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Choir Book for the Confraternity of Lawyers in Le Mans In Latin, illuminated manuscript on parchment with musical notation Western France, Maine (Le Mans), c. 1460-1480

ii + 41 + i folios on parchment, modern foliation in pencil, 1-42, numbering the second flyleaf as f. 1, complete (collation i^s [beginning on f. 2] ii-v^s vi'), two sets of contemporary alphanumerical quire signatures in brown ink, horizontal catchwords, ruling in light brown ink (justification 238 x 165 mm.), written in dark brown ink in gothic textualis bookhand on 24 lines, music in square notation on four-line red staves, 8 staves per page, rastrum 15 mm., rubrics in red, capitals touched in yellow, 1-line initials alternating in red and blue, 1-line initials in gold alternating on dark red and blue grounds, for the music 1-line juridical initials (display capitals drawn by the scribe and decorated with grimacing profiles or geometric ornament) in brown with yellow wash, several with fine drawings of beads in profile, or a skull (f. 25), 2-line initials alternating in dark red with liquid gold penwork on blue grounds with white penwork and in blue with white penwork on dark red grounds with penwork in liquid gold, 3-line initials in burnished gold on grounds divided in dark red and blue with fine penwork in white, 3-line initials alternating in blue with dark red infill and in dark red with blue infill, both with white penwork and on burnished gold grounds, three of the initials accompanied by a partial floral border with stems composed of acanthus leaves and flowers modeled with liquid gold and enriched with small leaves in burnished gold (ff. 28, 34v, 38v), some stains and signs of use, but in overall excellent condition. ORIGINAL BINDING of soft beige leather over pasteboards, spine with five raised bands, originally closed with eight leather straps attached to the boards, of which two survive, leather on the boards and spine very worn, but the structure of the binding is solid and in good condition. Dimensions 355 x 255 mm.

Liturgical manuscripts from confraternities are a relatively untapped, but important primary source. Still preserved in its original binding with wide margins, this deluxe illuminated Choir Book, providing rare insight into the life of a medieval confraternity of lawyers, is a case in point. The confraternity was a wealthy one, and the manuscript includes numerous initials decorated with very fine penwork and generous use of gold. The diverse tinted human profiles that adorn the initials throughout the text, many with delightful details, are a noteworthy feature.

PROVENANCE

1. The script and decoration suggest dating the manuscript in the late fifteenth century, while the turret worn by the lady in the initial on f. 37 corresponds to fashion in the third quarter of the century, narrowing the probable date of this manuscript to around 1460-1480. Owned by the seventeenth century by the confraternity of the officers, lawyers and practitioners (*practicians*) of the episcopal court of Le Mans when the ownership inscription was entered on f. 1 (see below), the evidence of the contents makes it certain that it was in fact made for this confraternity.
2. Ownership inscription written c. 1600-1630 on the second front flyleaf, f. 1, "Ce libure est de la Confrayrie des Officiers Advocatz et practicians de la cour Episcopale du Mans."

3. An eighteenth-century ownership inscription in small handwriting in black ink on the second front flyleaf, f. 1: "<?> Husson <?>."
4. A nineteenth- or early twentieth-century label on the spine with the number "1"; the shelfmark, "(1)," is also written twice on the leather of the front cover in gray and blue pencil.

TEXT

f. 1, [second front flyleaf which has been foliated "1" by a modern owner], blank, with two ownership inscriptions (see Provenance, above);

ff. 2-4v, Antiphons with musical notation and psalms for Vespers during the Easter season for each day of the week, beginning with Sunday, incipit, *Dominicis diebus ad vespas, antiphona. Tempore paschali, antiphona, incipit, "Sede a dextris meis. Seculorum amen. Alleluia. Seculorum amen. psalmus. Dixit Dominus Domino meo..."* [Ps. 109] ...; and continuing with, ff. 4v-6v, Monday; ff. 6v-8v, Tuesday; ff. 8v-10v, Wednesday; ff. 10v-13v, Thursday; ff. 13v-17, Friday; and ff. 17-20, Saturday;

ff. 20-21, *Kyrie fons bonitas*, with musical notation;

ff. 21-22, *Gloria in excelsis Deo*, with musical notation;

f. 22r-v, *Sanctus, sanctus, sanctus*, with musical notation;

ff. 22v-23, *Agnus Dei*, with musical notation;

ff. 23-25, Funeral Mass, the Requiem, with musical notation, beginning with the Introit, "Requiem eternam dona eis, Domine, et lux perpetua luceat eis," and ending with the Communion, "Lux eterna luceat eis, Domine, cum sanctis tuis in eternum, quia pius es"; [f. 25v, ruled, otherwise blank];

ff. 26-32, Office and Mass for St. Nicholas, with musical notation;

ff. 32-37, Office and Mass for St. Catherine, with musical notation;

ff. 37-42, Office and Mass for the Conception of the Virgin Mary, including the Vigil, with musical notation, concluding, "... Beata viscera Marie virginis que portaverunt eterni patris filium"; f. 42v, blank.

Choir Book providing the antiphons and psalms for celebrating the Office of Vespers on all weekdays during the Easter season, followed by the *Kyrie*, *Gloria in excelsis Deo*, *Sanctus*, *Agnus Dei*, the funeral Mass, and the Office on the feast days of St. Nicholas, St. Catherine, and the Conception of the Virgin Mary,

Most confraternities of lawyers and *procureurs* (public prosecutors) placed their brotherhood under the protection of St. Nicholas (although some chose St. Ivo of Kermartin), following the example of the *procureurs* in Paris who established the first such confraternity in France at the

Palais de Justice. The confraternity of the lawyers at the episcopal court of Le Mans was thus dedicated to St. Nicholas, which is the reason for including an Office and Mass dedicated to this saint in our manuscript (ff. 26-32). All members of the confraternity were required to celebrate the feast day of the patron saint (6 December) with a Mass, a sermon, and a procession. The text indicates that this confraternity in Le Mans also venerated St. Catherine (ff. 32-37; feast day: 25 November) and the Virgin Mary, celebrating the feast of the Conception of the Virgin (ff. 37-42; 8 December). Floral decoration in the margins at beginning of the masses for St. Nicholas, St. Catherine, and the feast of the Conception of the Virgin, underlines their importance.

Confraternities organized the funerals of deceased members and celebrated Offices for the dead; a funeral Mass was included for this purpose in the manuscript (ff. 23-25). Members of the confraternity also celebrated the Office of Vespers, evening prayer. The number of Offices offered each week depended on the confraternity, but during Easter season, as the text suggests, the Office of Vespers was celebrated every day at the Confraternity of St. Nicholas of Le Mans. Members could pay for new Offices and Masses to be funded during their lifetime or upon their death. Most confraternities offered an annual banquet for their members. A comparison might be offered by the confraternity of St. Nicholas in Angers, where in the fifteenth century this annual banquet took place in the chaplain's house on the feast of the translation of St. Nicholas on 9 May, as well as the day after, following the Requiem Mass (see Tardivel, 2013, p. 13).

Confraternities were (and still are) associations of laypeople centered around carrying out pious and charitable works, which through their performance and associated indulgences prepared members for a favorable afterlife. With roots in antiquity, confraternities were central to city life in the late Middle Ages, continued well into the Early Modern period, and still exist in Christian communities today. Members were bound through a shared sense of brotherhood and ritual and by rules which promoted positive social behavior (Rubin, 1993). Although there have been studies of local confraternities in France (see e.g. Chevalier, 1975, Leguay, 1975, Louis, 2009, Schwindt, 2004, Vincent, 1988), to our knowledge, this confraternity in Le Mans, and confraternities of lawyers in general, have not yet been studied by modern scholars.

Most studies of confraternities are based on surviving statutes and archival sources. Liturgical manuscripts from confraternities, like the manuscript described here, are less well known and of particular interest. As Long's study of confraternity manuscripts from Paris and Tournai has demonstrated, they can include unique liturgical compositions and are valuable primary sources for the history of confraternities and for the study of late medieval devotional practices and religion (Long, 2021, p. 3).

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ONLINE RESOURCES

Cantus Planus

https://www.uni-regensburg.de/Fakultaeten/phil_Fak_I/Musikwissenschaft/cantus/

Latin chants of the Mass and Divine Office from the Gregorian repertory

<https://gregorien.info/en>

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