

**Rule of the Augustinian Canonesses of Santa Andrea della Porta in Genoa
In Italian (Genoese dialect), illuminated manuscript on parchment
Northwestern Italy (Genoa), 1511**

55 + i + i (paper) folios on parchment, modern foliation in pencil, 1-55, lacking one leaf (collation i¹⁰ ii¹⁰ [-10, one leaf missing after f. 19, with loss of text] iii-v¹⁰ vi⁶), vertical catchwords, ruled in lead (justification 135 x 85 mm.), written in gray and red inks in Italian textualis bookhand on 25 lines, capitals touched in yellow and often decorated with ornamental strokes, 2-line initials alternating in red and blue throughout, two 3-line puzzle initials, one 4-line puzzle initial, OPENING PAGE WITH THREE MINIATURES (described below), acanthus foliage and a 4-line initial in colors on a burnished gold ground, first leaf moderately worn with some flaking of ink and paint, a few stains and signs of use, but in overall very good condition. Bound in the seventeenth century in dark brown goatskin over wooden boards, both covers gold tooled with filets and a foliage roll, fleurs-de-lis in corners, a crucifixion in the center of the front cover, Virgin and Child in the center of the back cover, spine with three raised bands, gold tooled with flowers, leather in corners and spine slightly worn, one of two leather straps and metal clasps missing, otherwise in very good condition. Dimensions 202 x 142 mm.

Apparently unpublished and unedited, this Rule for the Augustinian canonesses of Santa Andrea della Porta in Genoa is a significant new source for the study of the religious life of women in Renaissance Italy. Written in a practiced script by the confessor of the house, who signs his name, this manuscript marks the adoption of a new way of life by the religious community, which was formerly Benedictine. An illuminated frontispiece, possibly the work of one of the nuns and portraying the sisters, suitably underlines the importance of this manuscript.

PROVENANCE

1. The colophon at the end, on f. 54v, identifies the manuscript as the Rule of St. Augustine for Augustinian canonesses regular of the Lateran Congregation in Genoa, copied in 1511 at the monastery of Santa Andrea della Porta (situated near Porta S. Egidio, today Via Dante) by Father Gregorio da Piacenza, confessor of the nuns: "Hic liber est Canonissarum regularium sancti Augustini Congregationis lateranensis Commoratum genue in Abbatia Sancti Andree de porta. Scriptus per D. Gregorium placentiae tunc imprimis confessore 1511. Merces laboris mei sit christi filius dei amen."

The monastery of Sant' Andrea della Porta was one of the oldest monasteries in Genoa, founded perhaps as early as the end of the tenth century or early eleventh century, and documented as a Benedictine house for nuns in 1109; in 1510 Augustinian Canonesses regular of the Lateran congregation, replaced the earlier Benedictine congregation (Paolucci, 2011; Maiolino and Varaldo, 1979, pp. 108-109; Soave, 2002). The Lateran congregation of Augustinian Canons (and Canonesses) dates from the middle of the fifteenth century, part of the Observant Reform, and search for a stricter religious life. Our manuscript, dates from this very important moment of transition in the history of Sant' Andrea; its illuminated frontispiece marks it as an important manuscript, preserving the new Rule for this house of nuns (and indeed, this is very likely was the

monastery's first copy of its Rule). The monastery was secularized in 1797.

Augustinian nuns were an important presence in Genoa; another foundation belonging to the Lateran congregation was Santa Maria della Grazie, founded in 1451, was home of women from many prominent families in Genoa, notably including Limbania, the sister of St. Catherine of Genoa, and [Battistina Vernazza](#) (1497-1587). This convent was closed in 1798, and the nuns moved into the nearby convent of S. Maria in Passione.

2. An eighteenth- or nineteenth-century inscription on the front pastedown: "Monache S Maria in Passione," suggests the manuscript may have subsequently belonged to Santa Maria in Passione (also a house of Augustinian nuns), founded in 1463, and secularized in 1798, although this may simply be an error on the part of a modern owner or user of the manuscript.

TEXT

ff. 1-54v, *In christi nomine incomintia la prima parte de le ordinatione nostre. In prima Sermone in laude de la sancta religione*, incipit, "Concio sia cossa che la sancta madre giesia sia decorata et ornata de molti modi di vivere de li quali secondo il propheta e dipinta ... vestita de molte viritude ... A la quale ce conduca lo eterno remuneratore christo Jesu; loquale vive; e regna in unitade de cho eterna maiesta in secula seculorum. Amen," *Finisse el libro de le ordinatione nostre, nel nome del signore Jesu Christo, et virginis marie. Et beati patris nostri Augustini*; [f. 55, ruled but blank].

The rule of the Augustinian nuns of Santa della Andrea Genoa. The text begins with a sermon, "In laude de la sancta religione" (ff. 1-3) and a prologue introducing the rule (ff. 3-4). The main text is divided into two parts. The first part details the thirty-three chapters that form the rule of the convent (ff. 4-44v), and the second part lists the punishments to be implemented if the nuns fail in their duties or behave badly (ff. 45-54v).

The thirty-three chapters instruct the nuns about observing and reading the rule (1), celebrating the divine office and Mass, and the partaking of the Eucharist (2), celebrating the divine office and other ceremonies (3), the canonical hours (4), how the non-literate nuns should say the office (5), devotional exercises and prayer (6), the way and time for performing penance (7), silence and when it should be observed (8), how the nuns should speak through the grate at the door, and behave with men entering the convent (9), the nun who distributes the mail must show discretion with regard to the content (10), obedience (11), manual work (12), confession (13), questioning those who want to enter the order to ensure they have good and mature diligence and have given the matter serious consideration (14), how to receive and teach novices (15), the newly professed nun (16), owning nothing (17), meals, blessings and readings in the refectory (18), fasting (19), collations in the refectory (20), sleeping in individual dormitories (21), chapter meetings and voting using white (yes) and black (no) beans (22), electing an abbess (23), announcing the elected abbess, and the possibilities for the prior or confessor to overrule the decision (24), the authority and duties of the abbess (25), the abbess must never divulge her faults to the nuns ("come la Abbatissa non dice mai sua colpa a le sore", f. 35), and the prioress will assume the duties of the abbess in her absence (26), humility, correcting faults or infractions (27), visitors (28), clothes and shoes (29), how the nuns must refrain from acting like the laity (30), how the nuns should honor and give reverence to their

superior (31), the diligent care of sick nuns (32), and how and by whom the deceased nuns should be buried (33). The second part of the text explains how the nuns who fail in their duties will be separated from the others. Punishments include eating bread and water on the ground, kissing the feet of the other nuns, washing dishes, remaining silent, and being imprisoned for a year.

Of considerable charm and extensive detail, these rules and regulations governing behavior are apparently unpublished and unedited.

ILLUSTRATION

f. 1, an opening page with a burnished gold band that frames the text block, three miniatures, and compartments with decorative motifs. A large miniature (93 x 73 mm.) represents St. Augustine with a halo in burnished gold, enthroned as bishop with a miter and scepter, and surrounded by kneeling nuns; the abbess on the left holds open a book in which is written the rule. The miniature in the lower register of the page represents two angels holding a medallion in burnished gold with the Lamb of God resting on the Holy Scriptures (93 x 32 mm.). The miniature in the outer margin represents an elderly saint with a cross, presumably St. Andrew (43 x 25 mm.). The other compartments in the margins are decorated with acanthus leaves in the form of candelabra, and lace patterns. The opening 4-line initial 'C', on a burnished gold ground, is painted in pink and green, and in-filled with a flower in blue, green and liquid gold.

The illumination finds similarities in Genoa. The white dotting of veins in the acanthus leaves and the forms of the golden balls surrounded by cusping spheres are found for instance in the fifteenth-century Gradual made at the local Cervara Abbey (cf. Puncuh, 1979, no. 114, pp. 164-165). The page presents an assembly of iconographic and decorative elements in an additive construction, and the lace pattern in the left and upper margins suggests that the artist may well have been one of the nuns in the convent.

The details included here about the religious life of these Augustinian canonesses are captivating. In addition to its interest for medieval studies in general, and women's studies in particular, this manuscript would be an excellent support for teaching medieval Italian and the Genoese dialect.

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