-page 19<sup>th</sup>- or 20<sup>th</sup>-century miniatures, repairs to lower margins ff. 8 and 65, minor signs of use. Bound in blind-stamped 19<sup>th</sup>-century burgundy velvet over pasteboards, wear to covers and joints, some cords broken, overall sound. Dimensions 145 x 115 mm.

**LITERATURE:** Rudolphus Hanslik, ed., *Benedicti Regula*, CSEL 75, Vindobonae, 1960 (2nd revised ed. 1977); Ludwig Traube, *Textgeschichte der Regula S. Benedicti*, Munich, 1898; Adalbert de Vogüé and Jean Neufville, *La Règle de Saint Benoît*, Paris, 1971-72; Luc Verheijen, *La Règle de saint Augustin*, Paris, 1967.



ARNULFUS DE BOERIIS, *Speculum monachorum* [A Mirror for Monks]; PS.-AUGUSTINE, *Speculum peccatoris* [A Mirror for Sinners]; ISIDORE OF SEVILLE, *Synonyma* (abridged and reworked)

In Latin, decorated manuscript on paper

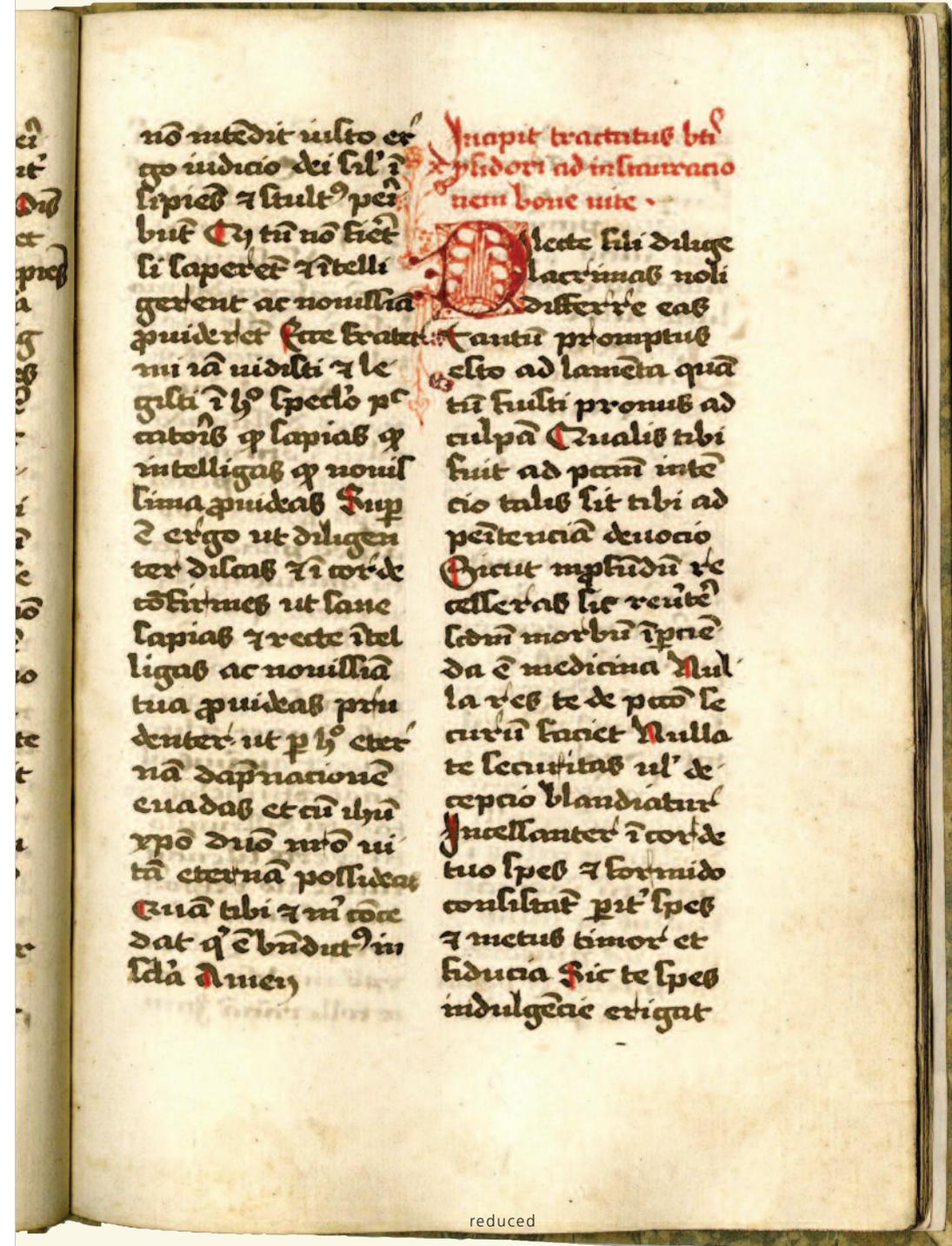
Western Netherlands or Northern Rhine (Westphalia?), c. 1510-1525

The texts by Cicero and the *Rule* of St. Benedict (nos. 1 and 2) were bestsellers in the Middle Ages, and have continued to be popular down to the present-day. The spiritual treatises in this manuscript, in contrast, were very important during the Middle Ages, but are probably now known only to specialists (and certainly read by very few people). Two are pseudonymous, that is attributed to St. Bernard but not actually written by him, the *Speculum monachorum* and the *Speculum peccatoris*; both were popular and survive in around 200 manuscripts. Numerous medieval bestsellers were "awarded" the name of a famous author, a fact that is both evidence of their popularity, and which also then contributed to it.

The *Synonyma* by Isidore of Seville (560-636), begins as a dialogue between man and reason, in which man laments the bitterness of the human condition, and reason responds by telling man how he can reach eternal joy. The second book instructs the reader on how to lead a good Christian life (the text is abbreviated here and book two is copied first). Copied often (c. 508 complete copies and 81 extracts), it is structured around synonyms, but was not primarily a grammatical or rhetorical treatise. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries it was particularly popular in the German-speaking world, where its inwardly focused spirituality and rejection of life in this world appealed to the followers of the *Devotio Moderna*. All the texts here are complete, but were once part of a longer codex, divided at the time of the current binding (see TM 615, 646, and 647). [TM 612]

**DESCRIPTION:** 22 folios, complete, but once part of a longer codex, written in a hybrida script in two columns of 28-25 lines, red penwork initials, in excellent condition. Bound in modern quarter marbled paper and vellum, covers slightly bowed. Dimensions 204 x 142 mm.

**LITERATURE:** Mirko Breitenstein, "Consulo tibi speculum monachorum. Geschichte und Rezeption eines pseudo-Bernhardinischen Traktates (mit vorläufiger Edition)," *Revue Mabillon* 81, n. s. 20 (2009), pp. 113-49; Elfassi, 2008; Jacques Elfassi, ed. *Isidori Hispalensis episcopi Synonyma*, CCSL, vol. 111B, Turnhout, 2009; Köpf, 1994.



LOTARIO DEI SEGNI (POPE INNOCENT III), *De miseria humanae conditionis* [On the Misery of the Human Condition]

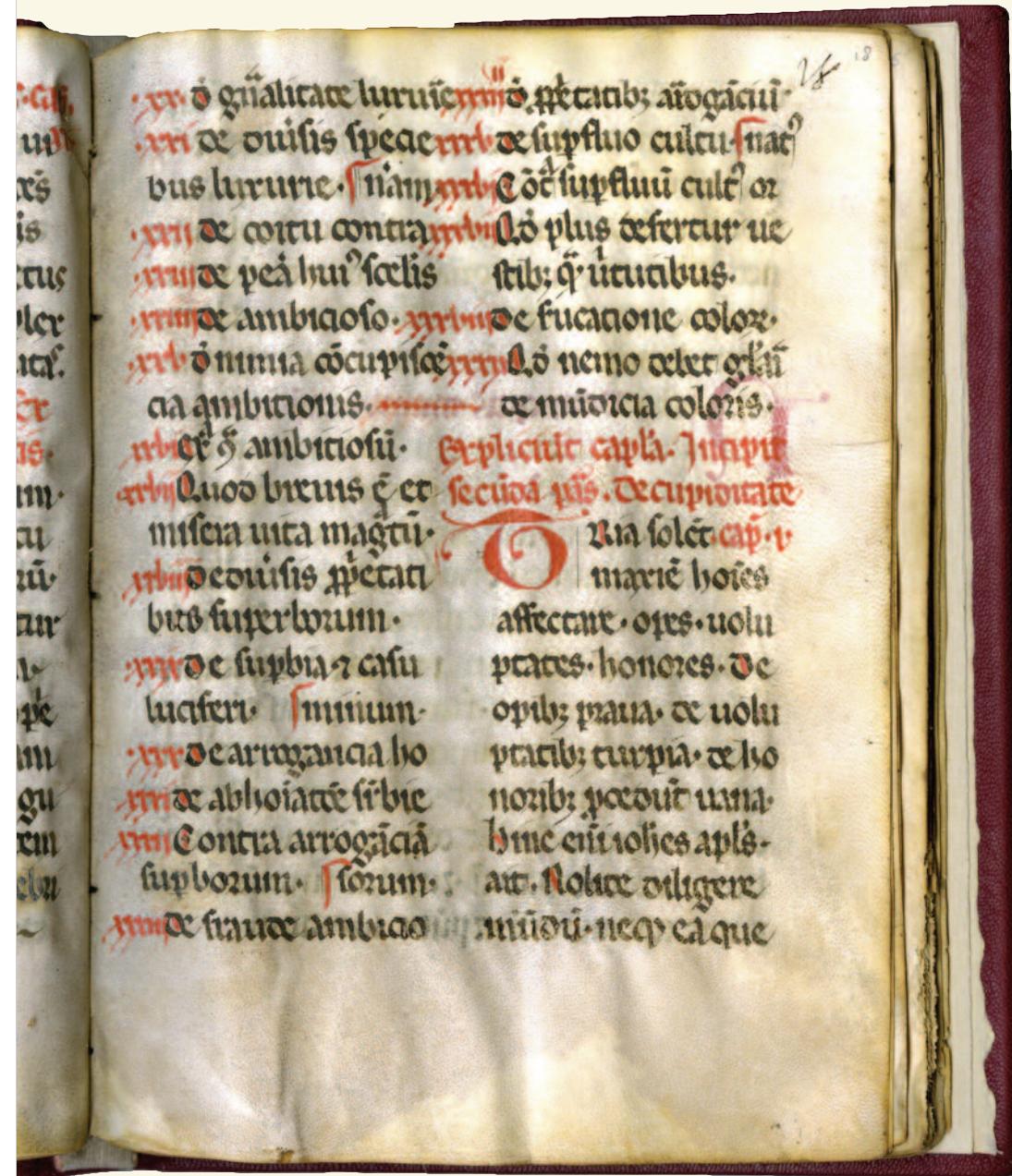
In Latin, decorated manuscript on parchment  
Southern France or Spain, c. 1300-1325

Another very influential spiritual text, *De miseria humanae conditionis* or *De contemptu mundi* ("On the Contempt of the World"), as it was also known, was written in 1195 by Lotario dei Conti di Segni (1160-1216), who was to become Pope Innocent III in 1198. The influence of this text, written by one of the greatest medieval popes while he was still a cardinal, can hardly be exaggerated. It survives in 672 manuscripts and was found in most monastic libraries, in the schools, and in princely collections. It was cited often by both Latin and vernacular authors, including Christine de Pizan, St. Bernadino of Siena, and Chaucer, and was translated into nearly every European language.

Partially rooted in the *contemptus mundi* tradition that stressed the negativity of all human existence, this text with its three sections on "the miserable entrance upon the human condition," "the guilty progress of the human condition," and "the damnable exit from the human condition," may now seem quite grim to the modern reader. Lotario's modern biographer, John C. Moore, accounts for its enduring popularity: "If happiness lies in adjusting expectations to what can be realized, the work must have provided comfort to many by reminding them of the inevitability of suffering and the inherent limitations of human life. It is clear, succinct, and full of pithy quotations ... And it is radically egalitarian. Everyone suffers the human condition, rich and poor, master and serf ...." This copy from southern France or Spain was owned, and may have been made for, Carmelite friars; in modern times it was owned by the art historian Comte Paul Durrieu. [TM 557]

**DESCRIPTION:** 46 folios, complete, written in an upright southern gothic bookhand in 20 long lines, red initials, cockled, edges darkened, some stains, ink flaking on many folios. Bound in modern red leather over wooden boards. Dimensions 220 x 160 mm.

**LITERATURE:** Robert E. Lewis, ed. and tr., Lotario dei Segni (Pope Innocent III). *De miseria conditionis humane*, Athens, Georgia, 1978; John C. Moore, *Pope Innocent III (1160/61-1216). To Root up and to Plant*, Leiden, 2003; John C. Moore, "Innocent III's *De miseria humanae conditionis*: A *Speculum curiae*," *Catholic Historical Review* 67 (1981), pp. 553-564.



NICHOLAS OF DINKELSBÜHL, *Questiones in librum quartum sententiarum, d. 1-14* [Commentary on Book IV of the Sentences by Peter Lombard]

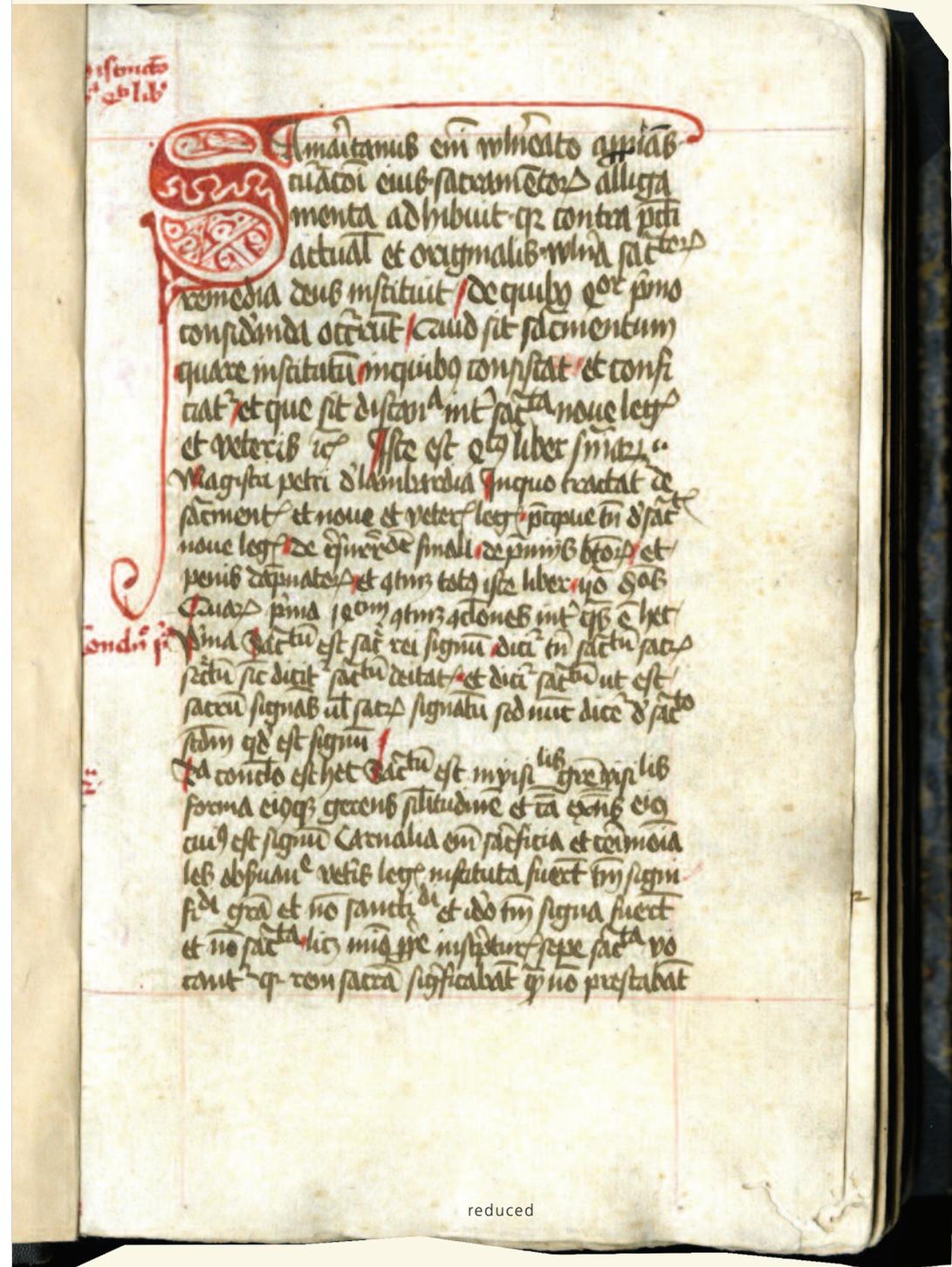
In Latin, decorated manuscript on paper  
Austria (Vienna?) or Southern Germany, c. 1425-50

The *Sentences* of Peter Lombard (c. 1100-c. 1160-4) was the standard textbook of scholastic theology from the early thirteenth century at least until the Council of Trent in the sixteenth century. Peter created a theological compilation from the *sententia* (opinions or judgments) of the Church Fathers, presented in an orderly fashion, with attempts to resolve contradictory teachings. Its popularity is reflected not only in the 1275 surviving manuscripts, but also in the extraordinary number of medieval commentaries written on this text. Apart the Bible, there is no theological work more commented on than the *Sentences*. Every medieval theology student attended lectures on the *Sentences*, and most important theologians wrote commentaries on it.

This manuscript is a commentary on the fourth book of the *Sentences*, which discusses God, the Sacraments, and the Four Last Things (Death, Last Judgment, Hell, and Heaven) by Nicholas of Dinkelsbühl (c. 1360-1433), who was important both as a theologian, and for his support of monastic and Church reform during his lifetime. He composed at least three commentaries on the *Sentences*. The first two were products of his years teaching at the University of Vienna. His last version was a lengthy commentary on Book IV of the *Sentences*, and reflected his lectures at the famous Benedictine Abbey of Melk from 1421-1424. It was the most popular of Nicholas's commentaries and survives in more than 200 manuscripts. None of his commentaries have appeared in print. The text in this manuscript appears to be an abbreviated version of his third commentary that also may incorporate passages from his earlier two commentaries. [TM 566]

**DESCRIPTION:** 168 folios on paper, watermark, dated 1420-1451, missing at least the final quire, written in a vigorous running hybrida script in 28-26 long lines, very clean, in excellent condition. Early 20<sup>th</sup>-century marbled half cloth binding. Dimensions 221 x 140 mm.

**LITERATURE:** Alois Madre, *Nikolaus von Dinkelsbühl: Leben und Schriften; ein Beitrag zur theologischen Literaturgeschichte*, Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie und Theologie des Mittelalters 40, Münster, 1965; Philipp Rosemann, *The Story of a Great Medieval Book: Peter Lombard's Sentences*, Peterborough, Ontario and Orchard Park, New York, 2007.



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# 6

## HUGO RIPELINUS ARGENTINENSIS (HUGH RIPELIN OF STRASBOURG), *Compendium theologiae veritatis* [Compendium of Theological Truth]

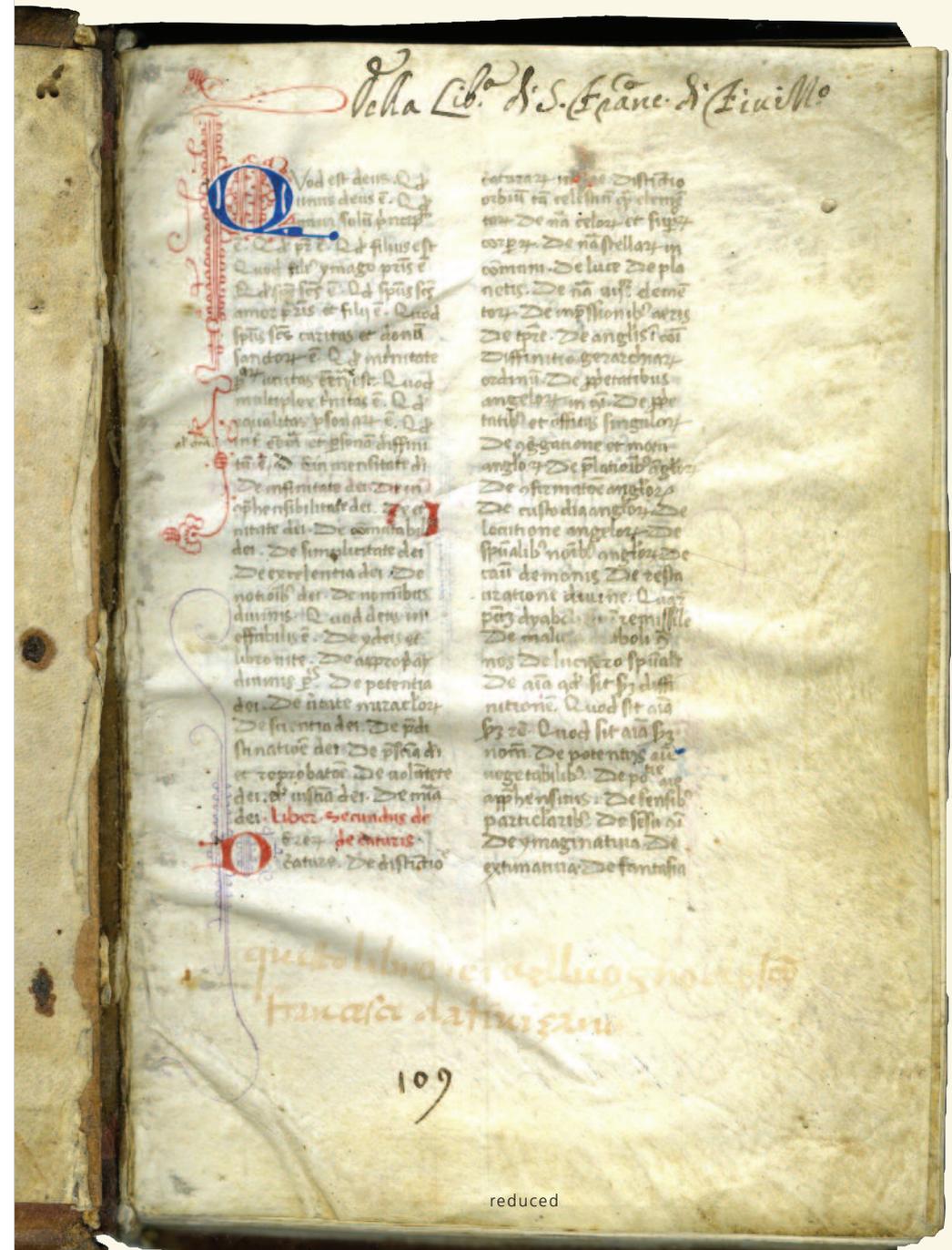
In Latin, decorated manuscript on parchment with 4 paper leaves  
Northern Italy, c. 1440-60

Although little-known today, the *Compendium theologiae veritatis* may have been the most widely-read theological work in the late Middle Ages, surviving in as many as 800 manuscripts in Latin, as well as in French and German translations. There is no modern critical edition, but it was printed among the works of Albertus Magnus and Bonaventure in the nineteenth century. The modern study by Georg Steer of the reception history of the Latin and German manuscripts of this text in Germany was a ground-breaking demonstration of the value of studying the transmission and reception of a medieval “bestseller” by analyzing the surviving copies.

Hugo Ripelin Argentinensis, or Hugh of Strasbourg (c. 1200-1210 - c. 1268) was one of the earliest Dominicans from Alsace, and prior of the convent in Strasbourg; the *Compendium theologiae veritatis* was written near the end of his life, c. 1260-8. In the preface, he explains that it was intended as a convenient summary of theology, a “compendium,” that avoided the tedium of an overly long work. He was obviously successful, and it was used as a school text for theology for more than four hundred years. Convenient handbooks that provided overviews of complex subjects had a great appeal during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. This carefully organized and corrected copy, still in its original binding, includes contemporary corrections and annotations, and is decorated with lovely penwork initials. It was owned early in its history by the Franciscans at Fivizzano, founded in 1490. The large number of scribes who copied this manuscript is noteworthy. [TM 628]

**DESCRIPTION:** 188 folios on parchment with four paper folios, watermark, similar to examples dated 1427-1449, complete, written in upright gothico-antiqua scripts in two columns of 32 lines by numerous scribes, red or blue penwork initials, wide margins, some stains, bottom or outer margins cut away on some folios (with loss of text on 7 leaves). Original blind-stamped leather binding, clasps missing, minor wear. Dimensions 173 x 120 mm.

**LITERATURE:** A. Borgnet, ed., *B. Alberti Magni...Opera omnia, ex editione lugdunensi religiose castigata...*, Paris, 1895, vol. 34, pp. 1-306; A. C. Peltier, ed., *S. Bonaventurae Opera omnia...* (1866) vol. 8, pp. 60-246; Steer, 1981.



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ANTONINUS FLORENTINUS (ANTONIO PIEROZZI),  
*Confessionale* [version: *Defecerunt scrutantes scrutinio*]; and  
*De ornatu mulierum* (excerpt); Anonymous [misattributed  
to Antoninus Florentinus], *Compendium de doctrina christiana*;  
and other texts

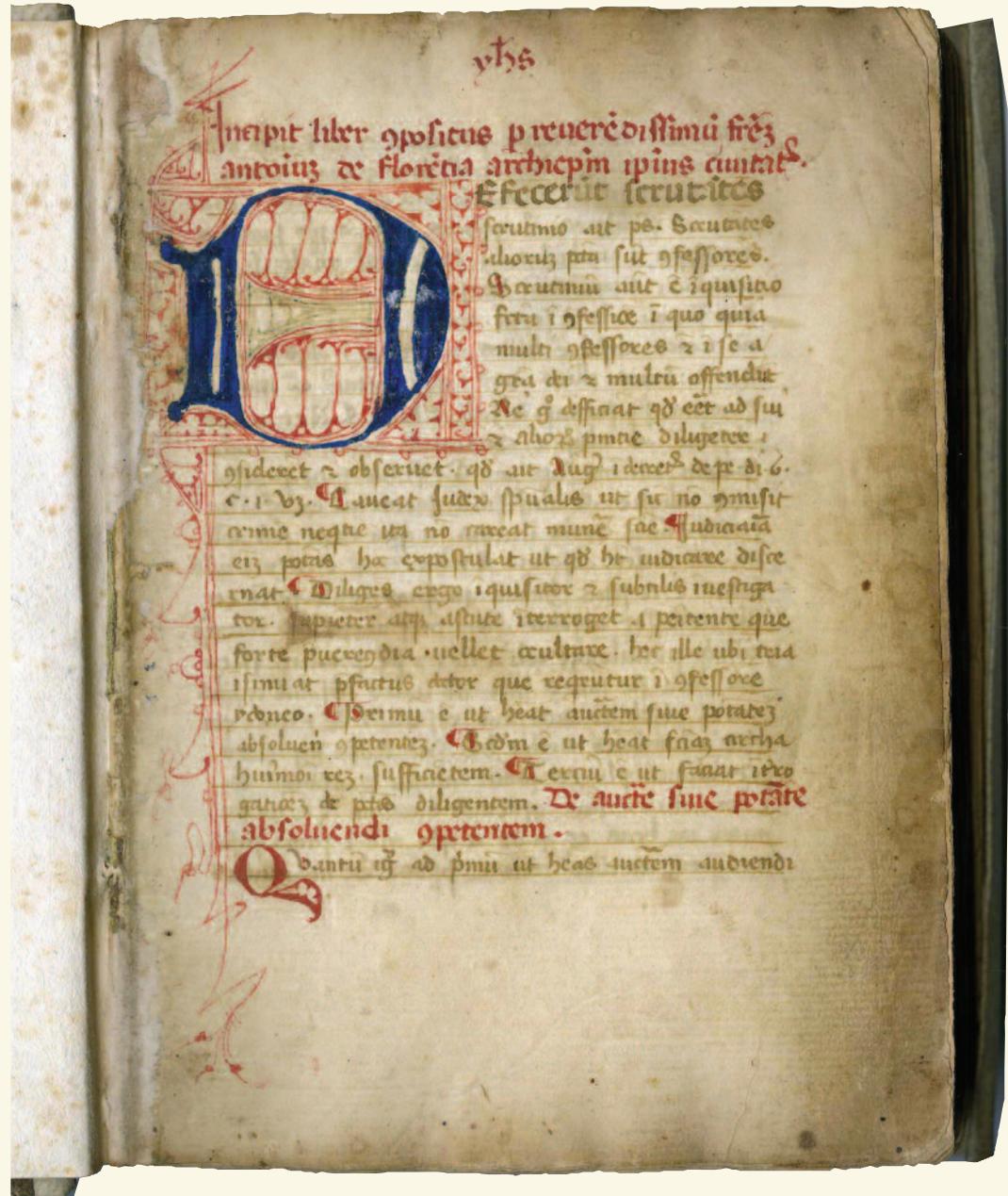
In Latin and Italian, decorated manuscript on paper  
Northern Italy (Florence, Milan?), dated 14[6]2

Literature related to pastoral care, in particular the linked missions of preaching and hearing confession, blossomed in the wake of the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215. Many of these texts, including manuals for confessors, such as the one in this manuscript, aids to preachers, biblical concordances, lives of the saints, and tracts on virtues and vices, to name a few examples, were by Dominican authors, and with the help of the efficient network of Dominican houses of study, many became medieval bestsellers. It is not entirely by accident that three of the authors discussed in this "Primer" are Dominican (nos. 6, 7 and 9).

The core of this manuscript contains a copy of the Latin *Confessionale* by Antoninus Florentinus (1389-1459), the Dominican archbishop of Florence who is known to have written three manuals for confessors (two in Latin and one in Italian). This is the third version, known as *Confessionale defecerunt* from its opening words; it was written before 1440 and enjoyed a wide circulation, surviving in 265 manuscripts. Here it is augmented with ancillary texts and excerpts, including a model for confession in Italian and an index, to form a handy portable manual for confessors. One of these texts, *De ornatu mulierum*, also by Antonius, reflects the contemporary debate on vanity and dress for women and the development of sumptuary laws in Florence. If the date of this manuscript is indeed 1462 (the "6" in the colophon is partially erased), it is a witness which comes only some twenty years after the redaction of the *Confessionale defecerunt*, and only a few years after the author's death in 1459. [TM 498]

**DESCRIPTION:** 112 folios, complete, watermark dated 1468-1478, written in a humanistic minuscule by four scribes, red initials, blue penwork initial. Limp vellum binding reusing part of a leaf from a fifteenth-century Choir book. Dimensions 165 x 120 mm.

**LITERATURE:** Gilberto Aranci, "I 'confessionali' di S. Antonino Pierozzi e la tradizione catechistica del'400," in *Vivens Homo*, 1992, no 3, pp. 273-292; Peter Howard Francis, *Beyond the Written Word: Preaching and Theology in the Florence of Archbishop Antoninus, 1427-1459*, Florence, 1995; Thomas Izbicki, "The Origins of the *De ornatu mulierum* of Antoninus of Florence," *Modern Language Notes* 119 (2004), pp. S142-S161.



## GUILLAUME DE LORRIS AND JEAN DE MEUN, *Roman de la Rose*, with JEAN DE MEUN, *Testament*

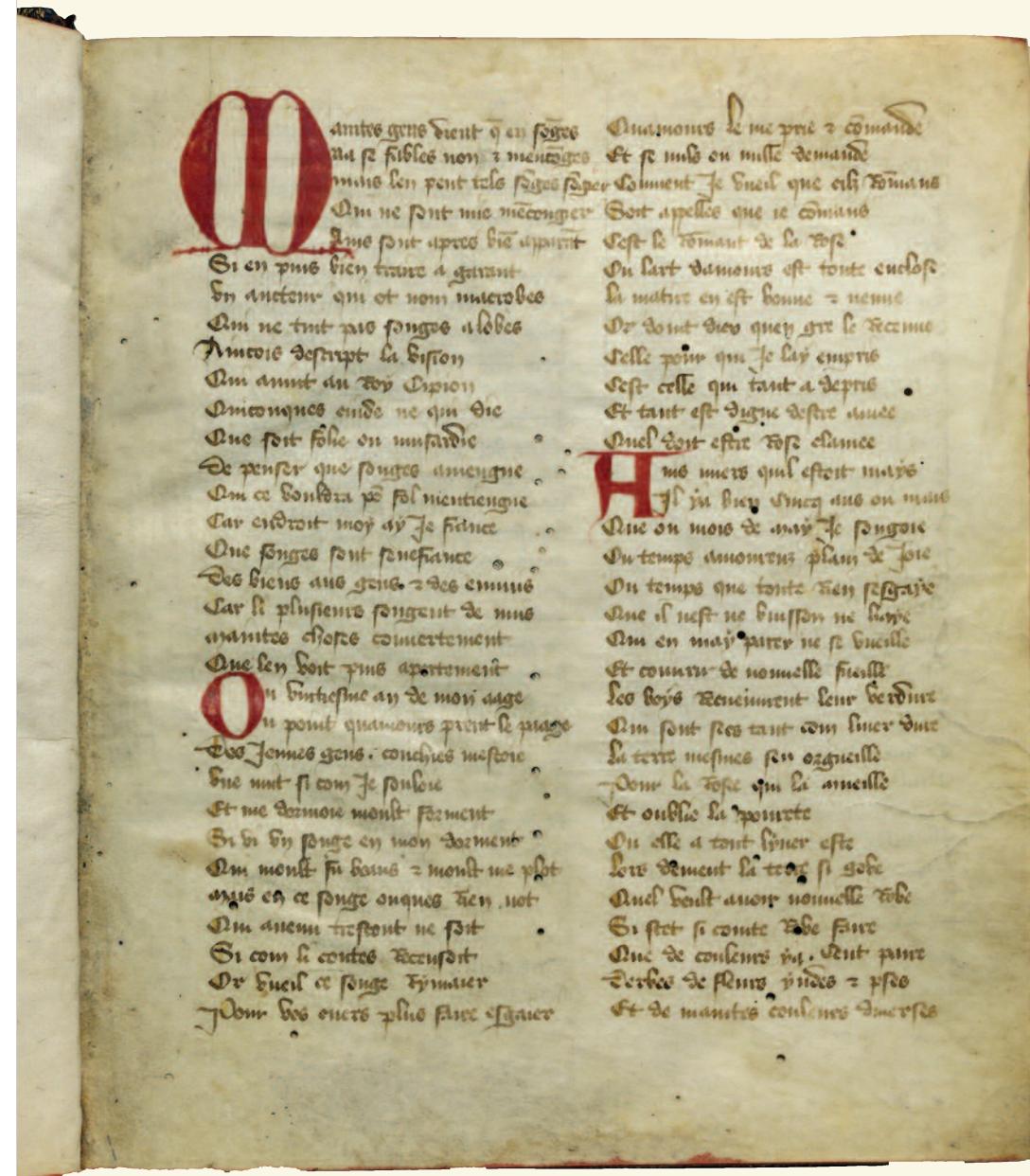
In French, decorated manuscript on parchment  
France (perhaps central France), dated 2 October 1375

In general, vernacular works survive in fewer manuscripts than do works in Latin. The *Roman de la Rose*, the bedrock of medieval French literature, is an exception. It is probably the single-most influential literary text of the Middle Ages, surviving in 322 manuscripts and fragments (more than both Chaucer and Dante). C. S. Lewis stated that in cultural importance "it ranks second to none except the Bible and the *Consolation of Philosophy*." A vast composition of 21,000 lines of verse, it was begun c. 1240 by Guillaume de Lorris (d. c. 1278) who wrote the first 4058 lines, and completed some forty years later by Jean de Meun (d. c. 1305), who edited this earlier work and added another 17,724 lines. Jean de Meun's less popular *Testament* still exists in 118 copies.

Guillaume de Lorris's section of the poem is a classic story of courtly love. Set within a walled garden, and told as if in a dream, it recounts the Lover's quest for the Rose (his lady's love). Jean de Meun's additions continue the story, but also dramatically changed its tone and introduced the satirical vitriol for which the text is famous. His section is full of scholarly references, discussion of various topics from the contemporary arts and sciences, and numerous pieces of advice for lovers, tempered with his seductively vicious sense of humor. These additions brought the work immediate acclaim and condemnation, ensuring a popular if perhaps secretive readership throughout the Middle Ages. This is a fine manuscript, probably once owned by Dominique Méon (1748-1829), librarian of the Bibliothèque nationale in Paris, and the author of the first modern edition of the *Rose*, and then by Sir Thomas Phillipps (1722-1872).

**DESCRIPTION:** 209 folios, complete, written in two columns of 32 lines in a cursive gothic bookhand, red initials, slightly trimmed, a few wormholes. Bound in 17<sup>th</sup>- century mottled calf, small scuffs and cracks. Dimensions 230 x 190 mm.

**LITERATURE:** D. Méon, *Le Roman de la Rose, Nouvelle édition, revue et corrigée sur les meilleurs et plus anciens manuscrits*, Paris, 1814; S. Huot, *The Romance of the Rose and its Medieval Readers. Interpretation, Reception, Manuscript Transmission*, Cambridge, 1993; C. S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love*, London, 1936; "Roman de la Rose: digital library": <http://romandelarose.org/>



## HENRICUS SUSO, *Horologium sapientiae* [Little Clock of Wisdom]

In Latin, decorated manuscript on paper  
Southwestern Germany or Switzerland (?), 1426

The *Horologium sapientiae* was written c. 1330 by Henricus Suso (c.1295-1366), the German mystic and Dominican friar. Throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries it was a tremendously popular text, surviving in 377 whole or partial witnesses (233 complete manuscripts, 144 excerpts, and 88 now lost), as well as in numerous vernacular translations (in all about 220 manuscripts of the various vernacular translations survive). The Latin work was an expanded version of Suso's German work, the *Büchlein der ewigen Weisheit* ("Little Book of Eternal Wisdom"), which also survives in hundreds of manuscripts.

Its success was certainly in part due to its popularity as devotional reading in the reformed monasteries of the fifteenth century and in *Devotio Moderna* circles. The *Horologium*, in fact, was the only contemporary work on the list of personal reading for the converted follower proposed by Geert Groote (1340-84), the founder of the *Devotio Moderna*. It was also an entertaining text, drawing on the tradition of courtly romance. The text tells of the author's devotion to Wisdom (Christ, the Bride in the Song of Songs, and other manifestations of the Divine) in a manner that echoes a knight's devotion to his lady, with love guiding all of his actions, and with their betrothal his aim. Still in its original binding, this unassuming but carefully written and corrected copy, dated by its scribe on the last folio, is a wonderful artifact that may have been copied for devotional reading in a monastery or for a cleric or lay person associated with the *Devotio Moderna*. [TM 563]

**DESCRIPTION:** 252 folios, written in a cursive gothic bookhand in 22-19 long lines, red initials, some signs of use. Original red blind-tooled leather binding, unobtrusively restored, both covers worn leaving wood and thongs exposed, and two bands are broken, but in serviceable condition. Dimensions 156 x 105 mm.

**LITERATURE:** Kock, 1999 (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 2002); Henricus Suso, *Wisdom's Watch Upon the Hours*, tr. Edmund Colledge, Washington, D. C., 1994; Pius Künzle, ed., Henricus Suso. *Heinrich Seuses Horologium sapientiae erste kritische Ausgabe*, Freiburg, 1977.



## THOMAS A KEMPIS, *Imitatio Christi*

In Latin, manuscript on paper

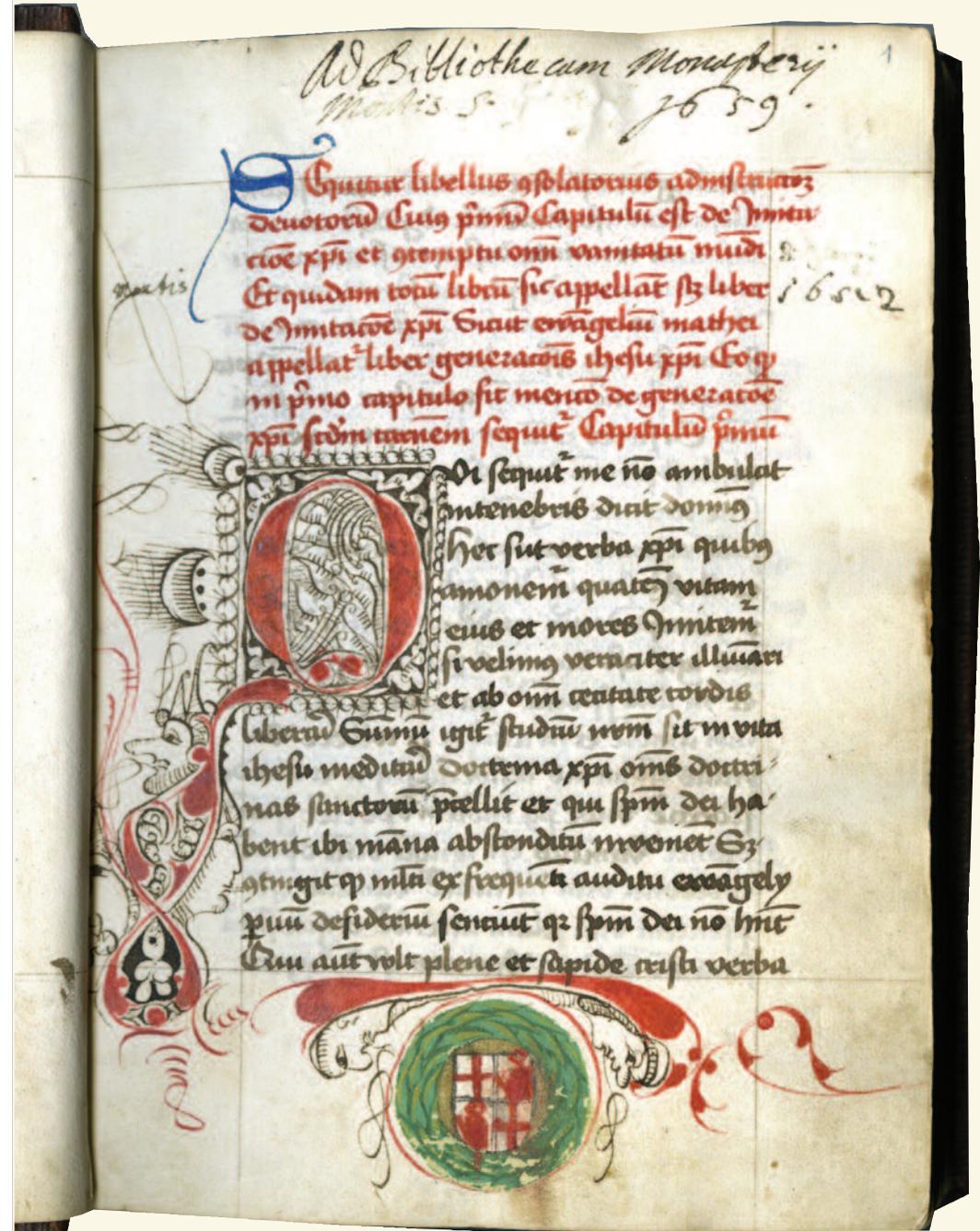
Austria (Tirol) or Southern Germany, c. 1469-1491

The *Imitatio Christi* ("The Imitation of Christ"), arguably the most influential devotional book in Western Christian history, was not only a medieval bestseller, but has remained one to the present day. It survives in perhaps 1,000 manuscripts (estimates vary), and more than 740 printed editions from its composition up to 1650, making it the most frequently printed book in the sixteenth century apart from Bible. During the fifteenth century it was translated into French, German, Dutch, Middle English, Castilian, Catalan, Italian, and Portuguese among other languages.

Thomas a Kempis (1379/80-1471) belonged to the second generation of the *Devotio Moderna* following Geert Grote. In this work, Thomas encapsulated the spirituality of the *Devotio Moderna*, or the New Devout, especially their emphatic emphasis on Christ, the importance of the Bible, the recommendation of the use of the vernacular for religious writings, and their focus on the interior life and a calm withdrawal from the world. The earliest dated copy of Book I was copied in 1424; all four books can be found in a dated manuscript from 1427. Key to its dissemination in the fifteenth century was the importance of copying books among followers of the Modern Devotion. The Brethren of the Common Life and the Windesheim Canons made translating, copying, and reading devotional works central to their way of life, and introduced the *Imitatio* throughout Europe. This copy includes the coat-of-arms of Kaspar II Augsburger, Abbot of the important Benedictine monastery of St. Georgenberg from 1469-91. He was an important figure, who was instrumental in enlarging the monastery's library. [TM 602]

**DESCRIPTION:** 153 folios, written in a formal hybrida script in 23-20 long lines, red line initials, partial border with coat-of-arms. 19<sup>th</sup>-century (?) gold-tooled brown leather binding. Dimensions 206 x 145 mm.

**LITERATURE:** Delaveau and Sordet, 2011; Peter Jeffery and Donald Yates, *Hill Monastic Manuscript Library. Descriptive Inventories of Manuscripts Microfilmed for the Hill Monastic Manuscript Library, Austrian libraries, volume II, St. Georgenberg-Fiecht*, Collegeville, Minnesota, 1985; M. J. Pohl, ed., *De Imitatione christi quae dicitur libri III*, in *Thomae Hemerken a Kempis opera omnia* (vol. 2), Freiburg, 1904, pp. 3-264; Van Habsburg, 2011.



**HIEREMIAS DE MONTAGNONE, *Compendium moralium notabilium*; Florilegium on the Virtutes and Vices by an UNKNOWN AUTHOR**

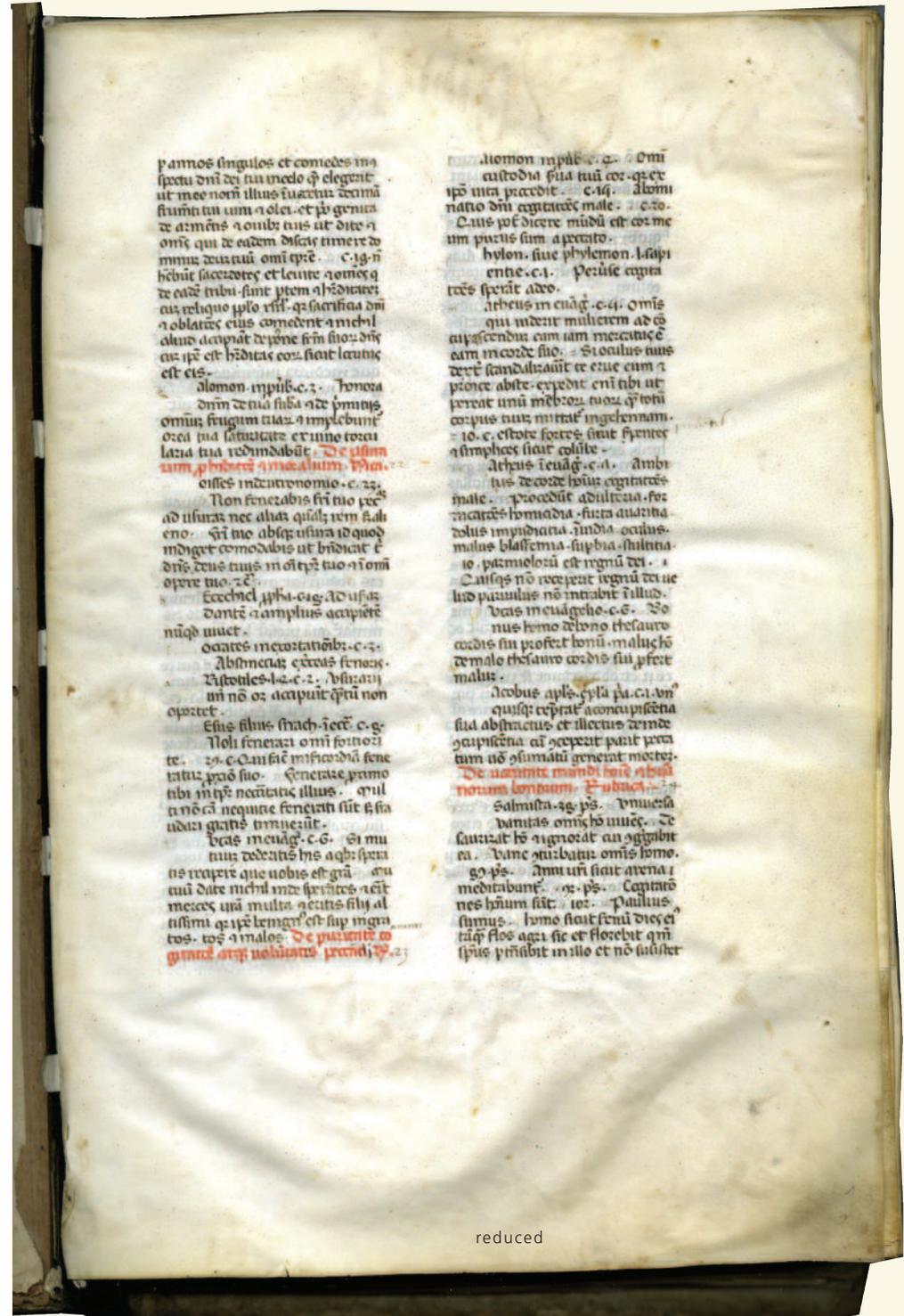
In Latin, with some Italian, manuscript on parchment  
Northeastern Italy (Padua or Vicenza?), c. 1400-1435

To conclude this brief survey of medieval bestsellers, it may be instructive to look at the fate of a classical text that was not copied during the Middle Ages, and that consequently almost did not survive to the present day. The *Compendium moralium notabilium* by Hieremias de Montagnone (c. 1250/60-1320/1), a judge from Padua, is a vast collection of moral excerpts from ancient and medieval sources. It includes extensive citations from classical sources, including seven passages from works by the Roman poet Gaius Valerius Catullus (c. 84 B.C.- c. 54 B.C.).

The story of the exceedingly fragile transmission of these poems is a remarkable one. Catullus is notorious for his erotic poetry and for his rude, occasionally obscene, attacks on various people. His poems had some acclaim in the ancient world, but were never canonical school texts. Indeed, there are only two records of their survival into the Middle Ages: a ninth-century poetic anthology with a single poem, and a remark in a sermon dated 965 by Bishop Rather of Verona stating that he had discovered a long-forgotten manuscript of Catullus. A manuscript now thought to be a copy of the one seen by Bishop Rather re-surfaced in Verona only centuries later, c. 1290 (it is said to have been hidden under a wine barrel), and it is this manuscript, known as V, that was most likely used by Hieremias as a source for his quotations from Catullus. Since the Renaissance copies of Catullus have been shown to descend from a (lost) copy of V, known as A, rather than from V itself, the citations in Hieremias's *Compendium* are the earliest witness to Catullus's text. [TM 669]

**DESCRIPTION:** 208 folios, lacking one gathering at the beginning and six leaves, written in two columns of 50-48 lines in a regular round gothic bookhand by one scribe, blank spaces for initials, lower or outer margins of 55 leaves cut away (no loss of text), slight rodent damage to one corner. Bound in early leather (traces remain) over wooden boards, metal corner pieces (later?), spine bare. Dimensions 395 x 265 mm.

**LITERATURE:** Reynolds, 1983; Berthold Louis Ullmann, "Hieremias de Montagnone and His Citations from Catullus," *Studies in the Italian Renaissance*, Rome, 1973, pp. 79-112.



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<http://www.opvs.fr/?q=fr/VuePresentationProjet>

Schoenberg Database of Manuscripts  
<http://dla.library.upenn.edu/dla/schoenberg/index.html>  
(Records for manuscripts before 1600 based on library catalogues, auction records, and booksellers catalogues)

**PASCALE BOURGAIN** has taught at the Ecole nationale des chartes in Paris since 1979 on medieval literature, medieval Latin, codicology, and the edition of texts. Her research interests include medieval poetry and Latin historiography, the history of texts, and editorial problems from the sixth to the fifteenth centuries. Among her books are: *Poésie lyrique latine du Moyen Âge*, *Lettres gothiques*, (2000); and *Le latin médiéval*, *L'Atelier du médiéviste*, (2005). The present "Primer" grows out of her ongoing project to create an online database on *Le succès des œuvres latines médiévales* with the IRHT.

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