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ANTONIUS VERCELLENSIS (DA VERCELLI), *Quadragesimale de duodecim mirabilibus christianae fidei excellentiis* (Sermons for Lent on the Twelve Marvelous Merits of the Christian Faith)

In Latin, illuminated manuscript on parchment

Northern Italy, c.1460-1500

i (paper) + i (parchment) + 302 folios on parchment + i (parchment), early (contemporary?) foliation in red Arabic numerals with occasional corrections in black pen, lacking at least one folio at the beginning (collation i<sup>10</sup> [original structure uncertain, bound out of order, and missing at least the original first folio] ii-xxix<sup>10</sup> xxx<sup>10+2</sup>), quire signatures mostly trimmed, original signatures terminate with signature 'r' (see f. 291), catchwords, including two with penwork decorations on ff. 90v and 140v, ruled in lead, pricking visible in central, fore-edge margin (justification 120 x 80 mm.), written in two columns of 42 lines in a neat Southern Gothic textualis, perhaps by two scribes (see f. 144v for suggestion of change of hand or change of ink), ff. 82-86v, sermons numbered 2-71 in running titles, red rubrics, majuscules within text highlighted with pale yellow (only ff. 81v-130), guide letters of initials occasionally visible, blue and red paraph marks, 3-line red or blue initials throughout, often with pen decoration in the other color (see f. 92v for beast in flourish), SEVENTY-ONE ILLUMINATED INITIALS (beginning each sermon) with two 4-line initials, ten 5-line initials (for particularly nice examples see ff. 61v, 81v, 86v), many 6-line initials (for particularly nice examples see ff. 122r and 131), and one 7-line initial (f. 110v), with gold initials on fields of blue and red with white ornamentation, occasionally extending into decorative acanthus leaves, 6-line 'Q's wanting tails, ff. 92v and 131, one example of transfer of pigment from initial (f. 51), contemporary or early repairs to marginal splitting of the parchment, likely post-annotation (ff. 133, 152, 198), overall in very good condition. Modern (20<sup>th</sup> century) parchment binding, good condition. Dimensions 180 x 135mm.

Copied during the author's lifetime or soon after, this is a particularly fine manuscript of the Lenten sermons by the understudied Italian preacher Antonius da Vercelli (d. 1483) of the Observant Franciscan movement. The surviving manuscripts and early printed editions testify to the popularity of this sermon cycle, which still lacks a modern critical edition. Distinguished by its beautiful script and fine illuminated initials, the manuscript also includes several decorated catchwords. Multiple hands within the margin providing annotations and other reader-marks demonstrate engagement with the text within the fifteenth century.

## PROVENANCE

1. Manuscript copied in Northern Italy, c. 1460-1500, as suggested by the evidence of the script and illumination.
2. Several contemporary campaigns of marginal annotation are evidence of multiple early-stage readers of the book in Italy (discussed in detail below).
3. Evidence suggests it remained in Italy into modern times. It was rebound in the twentieth century and there are multiple notations in pencil in black and red on the modern pastedown with one substantial notation in Italian on the flyleaf describing the print history of this text. The other pencil annotations include a citation from Wadding

and various bookdealer marks, with minor bookdealer numbering on the back pastedown and flyleaf and minor, modern Italian notation on the verso of the first parchment flyleaf. It was sold at auction in Florence, 2014.

4. Private Danish collection.

## TEXT

f. 5r [prologue, text of the first quire is bound out of order, with the prologue concluding on f. 5v], incipit, "... Duodecim dicitur, Excellentia damnabilitatis," *Prologus nec non et dicendorum explicit ordo*, [followed by the rubric for the first sermon (see below)];

Text of the first sermon now begins on f. 1 (see below); the remaining text of the prologue is likely copied on ff. 2-4, and perhaps f. 6, with at least the opening folio of prologue (presumably illuminated) now missing.

ff. 1-301, [Sermon 1, rubric is on f. 5v], *Incipit Quadragesimale de duodecim mirabilibus Excellentis sacratissime fidei Christiane. Et primo dominica in Septuagesima. De prima Excellentia sacratissime fidei que di[citur] Excellentia Quidditatis. Sermo primus*; [text, f. 1], incipit, "Fides tua te salvam fecit ... Lc 7[:50], Post consummationem prohemii et exordii huius nostri quadragesimalis prædicandi .. [continuing ff. 7, 8, and concluding on f. 8v] ... qui cum omni puritate et bonitate uiuit et regnat deus per infinita seculorum secula. Amen; ... [Final sermon, f. 298v], *Dominica in octava pasche ... Sermo Ultimus*, incipit, "Haec autem scripta sunt, ut credatis (Io 20,31) - Quoniam, praecordialissimi cives et patres ... quam in ceteris gratiam suam augeat et conservet. Et dicat omnis populus. Amen," *Explicit quadragesimale de duodecim mirabilibus excellentis christianae fidei editum cum ingenti labore per pauperulum et uenerabilem patrem fratrem antonium de vercellis ordinis minorum de obseruantia nuncupatorum. Deo Gratias Amen*;

ff. 301-302v [Table of contents with references to folio numbers], incipit, "Prologus super hoc quadragesimali in quo continetur quam ...; Dominica in lxx de septem conductionibus quas debet habere ...; [71], Dominica in 8a pasce de necessitate perseverantie in bonis operibus, 299; Contritionis necessitates, 154."

Antonius de Vercellis, *Quadragesimale de duodecim mirabilibus christianae fidei excellentis*, including seventy-one sermons from Septuagesima Sunday through the Sunday in the Octave of Easter.

Sermons begin as follows: ff. 8v-11v, 11v-16v, 16v- 20v, 20v-24, 24-29v, 29v-34v, 34v-38v, 38v-42v, 42v-46r 46- 51, 51- 54, 54-57v, 57v- 61v, 61v- 67, 67- 71v, 72- 75, 75-81v, 81v- 86v, 86-92v, 92v-95, 95-100v, 100v-106, 106-110v, 110v-114, 114-117v, 117v-120, 120-121v, 122-128, 128-131, 131-133v, 133v-137v, 137v-141v, 141v-146, 146-148v, 148v-152v, 152v-157, 157v-162, 162-167v, 167v- 171, 171-176, 176v-180, 180-184, 184-188, 188-191v, 191v-193v, 193v-196, 196v-200v, 200v-204v, 204v-208v, 208v- 212, 212-215v, 215v-218, 218-220v, 220v-223v, 223v-225v, 225v-232v, 232v-237v, 237v-242v, 242v-246v, 246v-250v, 250v-265v, 265v-270v, 270v-276, 276-280, 280v-285v, 285v-288v, 288v-292, 292-296v, 296v-298v, 298v-301.

The text itself follows the standard incipits and explicits provided by Hödl and Knoch (Online Resources) nearly exactly, with small differences in the endings of Sermon 3 (T16/2) and Sermon 62 (T-25). The difference in the ending of Sermon 62 is likely due to the addition of a

formulaic ending. The surviving manuscript copies of this work are limited to European holdings; Mirabile (Online Resources), lists six manuscripts (all with extensive text and potentially complete): Cambridge, University Library, MS Add. 564; Cortona (Arezzo), Bibl. Com. E dell'Accademia Etrusca, MS 46; Florence, Bibl. Provenciale dei Frati Minori, MS OGN INC. 4.2; Padua, Bibl. Antoniana, MS HB VI40; and Siena, Bibl. Com. degli Intronati, MSS F.X. 17 and F. X. 21. Van der Heijden and Roest (Online Resources) lists four additional manuscripts, each with a few sermons only from this sermon cycle, Assisi, Bibl. Com., MS 443, ff. 162v-167v; Naples, Bibl. Naz. 'Vittorio Emanuele III', MSS VI.F.12, ff. 19-21v; VII.D.22, ff. 128-130; and VIII.A.7, ff. 101-102. There is no modern critical edition, but the sermons were printed several times in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, see: *De fidei christianae duodecim mirabilibus excellentiis sermones quadragesimales/Sermones quadragesimales de XII mirabilibus Christianae fidei excellentiis*, Venice, Giovanni & Gregorio de'Gregori, 1492; Venice, Albertinus de Lisona Vercellensis, 1505; Lyon, Nicolaus Chatelanus, 1504; and Hagenau, Henricus Gran, 1513. Johann Ulrich Surgant lists Antonius' works in his *Manuale*, or *Guide for Preachers*, printed in 1502/1503 (Hirsch, 1967).

Like many medieval authors, despite their importance, much detail regarding Fr. Antonius de Vercellis has been lost. The date and location of birth cannot be determined with any certainty; however, his election in 1467 to the post of *Vicarius Observantium Provinciae Mediolanensis*, suggests that he was likely born around 1410 to 1420, to give him time to rise into this position (Schäfer, 1941). His status as an Observant Friar Minor is attested by a letter in his own hand to Lorenzo de Medici, dated March 6, 1478. His signature on this letter ascribes himself as "Ordinis minorum de observantia professor indignus," a hyperbolically, though typical, modest self-description as a professor unworthy of respect (Schäfer, 1941). Though Fr. Antonius calls himself 'de Vercellis', another name, Balocchus, is also associated with him. Scholars have been unclear whether this is a family name, a place name, but they do agree that these two names refer to the same Antonius who was described in 1478 as "Antonius de Belloeho, Vercellensis, doctus et egregius praedicator, librum scripsit De XII mirabilibus christianae fidei excellentiis; miraculis fulsit" (Schäfer, 1941). Antonius likely died on September 22, 1483.

We have contemporary praise for Antonius as a celebrated professor of theology and preacher, and his talents in preaching were in demand by heads of state, religious men, and the peoples of cities he visited. Moreover, Antonius's reputation was not only for his preaching but for his active efforts to create peace and social justice as evidenced by his work in Orvieto, Parma, and Florence during times of civil tensions (Muscat, 1980). The sermon cycle in our manuscript is Antonius's first work. It is a "quadragesimale," that is a series of sermons covering the liturgical year from Septuagesima Sunday to the Easter Sunday octave including a sermon for each day from Lent until Easter (Bataillon, 1980). This Latin work would have been used as an aid for preachers to compose sermons preached in the vernacular to their congregations.

The work presented in this manuscript is a particularly fine copy, carefully written and illuminated, but also one that was used as a working text. Marginal annotations range from simple marks to aid memory or direct the reader back to a specific passage to longer form cross-references to biblical passages and various authorities. As many as five different hands annotated the manuscript (see ff. 28, 64r, 68v, 97v, 124v for samples of marginal hands), quoted authorities and references to the Bible in various hands in the margin (such as Ambrose, e.g., ff. 237v, 239, 241, 243, 248, 274, Augustine, e.g., ff. 248v, 272, Thomas Aquinas, e.g., f. 26v,

Theodosius, e.g., f. 101v). Additional marginal rubrication added after the initial text campaign is found on ff. 17, 21v, 22v, 23v, 29, 29v, 32, 33v, and there are many examples of *manicula* and *patte-de-mouche* throughout indicating important passages, as well as *notae* marks (see ff. 103, 104, 111, 190, 193, 222, 239, 270, 297). There is marginal numbering of sections on ff. 82-86v, and the sermons themselves are numbered 2-71 in the running titles. Finally, we note the presence of corrections throughout, including *signes-de-renvois* (see examples on ff. 16v, 40v, 41v, 47v), cancellations (see examples on ff. 31v, 56v, 62v, 121) and potential marginal palimpsests (see examples on ff. 154, 262).

## LITERATURE

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## ONLINE RESOURCES

ISTC: International Short-Title Catalogue. Antonius de Vercellis: Sermones quadragesimales de XII mirabilibus Christianae fidei excellentiis. With additions by Ludovicus Brognolo  
<https://data.cerl.org/istc/ia00918000>

"Antonius de Verceil (Antonius Vercellensis/Antonius de Balocco/Antonio da Vercelli/Antonio Balochi, c. 1410/20-1483)" in Maarten van der Heijden and Bert Roest,  
*Franciscan Authors 13<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> Century: A Catalogue in Progress*  
<https://franciscanauthors.rich.ru.nl/index.html>

"Antonius de Vercellis n. saec. XV in., m. 22-9-1483"  
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