

Psalter

In Latin, illuminated manuscript on parchment

Northeastern France (Diocese of Thérouanne, Saint-Omer?), c. 1300-1340

i (paper) + *i* (parchment) + 158 + *ii* (paper) folios on parchment, modern foliation in pencil top outer corner recto, 16 leaves missing, plus additional leaves at the end (collation *i*⁸ [-1, 2, and 5, with loss of text] *ii*⁶ *iii*¹² [minus one leaf, inserted singleton, before 1] *iv*¹² *v*¹² [-4, after f. 38, and -9, after f. 42, with loss of text] *vi*¹² *vii*¹⁰ [-3, after f. 61, with loss of text] *viii*¹² *ix*¹² [-2, after f. 79, with loss of text, 5 and 8 are single] *x*¹² [-3, apparently cancelled with no loss of text, and -10, following f. 97, with loss of text] *xi*¹² *xii*¹⁰ [-2, following f. 112, and -9, following f. 118, with loss of text] *xiii*¹² *xiv*⁸ [-8, following f. 138, with loss of text] *xv-xvi*⁸ *xvii*⁸ [-1, before f. 155, -3, before f. 156, -6, before f. 158, and -8, after f. 158], horizontal catchwords in quires 15 and 16, very bottom inner margin, no signatures, ruled lightly in lead with the top or top two and bottom or bottom two horizontal rules full across, single full length vertical bounding lines, prickings visible in outer margins of some leaves especially at the beginning and end of the volume (justification 65-62 x 48-45 mm.), ff. 132-end, (justification 62-60 x 40 mm.), written below the top line by two or three scribes in eighteen long lines in gothic bookhands, scribe 1, ff. 1-38v, scribe 2, f. 39rv, then scribe 1 resumes, continuing through f. 41v, f. 42, scribe 2, leaving f. 42v, blank, ff. 43-131v, scribe 1, scribe 3, ff. 132 to end (scribe 2 and 3 may be the same), one-line alternately blue and polished gold initials throughout, usually with contrasting pen decoration in red or blue or bluish-black, respectively, red and blue line fillers, each psalm begins with a two-line (with 'I' extending up to 18 lines) polished gold initials infilled with blue or pink with white details on grounds on the opposite color, most with bar borders in gold, pink, and blue extending the full-length of the text and partially into the upper and lower margins, gold on a few initials rubbed, edges darkened, f. 1, top quarter of the leaf (with the initial), excised, f. 11, slit in upper margin, quires 6 to the end (from f. 46) loose, attached only by one band, last leaf darkened and stained, slightly cockled. Bound in modern (nineteenth-century?) red leather over pasteboard, simple blind-tooled fillets framing both boards, almost flat spine with two slightly raised bands, worn along the outer edges, scuffed, bottom lower joint split, lower portion of spine stained and partially worn away. Dimensions 96 x 67 mm.

Tiny Psalters from the later thirteenth and fourteenth centuries made for private devotion raise interesting historical questions, especially when studied alongside the earliest Books of Hours. This example is from the diocese of Thérouanne, a particularly important center for the production of Psalters in this period. Surely once an opulent volume, it is still adorned by numerous attractive gold initials and colorful line fillers. It remains an accessible example of one of the most important genres of medieval books.

PROVENANCE

1. Written and illuminated in Northeastern France in the first half of the fourteenth century, probably c. 1300-1340, possibly in the earlier decades of this period, as supported by the evidence of the script and style of the decoration. The significance of what appears to be a date, "1318" written below the text in a medieval or early modern hand on f. 99v is unclear, but it seems unlikely that it is the date of the manuscript.
2. Evidence of the calendar suggests it may have originated in the diocese of Thérouanne in Northeastern France; Saint-Omer was an important center for the production of small illuminated Psalters at the time. It includes two feasts for St. Omer (Audomarus), bishop of Thérouanne, one, in red on September 9, and another, also in red, on June 6 (the designation "confessor" here is probably a scribal error, as is the date, since the feast of the translation of bishop Omer was celebrated in Saint-Omer on June 8). Other

saints of note in the calendar are Nicasius, bishop of Reims, on December 14, in red, Donatianus, in black, on October 14 (Bruges), and abbot Valery (Walericus), on April 1, whose relics are preserved at Saint-Valery-sur-Somme (diocese of Amiens).

3. There are two leaves with notes, likely from early owners. On the front parchment flyleaf, partially erased and obscured by dirt it is possible to read in part, "Accepi anno domino Dro<d?>saído/ [Calvinista, added between the lines]/ <?> / <?> quando fui[?]/ <?>/ <?> Ludolphus/ [in another hand] professus/ </> dolensis." And on f. 43v, on a leaf otherwise left blank, there is a note possibly by an early owner, although it seems to have been copied twice, suggesting it might be a pen trial. Most of it remains to be deciphered, but the second time it was copied it concludes with a date, "1591", and includes the name, "Louis au Vou[?]."
4. Sold at Marc van de Wiele, Bruges, 7-8 October, 2016, lot 1037.

TEXT

ff. 1-10, Calendar, now beginning imperfectly with the second half of February with Juliana (16 February), and missing one leaf after f. 2, with the second half of April and the beginning of May, with major feasts in red, in addition some feasts in black (and one in red) are followed by a red 'D' (for duplex), although oddly there are 'D's on several blank dates with no feasts; among the feasts included are Albinus, bishop, 'D' (1 March), Fortunatus, bishop (3 March), Longinus (15 March) is now partially erased, although this may be due to accidental wear, Gertrude (17 March), Benedict (20 March), Walericus, abbot (1 April), Mary of Egypt, in black, but with a red 'D' on the line below (9 April), Audomarus, in red (6 June), Medard (8 June), translation of Thomas (3 July), translation of Martin (4 July), translation of Benedict (11 July), Arnulph, bishop (18 July), Margaret, in red (20 July), Mary Magdalene, in red, 'D' (22 July), Philibertus, abbot (20 August), Louis, in red (25 August), Audomarus, bishop, in red (9 September), Lambert, bishop (16 September), Tecla (21 September), Leodegar (2 October), Dionysius, in red (9 October), Donatianus, archbishop (14 October), Winwoc, abbot (6 November), Martin, in red (11 November), Brice, in red (13 November), Eulalia (10 December), Walericus, abbot (12 December), Nicasius, bishop, in red (14 December);

ff. 12-158v, Psalms in biblical order from Psalm 1-114:8; missing thirteen leaves as follows:

f. 12, the Psalm 1:1 now begins, "//eatus vir ...," and likely was once been preceded by a leaf with an illuminated 'B'; f. 38v, text ends abruptly "... ventura et annuntialiter//" at Psalm 21:23; f. 39 begins "//vano animam suam ..." at Psalm 23:4; f. 42, Psalm 25 ends at the top of f. 42, remainder and f. 42v, blank; f. 43 begins, "//[tab]bernaculo eius ...," at Psalm 26:6; f. 61v, Psalm 36 ends mid f. 61v, with the addition of "gloria patri. Sicut erat," remainder blank; f. 62 begins "//mea apud te est ...," at Psalm 38:8; f. 79v, Psalm 51 ends near top of folio, remainder blank; f. 80, begins "//[vir]tute tua iudica me ...," at Psalm 53:3; f. 97v, ends "... psallite domino. Psallite//" at Psalm 67:33; f. 98 begins, "//comedit me et obprobia ...," Psalm 68:10; f. 112v ends, "... Ideo audivit//," Psalm 77:21; f. 113 begins, "//eum et reuertebantur ...," at Psalm 77:34; f. 118v, ends "... dextera tua et super//," Psalm 79:16; f. 119 begins "//de terra egypti ...," at Psalm 80:6; f. 138v ends, "... et rectis cor//," Psalm 96:11; f. 139 begins, "//[che]rubim moveatur terra ...," at Psalm 98:1; f. 154v ends, "... exurgam diluculo//," Psalm 107:3; f. 155 begins, "//orabam. Et posuerunt ...," at Psalm 108:4; f. 155v, ends, "... in ossibus eius//," Psalm

108:18; f. 156, begins, "[virtu]tis tue emmitet dominus ...," Psalm 109:2; f. 157v, ends "... Vt colloceat eum cum principibus//," Psalm 112:8; f. 158, begins "//Domus Israel speravit ...," Psalm 113:19, and concludes, f. 158v, "...Quia eripuit animam meam de//," Psalm 114:8.

Tiny Psalters made for private devotion held a special place among the books copied and illuminated in Northeastern France and Flanders at the end of thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Many examples are extant from Saint-Omer in the diocese of Théroutanne, from Amiens, as well as from Ghent and Bruges. This example is smaller than most, and was probably made for a lay person. The lavish use of gold and the colorful line fillers make this an opulent volume (and it almost certainly once included large initials at each of the main divisions of the psalms). Although somewhat reduced in splendor, it remains a valuable and instructive example of one of the most important genres of medieval book production, from a region known for this type of book.

All 150 Psalms were recited each week during the Divine Office, and the psalms in many Psalters, even those intended for lay use, include prominent initials or miniatures that reflect liturgical readings. Breaks in the text of this Psalter show us that it once included pages prominent (presumably illuminated) initials marking the psalms recited at Matins for each day of the week according to secular use (psalm 1, Sunday at Matins, psalm 26, Monday, psalm 38, Tuesday, psalm 52, Wednesday, psalm 68, Thursday, psalm 80, Friday, and psalm 97, Saturday), and Sunday at Vespers (psalm 109). Psalters varied in their contents, some included litanies, and other prayers in addition to the psalms and calendar found in this manuscript. Although the manuscript is now in a modern binding, there is no evidence to suggest it ever included these additional texts.

Psalms were the primary book for private, lay devotion from early in the Middle Ages and well into the thirteenth century (and often much later). It is often stated that Books of Hours largely replaced Psalters as books for private devotion for the laity in the later Middle Ages, and this is partially true. Small devotional Psalters are part of the history of early Books of Hours and combined Psalter-Hours in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. However, Books of Hours never completely replaced Psalters as books for the laity. The psalms were the texts devout Christians prayed throughout their life; Psalters were commissioned to mark important occasions, such as marriages, and they were the texts used to teach children how to read.

LITERATURE

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ONLINE RESOURCES

Introduction to liturgical manuscripts:

"Celebrating the Liturgy's Books":

<http://www.columbia.edu/itc/music/manuscripts/>

"Psalms", New Catholic Encyclopedia:

<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12533a.htm>

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