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Book of Hours (Use of Venice)

In Latin, illuminated manuscript on parchment

Italy (Venice), 1442 (dated)

3 historiated initials and 19 illuminated initials, with borders, from the Circle of the Master of the Commissione Donato

Dated by the scribe, this small devotional prayer book was owned by a nun from Venice. She appears kneeling in the border of the first decorated page, her coat of arms (not yet identified) in the lower margin. She was likely one of the many daughters of the nobility who lived out their lives in that city's numerous convents (surely an illustrious one, given the luxury of her Prayer Book, and the noble family of her abbess, Clara Gradenigo). This is a delightful example of an Italian Book of Hours from the circle of an important late Gothic illuminator in Venice, here in an inviting, small format. Dated Italian Books of Hours made for nuns are uncommon.

267 folios on parchment + vi (paper), partial modern foliation in pencil top outer corner recto, missing two leaves (partial collation through f. 160v, i¹²⁺¹ [13, added blank singleton] ii-viii¹⁰ ix⁴ x¹⁰ [-1, before f. 88, with loss of text] xi¹² xii¹⁰ [-1, before f. 109, with loss of text] xiii¹⁰ xiv¹² xv⁰ [structure uncertain] xvi¹⁰ xvii² [concluding f. 160v; remaining quires were not collated due to the condition of the binding]), horizontal catchwords in most quires through quire 16, ruled in in ink (horizontal rules), with vertical bounding lines ruled, very lightly, in hardpoint (justification 56 x 45 mm.), written in a rounded southern gothic book hand in thirteen long lines, red rubrics, 1-line alternately red and blue initials within the text with simple contrasting penwork, 2-line red and blue initials with elaborate pen decoration in the opposite color extending into the margins, NINETEEN ILLUMINATED INITIALS WITH BORDERS, initials, 3- to 4-lines, are pink infilled with acanthus or floral motifs on polished gold grounds, some with lush acanthus in green, blue, pink, and gold extending from the initial and continuing into borders of blank ink sprays set with flowers and

leaves in colors and burnished gold, usually on three sides of the page, occasionally framing two sides (ff. 17v, 27v, 41, 48, 55v, 63, 70v, 79v, 119v, 122v, 125, 127, 129v, 131v, 135v, 142v, 219v (5-line initial), and 240), the larger 6-line initial on f. 161 includes a large peacock in the outer margin, *THREE HISTORIATED INITIALS WITH BORDERS*, described below, ff. 14, 79v, and 140, f. 1, dirty and somewhat rubbed; ff. 33v, 46, rubbed, f. 160v (blank folio) very dirty, f. 161 (with initial and border) rubbed and very dirty, some offsets following painted pages (e.g. ff. 120, 123, 131, 135), f. 140, lower margin repaired (with bottom of the decoration redone), otherwise normal evidence of use (dirt and some stains), but with wide margins and in overall good condition. Bound in early (sixteenth- or seventeenth-century?) brown leather, gold-tooled with a center ornament surrounded by undulating filets with fleurons at each corner set within a narrow arabesque border, spine with three raised bands, edges gilt and gaufered, once with two clasps (both missing), rebounded, very fragile and partially separating at front joint, leather on spine is worn and cracking at the top and bottom, boards slightly bowed. Dimensions 114 x 83 mm.

PROVENANCE

1. Written and illuminated in 1442, very likely in Venice (dated, f. 267v, "Ad laudem gloriosissimeque uirginis marie. Completum est sub regimine uenerabilis abbatisse domina Clara gradenigo. M ccccxxxii"; In praise of the most glorious Virgin Mary. Completed under the rule of the venerable Abbess Lady Clara Gradenigo. 1442).

We have not identified the convent where Clara Gradenigo was abbess, but surely this should be possible. Her family was an illustrious one. The Gradenigos were one of the founding noble families of Venice (Pietro Gradenigo (d. 1311) was the 49th Doge). The Hours of the Virgin here are Use of Venice, and the patron saint of Venice, St. Mark, figures prominently in the calendar, which includes four of his feasts (see below).

The opening miniature on f. 14 includes a small kneeling figure of a nun dressed in the black habit of a Benedictine nun in the lower inner margin, doubtless the original owner of this book; her coat of arms (unidentified) is found in the lower margin. The feast of St. Benedict in March is copied in blue (the highest grading in this calendar), evidence that this was indeed copied for a Benedictine. The inclusion of a Litany in honor of St. Lawrence may be evidence that this was made for the convent of San Lorenzo, founded in the ninth century and later the site of the burial of Marco Polo, but further research is needed. In the calendar, the feast of St. Lawrence on August 10 is in red, and a feast of the dedication St. Lawrence on July 3 is also included in red (this feast seems to be unusual; not recorded in *Calendoscope*, *Online Resources*).

2. Modern owner's signature in blue pen, inside front cover, "Sean Galvin," most likely the son the collector Sir John Galvin (1908-1994), Dublin, Ireland, also owner of the famous *Códice Múrua*.

TEXT

ff. 1-12v, Calendar in black, red, and blue (blue reserved for the most important feasts); [f. 13rv, blank].

The patron saint of Venice is St. Mark, and four of his feasts are included here: translation of St. Mark to Venice, January 31, in blue; martyrdom of St. Mark, April 25, in blue; and the apparition of St. Mark on June 25 and the Dedication of the Church of St. Mark on October 8, both in red. Also in blue are the feasts of Peter Martyr on April 29, St. Benedict (March 21),

the Purification (February 2), and the Annunciation (March 25). In red are Zeno (April 12), John and Paul, martyrs (June 26), dedication of St. Lawrence (July 3), translation of Benedict (July 11), Hermagoras and Fortunatus (Aquileia, July 12), Dominic (August 5), Lawrence (August 10), and Leonard (November 6).

ff. 14-86v, Hours of the Virgin, Use of Venice, with Matins, f. 27v, Lauds, f. 41, Prime, f. 48, Terce, f. 55v, Sext, f. 63, None, f. 70v, Vespers, f. 79v, Compline; [f. 87rv, blank but ruled];

The liturgical use of the Hours of the Virgin was determined using the criteria published by Madan, 1923 and 1927; the texts included here do not correspond to any listed in the more accurate CHD tests (Online Resources).

ff. 88-108v, Penitential Psalms, beginning imperfectly in Psalm 6:7, followed by the Litany beginning f. 101v, with Silvester, Hilary, Marin, Augustine, Ambrose, Gregory, Nicholas, Dominic, Thomas, Francis, Jerome, Benedict, Anthony, and Bernard as the confessors; the virgins begin with Mary Magdalene and Helen and conclude with Katherine, Margaret, and Ursula.

ff. 109-138v, Hours of the Cross, beginning imperfectly in Matins, f. 119v, Lauds, f. 122v, Prime, f. 125, Terce, f. 127, Sext, f. 129v, None, f. 131v, Vespers, and f. 135v, Compline; [f. 139rv, blank but ruled];

ff. 140-157, Hours of the Holy Spirit, with f. 142v, Prime, f. 145, Terce, f. 148, Sext, f. 150v, None, f. 153, Vespers, and f. 155, Compline;

ff. 157-159v, Litany of the Virgin Mary; [f. 160rv, blank];

ff. 161-219, Office of the Dead;

Unidentified use; the responses to the lessons at Matins are not listed in Ottosen, 1993 or in the online version of this repertory (Online Resources).

ff. 219-259v, [Prayers, beginning with prayers in honor of the Virgin; many of the prayers use feminine forms], *Ad honorem et gloriam beatissime marie uirginis pro quacumque tribulatione ualde bona et utilis oratio, ...*; [f. 240], *Oratio ante communionem corporis christi*, incipit, "Domine ihesu christe qui immensam clemenciam tuam ...";

ff. 259v-267, Litany of St. Lawrence; followed by prayers in honor of Lawrence, beginning f. 264v], *Oratio*, incipit, "Amantissime qui gloriosum martirum tuum laurentium ..."; [f. 267v, Scribal colophon in red; see Provenance, above].

ILLUSTRATION

Skillfully decorated throughout, including very graceful and complex penwork, illuminated initials with borders, and three historiated initials (the missing leaves at the beginning of the Penitential Psalms and the Hours of the Cross must have included historiated initials as well).

Subjects as follows

f. 14, Virgin and Child, 8-line pink initial on square polished gold ground, with full border of black ink sprays, flowers, leaves, and acanthus, with a kneeling nun in a black habit in the lower inner margin, and an angel in the center middle holding a coat of arms;

f. 79v (Hours of the Virgin, Compline), 4-line initial of a half-figure of a male figure (a saint) in a brown robe (St. Francis or St. Peter of Verona?);

f. 140, (Hours of the Holy Spirit, Matins), 6-line pink initial on a square gold ground of Mary and the Apostles at Pentecost.

With thanks to Federica Toniolo, we attribute the illumination here to the circle of the Master of the Commissione Donato, a Venetian illuminator active in the second quarter of the Quattrocento into the third quarter. The artist takes his name from the opening miniature of the Commission of Francesco Foscari to Bartolomeo Donato named procurer of San Marco in 1427 (Venice, Biblioteca del Museo Correr, MS Cl. III, 775). Among the artist's works are the Durant Gradual (Wellesley College, MS 2; see Armstrong, 2016-17, 2021); a Sanctoral in London (British Library Add. MS 18161); fragments of an Antiphonal also in London (Add. MS 22410); a Breviary in Bloomington (Lilly Library, University of Indiana, MS Poole 9); and two Books of Hours (Vatican City, MS Barb. Lat. 360; and Oxford, Bodleian Library, Canon Liturg. 138, 139; see Paecht and Alexander 1970, p. 65, cat. 615, 616, pl. LIX). See also two pages sold at Christie's, London, 12 July 2023, lot 9, with a discussion of them by Toniolo, 2023-2024

Representing a late Gothic trend in Venetian manuscript illumination contemporary with the late work of Cristoforo Cortese, manuscripts in the circle display an interest in the natural world, soft modelling, a colorful palette, and energetic border illumination. The opening initial portraying the Virgin and Child is close to the same subject in two Books of Hours attributed to the artist and now in the Vatican and in Oxford; compare especially the treatment of the trees in the background setting of the miniature. There is an almost identical rendering of the stately, elegant green peacock in the margin in the Oxford Book of Hours, while the plump colorful, acanthus border decoration recalls that in the Durant Gradual. Our artist's renderings are not as fine as those of the Donato Master, but nevertheless display enough similarities to suggest that he probably worked in his circle.

The study of the history of women in religion in the Middle Ages and the early modern period has flourished in the last decades, and manuscripts such as this one, with concrete evidence that it was made for a nun in Venice in 1442, play an important part of this story. Recent studies have underlined the importance of religious communities of women in the social history of the Italian city, where remarkable percentages of the female population, especially women from the nobility, who were often educated and allied with the city's most powerful families, lived in convents. According to one modern author, early sixteenth-century Venice had fifty female convents and about 3000 nuns (Laven, 2003). Dated manuscripts associated with Italian nuns and their abbesses are, however, very uncommon.

LITERATURE

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ONLINE RESOURCES

CHD New Tests for Localization for Hore Beate Virginis
http://manuscripts.org.uk/chd.dk/use/hv_chdtest.html

Calendoscope (IRHT/CNRS)
calendoscope.irht.cnrs.fr/accueil

Feminae: Medieval Women and Gender Index
[Feminae: Quick Search \(uiowa.edu\)](http://Feminae:QuickSearch(uiowa.edu))

Glenn Gunhouse, A Hypertext Book of Hours (English and Latin)
[Hypertext Book of Hours, Home Page \(medievalist.net\)](http://HypertextBookofHours/HomePage(medievalist.net))

Monastic Matrix
[Search | Monastic Matrix \(st-andrews.ac.uk\)](http://Search|MonasticMatrix(st-andrews.ac.uk))

Francesca Manzari with Lola Massolo, "Italian Books of Hours/ Libri d'ore italiani"
[libridoreitaliani_Manzari \(google.com\)](http://libridoreitaliani_Manzari(google.com))

Responsories of the Latin Office of the Dead, Cantus Planus Regensburg
<https://www.cantusplanus.de/databases/Ottosen/search.html>

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