

Choir Book (Antiphonal)

In Latin, decorated manuscript on parchment with musical notation

Northern Italy, c. 1350-1400

f. i (modern paper) + 152 + i (modern paper) on parchment (good quality, even, opening bifolium quire 15 are offcuts), early (sixteenth or seventeenth century?) pagination middle outer margins with gaps where there are missing leaves, opening twenty folios only also foliated around this time, complete modern foliation [cited] in pencil bottom outer corner, missing fourteen leaves and probably a quire at the end since the final quire ends with a catchword (collation i¹⁰ [-2, following f. 1, and -9, following f. 7] ii¹⁰ iii¹⁰ [-5 and 6, following f. 22] iv¹⁰ v¹⁰ [-2, following f. 37, -9, following f. 43] vi¹⁰ vii¹⁰ [-5 and 6, following f. 58] viii-x¹⁰ xi¹⁰ [-2, following f. 93, and -9, following f. 99] xii¹⁰ xiii¹⁰ [-5 and 6 following f. 114] xiv¹⁰ xv¹⁰ [-3, following f. 130, and -8, following f. 134] xvi⁸ [no loss of text] xvii⁸ [no loss of text]), horizontal catchwords, center lower margin, a few leaf or quire signatures remain, ruled in brown crayon with double vertical bounding lines almost full length, and with the bottom two horizontal rules extending into the outer margin on some folios, prickings top and bottom margins (justification 360 x 240-235 mm.), written in a formal liturgical gothic book hand with six lines of text and six lines of music on most pages, square musical notation on red 4-line staves, red rubrics, majuscules stroked in red, red or blue initials with pen work in the opposite color equivalent to one line of text, 16 large (equivalent to a line of text and a musical staff) and very elaborate parted red and blue initials with pen decoration in both colors on ff. 1, 13, 30v, 44v, 49v, 65v, 70, 71v, 83v, 86, 90, 104v, 108v, 124v, 140v, and f. 148, f. 1rv are stained in three outer margins, with rust marks, also visible on the final leaves, bottom outer corners a bit dirty from use, bottom edges slightly tattered through f. 39, with a number of repairs to the very bottom edge, including a parchment reinforcements glued onto ff. 19 and 20, but overall in very good condition. EARLY BINDING, perhaps 16th century with some restorations, of heavy wooden boards (possibly original, re-used here) with no bevel, extending slightly beyond the book block, covered with brown leather, with a blind-tooled 'L' surrounded by four fleur-de-lis on the front cover, now with remains of a paper label pasted over it, four metal corner pieces with bosses and a four-petalled center ornament with a boss, front and back, once fastened back to front, upper strap partially missing, in excellent condition, sewing a bit loose at the bottom, no head or tail bands, some wear to top and bottom of the spine, scuffs, modern endpapers and pastedowns. Dimensions 517 x 355 mm.

Giant Choir Books were used in churches and monasteries throughout Europe during the later Middle Ages and well into the Renaissance. Containing the text and music for the Divine Office, this massive Antiphonal allowed the entire choir to sing from it. Whereas single leaves and cuttings from Choir Books are not uncommon, codices are increasingly rare on the market. This is an excellent example of the genre – early, nearly complete, and in good condition, with very skillful script and attractive penwork initials

PROVENANCE

1. Evidence of the script and the style of the decorated pen initials suggest this was copied in Northern Italy in the second half of the fourteenth century, c. 1350-1400. The minor pen initials may be compared with Paris, BnF, MS fr. 782, Venice or Padua, 1340-1350, and BnF, MS fr. 4972, Venice, 1328-1330 (Avril and Gousset, 2012, cat. nos. 96, 83).
2. Initial, 'L', front cover; perhaps a shelfmark(?).
3. Added sixteenth-century note on f. 33v, saying this antiphon is said on the following Sunday, another on f. 46v; in use through the 17th-century(?) when the volume was paginated and repaired.

4. Inside back cover, dealer's notes.

TEXT

f. 1, *Dominica prima in adventu domini*, Temporale from the first Sunday in Advent, beginning with the response for the preceding Saturday Vespers, then the antiphon to the Magnificat, to Lauds of the Octave of the Epiphany.

The seven 'O'-antiphons to the Magnificat in the ferial Office for the seven days preceding the Christmas Vigil are found on ff. 79-82v, numbered in the margins with roman numerals; f. 83, Vigil of Christmas; f. 98v, Christmas; f. 113, Circumcision of Christ; f. 128 Vigil of Epiphany.

Missing a leaf after f. 1 (ending imperfectly in the antiphon for the first nocturn of Matins, first Sunday in Advent); missing a leaf after f. 7 (in the second nocturn of Matins); missing two leaves after f. 22 (second Sunday in Advent); missing a leaf after f. 37 (third Sunday in Advent); missing a leaf after f. 43; missing two leaves after f. 58 (fourth Sunday in Advent); missing a leaf after f. 93; missing a leaf after f. 99 (Christmas); missing two leaves after f. 114; Missing a leaf following f. 130 (vigil Epiphany); missing a leaf following f. 134

This is an Antiphonal, a liturgical chant book that contains the chants for the Divine Office. In contrast to Breviaries, Antiphonals omit the spoken texts and include only the texts and music for sung portions of the Office. The most obvious, but also one of the most important features of this volume is that it is very, very big. Its size meant that it could be read by all the members of the choir, or *schola cantorum*, at once; both the text and music would have been easily legible from a distance.

Sets of large format Choir Books for the Mass and Office, often including numerous volumes, were used in churches and monasteries throughout the later Middle Ages and well into the Renaissance. Some of the most famous examples are from fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century Italy: a fourteen-volume set of Choir Books was made for the Abbey of San Sisto of the Congregation of Santa Justina in the second half of the fifteenth century; an even larger set of thirty-three volumes was made for the cathedral in Florence in the early sixteenth century. The twenty-nine volumes made for the cathedral in Siena in the fifteenth century can still be seen in the cathedral's library today. Many of the most famous examples were commissioned to celebrate the opening or re-dedication of well-endowed churches.

This is an excellent example of this genre; because the script and music are so large, it includes texts and music for only a small part of the liturgical year from the beginning of Advent in November, through the Christmas season, concluding in the middle of January. It too must have once been part of a multi-volume set.

LITERATURE

Avril, François and Gousset, M. *Manuscrits enluminés d'origine italienne. 3, XIV^e siècle. II, Émilie-Vénétie*, Paris, 2012.

Boehm, Barbara Drake. *Choirs of Angels: Painting in Italian Choir Books, 1300-1500*, New York, 2009.

Harper, John. *The Forms and Orders of Western Liturgy from the Tenth to the Eighteenth Century*, Oxford, 1991.

Hiley, D. *Western Plainchant: A Handbook*, Oxford, 1993.

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Huglo, M. *Les livres de chant liturgiques*, Turnhout, 1988.

Palazzo, Eric. *A History of Liturgical Books from the Beginning to the Thirteenth Century*, tr. Madeleine Beaumont, Collegeville, Minnesota, 1998.

ONLINE RESOURCES

"Singing the Antiphony," Pablo Alvarez, University of Michigan, Special Collections
<https://www.lib.umich.edu/online-exhibits/exhibits/show/singing-the-antiphony--mich->

Susan Boynton and Consuelo Dutschke. "Celebrating the Liturgy's Books" (Introduction to liturgical manuscripts)
<http://www.columbia.edu/itc/music/manuscripts>

Boehm, Barbara Drake and Alison Manges Nogueira. "Painting in Italian Choir Books, 1300–1500," *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*, New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art
http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/choi/hd_choi.htm

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