

Choir Book (Gradual for Cistercian Use)

In Latin, illuminated manuscript on parchment with musical notation

Southern Netherlands (Walloon Brabant or Namur?), c. 1440-1447

ii (modern paper) + 221 + ii (modern paper), folios on parchment, lacking 2 leaves, 2 folios on paper added, two systems of later pagination with errors, modern foliation in pencil, 1-221 (collation i² ii-ix¹⁰ x¹⁰ [one leaf removed after f. 86, with loss of text (the beginning of the Easter Sunday)] xi-xiv¹⁰ xv¹⁰ [one leaf removed after f. 133, with loss of text (the beginning of the Sanctorale)] xvi-xxi¹⁰ xxii¹⁰ [two paper leaves inserted after f. 208, with the end of the Credo on rectos] xxiii⁴ xxiv⁴ [one contemporary parchment leaf inserted, with music]), 4 unbound nineteenth-century paper leaves (former flyleaves) kept with the book, quire signatures on each leaf in the middle of the outer margin on the verso (Ai, Aii. . .), the added paper leaf f. 210 has a watermark of an imperial crown with fleurs-de-lys surmounting a coat of arms charged with a sword (unidentified), parchment tabs marking certain sections, ruled in grey ink (justification 240 x 160 mm.), written in black ink in Gothic bookhand (textualis) on 9 lines of text and musical notation, Hufnagelschrift notation on four-line black staves, rastrum 14 mm., verse initials throughout are cadels in black and red alternating with red or blue initials, 15 one-stave-high pen-flourished initials, 5 two-stave-high initials (of which 4 are puzzle initials) with pen-flourishes filled with green and pink, or green and yellow washes, ONE VERY LARGE (c. 150 x 111 mm) INITIAL in red, blue, yellow and green with a FULL PAINTED FLORAL BORDER at the beginning of the volume, thumbing, ink rubbed off in places and other signs of wear from frequent use, but in very good overall condition. Early binding of dark brown leather over wooden boards (possibly original), tooled in blind (now quite worn), sewn on five bands, newer metal corner fittings, clasps and catches, recently rebacked and restored, in very good condition, with case. Dimensions 315 x 230 mm.

An impressive large-format music manuscript with Hufnagel notation (notes in the shape of nails) from a Cistercian Abbey, apparently commissioned by Jean de Maillen, the abbot of Grandpré in Namurois. The system of letters and dots found in the Easter table is an example of Cistercian inventiveness and love for ciphers. A splendid opening initial offers a fine specimen of Southern Netherlandish penwork (little studied in comparison to the ornamental decoration produced in Northern Netherlands).

PROVENANCE

1. The manuscript was made locally for the Cistercian abbey of Grandpré near Namur in Southern Netherlands (today Belgium), daughter house of Villers Abbey in Walloon Brabant (branch of Citeaux), very likely commissioned by the fifteenth-century abbot, Jean de Maillen, whose name is inscribed on f. 1: "Jean de [or "op" ("from" in Dutch)] maillen." Jean de Maillen was the son of Wéry de Maillen and Jeanne de Modave (Berlière, 1897). He was the abbot of Grandpré from 1414 until his death on 3 December 1447 (Jacquet-Ladrier, 1986; Berlière, 1897). De Maillen's death provides a *terminus ante quem* for the manuscript.

The abbey of Notre Dame de Grandpré was founded in 1231 (first as a priory) by Marguerite, the wife of Count Henri de Vianden, fulfilling the promise of her brother, Philippe, Count of Namur, who had died during the Albigensian Crusade (see Jacquet-Ladrier, 1986). It was a small community averaging twelve to fifteen monks. Some of the monks studied at the University of Louvain, and the library of the abbey was rich in works on asceticism, mysticism and saints' lives (Blouard, 1954, p. 23). The abbey was suppressed in 1797, and the last monks left in 1809.

The Cistercian use of the manuscript is confirmed by the inclusion of the feast and octave of St. Bernard, and the very strong positioning of St. Bernard and St. Robert of Molesme at the end of the litanies (f. 198v). St. Edmund and St. Malachias (Malachy, 5 November), who were omitted by mistake, have been added on an extra line and a tie-mark indicates their place before St. Wilhelme (f. 198v). Malachy was a friend of St. Bernard and especially revered in the Cistercian order. St. Wilhelme is the great Cistercian William of Bourges (10 January), who was prior of Pontigny, then abbot of Fontainejean, and later of Chaalis, before being elected the archbishop of Bourges. St. Edmund of Abingdon was a thirteenth-century archbishop of Canterbury who died in France and was buried in the abbey of Pontigny. The Sanctoriale also includes a local seventh-century saint, Vincent Madelgarius, who founded monasteries in Hautmont and Soignies, both close to Namur (feast day on 20 September). The Alleluia verses for Sundays following Pentecost are also for the Cistercian use.

2. Marginal notes testify to the manuscript's continued use at the abbey into the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. An antiphon for Mary Magdalene was added on the final leaf (f. 221rv), together with a prayer to Mary Magdalene that was transcribed in the margin of f. 221v, "Deus qui beate Marie Magdalena ita tibi placitam gratamque fecisti penitentiam...", with the date "1591"; other additions include two series of page numbers, a much later note relevant to the musical use of this manuscript, "NB Disson Alle.: Hodie in Maria Virgo in A major Fis anzuschlagen," and a table of contents added on one of the former flyleaves.

TEXT

f. 1v, Table that provides the date of Easter according to the Julian solar calendar for the years 1253-1701. At the top the years are written vertically at a 28-year interval: "M.cc. l. iii" (1253), "M. cc. lxxxi" (1281), [...], "M. dc. lxxiii" (1673). The first row within each column represents the year inscribed vertically at the top of the column, and each of the 27 lines below the heading gives the date of Easter for that year. All possible Easter dates from 22 March to 25 April are represented in the table with a letter and a dot, before or after the letter, as follows: 22 March = b., 23 March = c., 24 March = d., 25 March = e., 26 March = f., 27 March = g., 28 March = h., 29 March = i., 30 March = k., 31 March = l., 1 Apr = m., 2 Apr = n., 3 Apr = o., 4 Apr = p., 5 Apr = q., 6 Apr = r., 7 Apr = s., 8 Apr = t., 9 Apr = v., 10 Apr = .a, 11 Apr = .b, 12 Apr = .c, 13 Apr = .d, 14 Apr = .e, 15 Apr = .f, 16 Apr = .g, 17 Apr = .h, 18 Apr = .i, 19 Apr = .k, 20 Apr = .l, 21 Apr = .m, 22 Apr = .n, 23 Apr = .o, 24 Apr = .p, 25 Apr = .q. Thus, if we look on the third row in the column "M. cccc. lxxvii", we find for the year 1479 the letter ".b", and learn that the Easter Sunday on that year was on 11 April. There are some scribal errors. For instance, two rows down, for 1481, the scribe wrote "m.", although it should have been ".n" (22 April). Three sentences at the bottom of the folio explain the table: "The feast of Easter is signaled by these letters. The red letters indicate the dates in the 19-year [lunar] cycle. The blue sign indicates the indiction." The indiction, marked by a blue sign inserted at every period of 15 years, was used by the Romans for fiscal purposes, and later by the Church for indicating Easter and the beginning of the new year. The red letters, which are 19 spaces apart, give the more common 19-year lunar cycle for calculating Easter.

f. 2, Table listing all the possible dates of Easter chronologically from 22 March to 25 April, and the concomitant dates of Septuagesima, Pentecost and Advent Sundays; it also gives the number of Sundays between these feasts. The various dates of Easter are listed in the second column beginning with "xi Kalendis Aprilis", which is the eleventh day before the kalends of April (1 April), in other words, 22 March. There are some scribal errors also in this table. Further down in the Easter column, after the scribe wrote "Idus aprilis", he wrote "xviii KL apl, xvii KL apl, ...", when he should have written "xviii KL mai, xvii KL mai, ...";

ff. 3-133v, Temporale from the first Sunday in Advent to the twenty-third Sunday after Pentecost, incipit, "Ad te levavi...". One leaf is missing after f. 86, containing the beginning of the Easter Sunday.

ff. 134-187, Sanctorale, begins imperfectly in the middle of the feast of St Andrew (30 November), "Dilexis andream dominus..."; missing one leaf containing the Vigil of St Andrew and the beginning of the feast. Continues through the year to the feast of St Katherine (25 November).

ff. 187-190v, Common of Saints, including chants for the feasts for one martyr non pontiff, several martyrs, several confessors pontiffs, and the dedication of a church.

ff. 191v-197, Votive Masses for the Holy Spirit, the Holy Cross, the Virgin Mary, for relatives (*pro familiaribus*), and for the dead (*Missa pro defunctis*).

ff. 197v-208, Kyrie followed by the litanies.

ff. 208-210, Credo, with the end added on two paper leaves, on the rectos [f. 209v and f. 210v, blank];

f. 211rv, Gloria (begins imperfectly).

ff. 211v-221v, Votive Masses for the 11,000 virgins, against the plague, for St. Peter, St. Anthony, St. Katherine, St. Bernard, the translation of St. Benedict, Christmas, at a major Mass, for St. Mary Magdalene, followed by the Sanctus (f. 219rv) and Agnus Dei (ff. 219-221), and on the last leaf the addition of an antiphon and a prayer for Mary Magdalene, dated 1591 (f. 221rv).

ILLUSTRATION

f. 1, the carefully executed opening initial 'A' (c. 150 x 110 mm) is exceptionally rich in its decorative forms. The red, blue, and white puzzle initial is decorated with flat-color quadrilobes, stylized leaves, and stars. The initial rests on a delicately patterned ground of interlocking circles and floral forms in pastel green, beige, red and violet. A wreath of red, blue and pink roses fills the outer margins.

It seems very likely that originally the manuscript had similar decoration at the opening for Easter Sunday and for the Sanctorale. These two leaves are now missing.

In addition, there are five multicolor pen-flourished initials that are two staves high:

- f. 14v, Christmas Day, large puzzle initial, purple and green washes, purple and red pen-flourishing;
- f. 102, Ascension, large initial in blue and white with red pen-flourishing and green washes;
- f. 105v, Pentecost, large puzzle initial, green and yellow washes, purple and red pen-flourishing;
- f. 135v, St Stephen, large puzzle initial, green and yellow washes, purple and red pen-flourishing;
- f. 166, Nativity of St John the Baptist, large puzzle initial, green and yellow washes, purple and red pen-flourishing.

Fifteen one-stave-high initials in red or blue with purple or red pen-flourishing: f. 12, Midnight Mass for Christmas; f. 16v, Epiphany; f. 70, Palm Sunday; f. 111, Holy Trinity; f. 112, Corpus Christi; f. 148, Candlemas; f. 149v, Candlemas; f. 155v, Annunciation; f. 168, Peter and Paul; f. 176v, Assumption of the Virgin; f. 180, Nativity of the Virgin; f. 183, Michael and All Angels; f. 184v, All Saints; f. 189v, Dedication of a church; f. 192, Votive Mass for the Virgin

The decoration suggests the manuscript was made locally, probably in Namur or in Brabant. A close comparison of the decoration can be found, for instance, in a copy of Konrad of Eberbach's *Exordium magnum ordinis Cisterciensis* made in Brabant in 1457 (Brussels, KBR, MS 12166, f. 28; Netherlandish translation of Eberbach's work). It includes a similar wreath with blue, red and pink roses, puzzle initials divided into comparable forms and pen-flourishing that employs purple ink in a like manner. Flourishing as decoration was used in the Southern Netherlands mostly in Brabant. Flourishing by Brabant monasteries was very much influenced by that of the Dutch IJssel River religious houses, especially Zwolle and Deventer. As this example so well illustrates, penwork in the Southern Netherlands was extremely inventive, but remains little studied by comparison to the considerable advances made on Northern Netherlandish penwork decoration by Anne Korteweg and her colleagues.

The Gradual is the book that compiles all musical items sung during the Mass throughout the liturgical year. During the Mass, the priest used the Missal, whereas the cantors and the choir used the Gradual. The musical notation in this volume is an example of Hufnagelschrift, literally, "horseshoe-nail script," named after the distinctive shape of the head of the *virga* (one of the signs for single notes); this type of musical notation (with local variations) is found in manuscripts copied in Germany, the Low Countries, and Central Europe, well into the modern era, long after the rest of Europe adopted the more common square notation for chant.

The Cistercians were known for their interest in numbers and computation and developed ingenious systems to express them (King, 2001; Rouse, 1976); the Easter table on f. 1v is a very interesting example of this (a similar table is found in Bruges, Public Library, MS 110bis; we thank Jenneka Janzen for this information, and for background information on Cistercian numerical notation). A letter-dot sequential system was likely developed first at the Abbey of Ten Duinen to foliate their manuscripts. By the time this manuscript was copied, one would expect the scribe to have used Arabic numerals; here, however, he faithfully copied a table from the thirteenth century (the first Easter date listed is for 1253).

LITERATURE

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ONLINE RESOURCES

The site of the former Abbey of Grandpré

<http://www.abbayedegrandpre.be/>

"Abbaye de Grandpré" on the site "Vallée du Samson"

<http://www.valleedusamson.be/index.php/vallee-du-samson/faulx-les-tombes/abbaye-de-grandpre-1231-1794/page-1/all-pages>

"Abbaye de Grandpré" on a Wikipedia site about Villers-la-Ville:

http://www.wiki-villers-la-ville.be/index.php?title=L%27abbaye_de_Grandpr%C3%A9

Edition of the Gradual in the liturgical use of Rome, *Graduale Romanum* (1961)

<https://media.musicasacra.com/pdf/graduale1961.pdf>

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<https://media.musicasacra.com/pdf/propers1974.pdf>

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

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