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ROBERTO CARACCIOLO DA LECCE, *Quadragesimale de poenitentia* (Lenten Sermons)

In Latin, illuminated manuscript on parchment and paper

Central Italy, Marche(?), c. 1470-1475

One inserted full-page miniature by the Masters of the Beady Eyes, Bruges, c. 1460

i (nineteenth-century paper) + i (parchment) + 98 + ii (nineteenth-century paper) folios on parchment and paper (in the first two quires the outer and innermost sheets are parchment; thereafter, f. 23-end, exclusively on parchment), no watermark visible, modern foliation in pencil, 1-98, complete (collation i-vii<sup>12</sup> viii<sup>15</sup>; the second front flyleaf is part of the first quire), signatures in red ink (mostly cropped), horizontal catchwords, ruled in light brown ink (justification c. 150 x 101 mm.), written in gray ink in a very small (1-2 mm.) and formal southern cursive gothic script without loops (hybrida) in two columns on 50 lines, rubrics in red, paragraph marks (pieds-de-mouche) alternating in red and blue, 2-line initials alternating in red and blue, 3-line initials alternating in red and blue with pen-flourishing in blue and red, one 5-line initial in red with white penwork, infilled with green with yellow penwork, on blue ground with white penwork (f. 1), FULL-PAGE MINIATURE WITHIN A FLORAL BORDER pasted onto the verso of the second front flyleaf (116 x 110 mm.), small stains and signs of use, but overall in excellent condition. Bound in 19<sup>th</sup>-century dark brown morocco, the covers blind-tooled with fillets, small circles and strapwork, the spine divided into six compartments blind-tooled with fillets and small circles, lettered in the second "ROBERTUS DE LITRO SERMONES &c." and the fourth "MS. IN MEMBRANIS," by John Leighton of Brewer Street in London, signed inside the front cover, gilt edges, slightly worn in the corners and in the middle of the front cover, but overall excellent condition. Dimensions c. 200 x 140 mm.

A fine manuscript of a late medieval bestseller containing sermons that circulated widely in print but is known in only nine complete manuscripts. Pasted on the leaf facing the beginning of the text is an attractive full-page miniature by a professional artist from Bruges. Numerous examples are known of Prayerbooks from the late Middle Ages customized by the insertion of miniatures; customization of this sort in a sermon manuscript, however, is very rare indeed, and underlines the exceptional nature of this manuscript.

## PROVENANCE

1. The work was composed by Caracciolo between 1470 and August 1471 (see "Caracciolo," in Treccani, Online Resources). The title of the first edition printed in 1472 is almost identical to the title given in the rubric on f. 1 of our manuscript. Notably, Caracciolo is described in the rubric as "fratris Roberti de Litio ordinis Minorum" as in all the editions that appear before 1475, the year in which he was made bishop of Aquino. In the editions printed after 1475, his office of bishop, "episcopi" appears. The manuscript thus dates between 1470 and 1475.

The style of the small cursive bookhand (hybrida libraria) script and the decorated initial on f. 1 suggest that the manuscript was copied in central Italy in the region of Marche. Compare a manuscript of Horace copied in Pesaro in 1457, now Clermont-Ferrand, Bibliothèque du Patrimoine, MS 242 (Derolez, 2003, pl. 135; for more images, see Online Resources).

The quality of the script, parchment, and the unusual addition of the large miniature on the leaf facing the opening of the text tells us this manuscript was destined for someone of high stature and wealth, perhaps an important ecclesiastic or member of the nobility.

2. The original or early owner added in Italian in the lower margins of ff. 21v and 22, verses 103-126 of Canto XXIX in "Paradiso," the final part of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, where Beatrice criticizes the excesses of popular preachers.
3. No. 32 in the collection of Marcel Mirgodin (d. c.1988), of Paris, couturier and bibliophile; his name is stamped inside the front cover, with the manuscript number added in red pen above it.

## TEXT

ff. 1-98v, *Sacre theologie magistri necnon sacri eloquii preconis celeberrimi fratris Roberti de Litio ordinis Minorum professoris opus quadragesimale perutilissimum quod de penitentia dictum est feliciter Dominica in Septuagesima, de facilitate incipit bonorum propum seu bene operandi peccatores ad penitentiam redire debent. Sermo i, incipit, "Multi sunt vocati, pauci vero electi ... Christi in cruce nudatum," Amen. Deo Gratias. finis.*

Roberto Caracciolo (c. 1425-1495), *Quadragesimale de poenitentia*, sermons for the season of Lent (Quadragesima), the forty-day penitential period leading to Easter. The text was widely disseminated in print but circulated in a smaller number of manuscripts; Visani, 1999; Mariani, 2019, p. 151, lists eight complete manuscripts, not including this one, and notes the existence of "two or three" with a large number of the sermons, and several more with one or more sermons from the collection.

First printed on July 20, 1472 by Wendelin von Speyer in Venice (GW 6061), and in the same year by Franz Renner (GW 6062-6063) and by Bartolomeo da Cremona (GW 6064), all four editions in 1472 in Venice. Another edition was printed on November 17, 1472 in Rome by Konrad Sweynheym and Arnold Pannartz (GW 6065). The work was soon printed throughout Europe (GW 6051-6079; see also Mariani, 2019, pp. 166-168 for a more complete list). The work was printed in Italian as *Sermones quadragesimales* in Milan in 1474 (not recorded in *Gesamtkatalog der Wiegendrucke*).

## ILLUSTRATION

f. ii verso, front flyleaf, Christ blessing, a full-page miniature within a full border of flowers and strawberries pasted onto the verso of the second front flyleaf, forming a frontispiece facing the beginning of the text. The painting style, identified with the Masters of the Beady Eyes, situates the painting of this miniature in Bruges around 1460. The Masters of the Beady Eyes were active in Bruges c. 1440-1470 and were contemporaries of Willem Vrelant. Comparisons can be made with Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MSS lat. 1165 and lat. 1049, and Les Enluminures BOH 163, all painted in Bruges around 1460.

It is noteworthy that the miniature fits the space on the blank leaf almost perfectly, and it and the text on the facing page are both framed by red ink lines (also seen on the final leaf of the volume). The evidence thus suggests that this volume may have been designed with the use of the miniature as a frontispiece in mind. Numerous examples are known of Prayerbooks from

the late Middle Ages customized by the insertion of miniatures (see examples studied in Rudy 2016; see also Rudy, 2015). Customization of this sort in a sermon manuscript, however, is very rare indeed.

Roberto Caracciolo da Lecce (c. 1425-1495) was one of the most famous preachers of his time. His exceptional oratory and theological competence gained him the reputation as the new saint Paul, "Paolo novello." He was nominated Bishop of Aquino by Pope Sixtus IV in 1475, then Bishop of Lecce, 1484-1485, after which he resumed the bishopric of Aquino. His fame as a preacher began when he was only in his mid-twenties, when he was chosen by Pope Nicholas V in 1450 to deliver the official canonization eulogies for Bernardino of Siena. His sermons were famous for their emotional impact, making his audiences laugh and cry (Telle, 1981, p. 460). He did not shy away from dramatic gestures: he is famous for preaching a crusade sermon in full armor, complete with a sword.

Caracciolo reworked the sermons he preached in Italian into Latin for a learned audience, and these were copied in manuscripts and published in printed editions during his lifetime, becoming "bestsellers" (cf. Telle, 1981, p. 461, n. 25, 463). To give an idea of Caracciolo's success, Mathias Moravus printed his *Sermones de laudibus sanctorum* in an edition of 2,000 copies in Naples in 1489, when the average edition size at the time was only 400-500 copies (Febvre and Martin, 1997, p. 218). By 1555 over one hundred editions of Caracciolo's works had been published in Italy and Northern Europe.

In these Quadragesimal sermons, a cycle of sermons for preaching during Lent, Caracciolo focuses on penitential themes and calls for repentance, appropriate for the season. The cycle includes his sermon, "On the Infidelity of the followers of Muhammad," recently studied by Stephen McMichael, a rare example of Christian polemic against Islam within a sermon cycle (McMichael, 2012).

## LITERATURE

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Visani, Oriana. "Giacomo della Marca e Roberto da Lecce: due grandi operatori culturali a confronto," *Picenum seraphicum* 21 (2002), pp. 33-47.

## ONLINE RESOURCES

Roberto Caracciolo in Treccani

[https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/roberto-caracciolo\\_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/roberto-caracciolo_(Dizionario-Biografico)/)

Roberto Caracciolo, *Quadragesimale de poenitentia*, Franz Renner, Venice, 1472 (GW 6063), Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Ink C 128

<https://daten.digital-sammlungen.de/~db/0004/bsb00049482/images/>

Clermont-Ferrand, Bibliothèque du Patrimoine, MS 242

<https://www.bibliotheques-clermontmetropole.eu/overnia/notice.php?q=id:72127>

Maarten van der Heijden and Bert Roest, "Franciscan Authors, 13<sup>th</sup>-18th Century: A Catalogue In Progress"

<https://applejack.science.ru.nl/franciscanauthors/>

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