

Psalter

In Latin, illuminated manuscript on parchment

Southern Germany (diocese of Constance or Augsburg), c. 1240-60

117 folios on parchment (medium weight, even, slightly velvety, well-worn, with occasional original holes, some with sewing holes from old patches, e.g. ff. 88, 98, 106, more recent (?) sewing f. 82, modern foliation in pencil top outer corner recto, 1-65, 66 (added quarter sheet), 67-118, missing at least one leaf at end (collation i-viii^s ix^s [+1, quarter sheet, f. 66, added after 1] x^s xi^s xii-xiv^s xv^s [-8, with loss of text]), no catchwords or signatures, ruled in lead with the top two horizontal rules usually full across, single full-length vertical bounding lines, prickings in the outer margins of ff. 10-109, closely spaced prickings along the outer edge of f. 88 do not correspond to the ruling (justification 140-134 x 96-95 mm.), written below the top ruled line in an upright gothic bookhand, Psalm verses begin with one-line alternately red and blue initials within the line of text, opening words of each Psalm following a painted initial begin with one-line majuscules alternately red and blue, three-line alternately red and blue initials with pen decoration in the other color at the beginning of most Psalms, one three-line painted initial, f. 1v, SEVEN LARGE ILLUMINATED FOLIATE INITIALS, almost full-page to six lines (three with dragons), THREE LARGE HISTORIATED INITIALS, twelve- to nine-line (described in detail below), signs of use throughout, including dirt and wear to text, lower outer corner ff. 41, 113, 116, 117 (slightly into text) ripped away, severe damage to initials ff. 1 and 1v, some degree of damage and wear to remaining initials. Bound in early thick wooden boards with a rounded bevel, almost flush with the bookblock, covered with alum-tawed skin, spine with three raised bands, lower board, single hole in middle, upper board, five bosses, two strap and pin fasteners, fastening back to front (modern hardware and straps), boards show signs of at least two other types of fastenings: a single strap-and-pin fastening closing front to back (end of strap visible middle outer edge upper board, and hole, middle lower board), and catches and clasps fastening back to front (recesses remain front board from the two catches), partial remains of a paper label on the spine, now illegible, but read by an earlier catalogue as lettered in the nineteenth century ".3.9(?)", restored, rebacked with spine laid down, corners and covers worn with a few spots of wood exposed, housed in a red fitted case with the spine labelled: "Psalter/ Canticles/ and Litany/ Western Germany/ Constance/ c. 1229 " and below, a black label: "MS 1209 ES." Dimensions 196 x 145 mm.

Front pastedown: **Breviary, one parchment leaf, in Latin, Germany, c. 1290-1350(?)**, glued in upside down, ruled in crayon(?), trimmed so that it is missing some text at the inner and bottom margins (186 x 122 mm.), copied in a quick square gothic bookhand in two columns of 28-31 lines, one-line red initials. Dimensions 198 x 140 mm.

Rear pastedown: **GILBERT CRISPIN, *Disputatio iudaei cum christiano de fide christiana*, bifolium on parchment, in Latin, Germany, c. 1200-50**, glued in vertically with the first column partially obscured by the turn-in, ruled in lead (106 x 70 mm.), copied in an early gothic bookhand in two columns of twenty-four lines, red rubric, two-line red initial. Dimensions bifolium, 172 x 125 mm.; one leaf, 125 x 90 mm.

Almost certainly copied for lay use, this German illuminated Psalter includes historiated initials depicting both Saint Francis and Saint Dominic, canonized only decades before the manuscript was produced. Artistically, it is related to important illuminated south German Psalters now in Liverpool and Schaffhausen. It is still bound in an early binding (with some restoration), and there are numerous signs of use throughout, including evidence that it was used to teach children to read. Unusual and intriguing damage to the initials of Francis and Dominic warrants closer attention.

PROVENANCE

1. Evidence of the script and decoration suggests a date c. 1240-1260, certainly in Southern Germany, and probably in the diocese of Constance or possibly Augsburg, based on the style of the illumination (discussed below). Liturgical evidence for closer localization is now lacking, since it now ends imperfectly, with most of the litany missing, and there is no calendar. All three of the historiated initials depict saints: St. Michael and the dragon, St. Dominic (1170-1221), and St. Francis (c. 1182-1226). St. Michael is found frequently in German Psalters before Psalm 51, but the presence of both Francis and Dominic is unusual, and is strong evidence that this was made for a lay owner (Klemm, 2004). Francis was canonized almost immediately after his death in 1226; Dominic was canonized in 1234, providing a *terminus post quem*. It was likely copied not long after this date, however, and the depictions of the two most important saints of the thirteenth century, dating only a few decades, at the most, after their deaths, is significant.
2. The manuscript was carefully corrected by a contemporary; on f. 6, Psalm 7, verses 2 and 8, "meam" was omitted, and supplied in margin; corrections in the same hand, ff. 6v, 46, and 49v, where Psalm 69:4, omitted by the scribe, was also supplied in the upper margin. On f. 65rv, Psalm 88:29, "... In aeternum servabo illi miseridordiam meam" is followed by Ps. 88:35, "et que procedunt de labiis." The omitted verses were copied in the margin, but with errors, and then more legibly on an inserted quarter sheet, now foliated as f. 66 (on the verso, blank on the recto), to correct the mistake. Eye-skip led the scribe to copy mistakenly Psalm 133:2-3 again after Psalm 134:2; the extra verses were cancelled in red on f. 99.
3. Psalters were traditionally used to teach children to read, and there are signs in this volume that it may have been used in this way. The lower margin of f. 14 was used to practice the alphabet, copied in decorative majuscules, and then erased. On f. 83v, in the lower margin in space left blank at the end of Psalm 108, someone added the beginning of a well-known hymn in a rather unpracticed hand and with a number of mistakes, suggesting that this might have been the work of someone still learning Latin (incipit, "Criste qui lux es et dies nodis tenebras et degis lucis ... Precamur sancte domine"); another hand then continued the hymn, breaking off when he (or she) ran out of space, "Defende nos in hac nocte nos tibi reos sta//."
4. We know that the volume remained in Germany into the fifteenth century (top margin, f. 116, note in German dated 1467, "in dem jar da man zale m ccc vnd jiiii lxxvii jar do hub ich den halgen ..."). Both the images of St. Francis and St. Dominic are damaged in a way that perhaps suggests deliberate defacement rather than ordinary wear. This is particularly true of St. Francis; the saint's face, hand, and the book he is holding have been completely obliterated. The image of St. Dominic is less-damaged, but one hand and parts of the robe have been removed. Anti-mendicant feeling was strong in parts of Germany in the fifteenth century. It is even possible that this is evidence of use by a Protestant owner – someone who may also have removed the calendar and most of the Litany of saints.

5. Sold at Sotheby's, July 10, 1972, lot 81, when it was bought by Sion Segre Amar (Turin, 1910-2003) for the Comites Latentes Collection, Geneva, MS 99; deaccessioned and sold at Sotheby's, June 20, 1989, lot 40, and December 1, 1998, lot. 69.

TEXT

ff. 1-107v, Psalms, with major divisions at the Psalms for Matins for each day of the week according to secular use 1, 26, 38, 52, 68, 80, 97, as well as the first Psalm at Vespers, 109 (see below, illustration), along with the Psalms from the tripartite division of the Psalter, Psalms 51 and 101; Psalms 148-150 written as one.

ff. 107v-118, Ferial Canticles, Daily Canticles, and Creed: Confitebor (Isaiah 12); Ego dixi (Isaiah 38:10-21); Exultavit (1 Kings 2:1-11); Cantemus (Exodus 15:1-20); Domine audivi (Habakkuk 3); Audite celi (Deut. 32:1-44); Benedicte omnia; Benedictus dominus; Te Deum; Magnificat; Pater noster; Credo in deum; and Quicumque vult;

f. 118v, Litany, one folio only, ending imperfectly after the apostles, "Omnes sancti apostoli et euangeliste orate pro nobis"//

[Back pastedown; bifolium from another manuscript] incipit, "//omnibus que in lege ... exercetur ad prelium. Con"//

Gilbert Crispin, *Disputatio Judaei cum christiano de fide christiana*, printed in Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 159, col. 1007B-1012B.

Gilbert Crispin (c. 1045-1117) was a student of St. Anselm who became Abbot of Westminster Abbey. The *Disputation of a Jew with a Christian on the Christian Faith* is one of his most important works, surviving in about thirty manuscripts; critical edition, Sapir Abulafia and Evans, 1986, pp. 1-53.

ILLUSTRATION

f. 1, Psalm 1, almost full-page illuminated "B" (for "Beatus vir"), framed in red, with the opening words copied in alternately red and blue capitals in a vertical row alongside the initial; very badly damaged with only the outlines of the initial remaining, but once probably a blue initial infilled with scrolling vines ending in red leaves (likely originally similar to the initial on f. 27v);

f. 1v, Psalm 2, quite damaged, but it appears to have been a three-line painted initial, infilled and on a light-colored ground, edged in blue;

f. 17, Psalm 26, 10-line blue initial showing St. Francis – shown $\frac{3}{4}$ -length, but with face, one hand, and his rope belt, and book, all effaced, with a gold background and on a gold ground (gold has now been removed), in a thick red frame, edged in black;

f. 27v, Psalm 38, 10-line blue initial ending with a green dragon, perched on top of the upper frame, infilled with red and blue vines, with a gold background and on a gold ground (gold now removed), in a thick red frame, edged in black; with some wear, but in fairly good condition;

f. 37, Psalm 51, 12-line blue initial depicting St. Michael slaying the dragon; the dragon forms the tail of the "Q," with a gold background on a gold ground (gold now removed), in a thick red frame, edged in black; with some wear, but in fairly good condition;

f. 37v, Psalm 52, 6-line blue initial, infilled and on a ground of gold (gold now removed), in a partial red frame, edged in black; with some wear, but in fairly good condition;

f. 48, Psalm 68, 11-line blue initial, of twining vines, formed from a winged dragon (initial ends in a dragon's head, and the feet and wings of the dragon are in pink), on a gold ground (slightly damaged), in a bold red frame, edged in black;

f. 60, Psalm 80, 9-line blue initial, infilled with pink (now badly flaking, possibly deliberately removed), and blue vines on a gold ground (gold now mostly removed), with a heavy red frame, edged in black;

f. 71v, Psalm 97, 9-line blue initial, infilled with a blue and pink spiraling dragon, on a gold ground (gold now mostly removed), with a heavy red frame, edged in black;

f. 73, Psalm 101, 9-line blue initial, infilled with portrait of St. Dominic, half-length, in a black robe, on a gold ground, with a heavy red frame, edged in black; some wear to one hand and the robe; gold and face intact;

f. 84, Psalm 109, 9-line blue initial, infilled with blue, green, and red vines, on a dark (silver or copper-colored) ground, with a heavy red frame, edged in black, minor wear, but in good condition.

The iconographic program of this Psalter with figurative initials depicting three saints (and only three saints), St. Michael, St. Francis, and St. Dominic, is very unusual. Of these three, only St. Michael slaying the dragon was common; there was an established tradition in German Psalters of depicting the Archangel before Psalm 51. The slightly earlier Buxheim Psalter, probably from Augsburg (although its calendar includes numerous saints from the diocese of Constance), has a very grand depiction of this scene (Light and de Hamel, 2015, p. 102), as does another, later Psalter, also attributed to Augsburg, Munich Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 16137. Some elements of the initial in the Munich Psalter compare rather closely with the initial in our Psalter; note the simple frame, solid gold background, and the neck of the dragon intertwined around the initial (Klemm, 1998, cat. 120, and Light and de Hamel, fig. 5.1). Stylistically, they are difficult to compare, because damage to the initial in our Psalter has eliminated the drapery folds, but the light and airy depiction of Michael's wings in our Psalter is not closely comparable.

Examples of Psalters with both Francis and Dominic, however, are very rare; a mid-thirteenth century Psalter from Augsburg, Prague, UL, MS XIV E.3, includes both, and Francis and Michael are depicted in the related Augsburg Psalter, Dublin, Chester Beatty Library MS W.40. Dominic is depicted in a Psalter from the Upper Rhine, Würzburg, UB, M.p.Th. q.70 (probably Dominican, the litany includes Dominic and Francis; see Swarzenski, 1936, taf. 450-3). In all these cases the saints are depicted full-length, instead of the bust-length portraits included in our Psalter.

Stylistically, our Psalter has traditionally been compared with a lavishly illustrated Psalter from the diocese of Constance, Schaffhausen, Stadtbibliothek, MS Gen 5 (Gamper and Mari, 1998, pp. 11-16, at p. 16; Swarzenski, 1936, taf. 637-646, in particular the St. Michael, taf. 646). The Schaffhausen Psalter, in turn, has been linked to Liverpool, National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside, MS M 12004 (Gamper and Mari, 1998, p. 16; Swarzenski, 1936, pp. 118, 132-4, and 137-8, taf. 647-660). Both of these volumes may in turn be related to the earlier Waldkirch Psalter, Stuttgart, Württembergische Landesbibliothek, Inventar-Nr. Cod. brev. 125 (Sauer and Kuder, 1996, cat. 16, taf. I-II, Abb 44-66). The exact origin of all these Psalters has been much debated in the scholarly literature, and remains an open question. The Liverpool Psalter has traditionally been assigned to the Swabian monastery of St. George at Ochsenhausen on the basis of its relationship to Paris, BnF, MS nouv. acq. lat. 187, the so-called "St. Blasien Psalter," also probably copied at Ochsenhausen (Irtenkauf, 1964 and 1965). The two manuscripts are closely related, although the question of whether the Liverpool Psalter was copied for use in a Benedictine monastery has been debated (Palmer, 1998, pp. 146-7).

The Psalms have always played an important role in Christian liturgy. Throughout the Middle Ages, the weekly recitation of the one hundred and fifty Psalms was the heart of the Divine Office said by members of religious orders and by secular clerics. The Psalms were also the focus of private devotion among both the laity and the clergy. In fact, copies of the Psalms, usually accompanied by a calendar, litany, and often the Office of the Dead and other prayers, were the primary book for private, lay devotion from early in the Middle Ages and well into the thirteenth century (and often much later). Some of the most famous books from Carolingian times were illuminated Psalters commissioned by the emperors themselves. The Dagulf Psalter, Vienna, ONB, Cod. 1861, was made for Charlemagne (d. 814); his grandson, Charles the Bald (d. 877), also owned a beautifully illuminated Psalter (Paris, BnF, MS lat. 1152). By the second half of the twelfth century, especially in Germany, the illuminated Psalter for private devotional use for lay people was a popular and established genre – the first devotional books made in any quantity for secular owners. A very early example is the Psalter made for Henry the Lion (d. 1195) and his wife, Matilda (d. 1189) in Lower Saxony after 1167 (London, British Library, Lansdowne MS 381). The Buxheim Psalter from the Idda Collection is another example (Light and De Hamel, 2015).

It is often stated that Books of Hours largely replaced Psalters as books for private devotion for the laity in the later Middle Ages. While this was certainly true in parts of Europe, Psalters continued to be copied, and were especially popular in German-speaking countries and in Italy well into the sixteenth-century. 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. It is easy to imagine that the alphabet copied on f. 14 in this volume, and perhaps also the well-loved hymn on f. 83v, may have been added by children or students who were using this book for just this purpose.

The Psalms continued to be the central element of daily prayer after the Protestant Reformation. The curious defacement of the initials depicting St. Francis and St. Dominic here suggests that our Psalter was owned by someone who did not hold the mendicant friars in high esteem. Indeed, it seems possible that this Psalter continued to be used as a devotional book after the Protestant Reformation, and that a Protestant owner may have not only defaced the initials, but

also removed both the calendar and most of the litany (thus obliterating their record of numerous saints venerated in the Catholic Church).

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