

Processional (Use of the Dominican Nuns of Poissy)
In Latin, illuminated manuscript on parchment with musical notation
France (Paris), 1505-1515

i (paper) + ii + 169 + v folios on parchment, modern foliation in pencil, 1-169, complete (collation i⁸ ii² iii-xiv⁸ xv⁶ xvi-xx⁸ xxi² xxii⁸ xxiii⁷), leaf signatures (that begin in quire iii) on the rectos of first four leaves of quire are partly visible "(Ai), Aii, Aiii, Aiii," cropped thereafter, quire signatures (probably inserted in the seventeenth century, at the time of the current binding), on the recto of first leaf of quire, below the text block on the right "A, B, [C]... Y, Z," (collation with these signatures: A⁸ B² [C]-O⁸ P⁶ Q-V⁸ X² Y⁸ Z⁷), ruled in red ink (justification 95 x 53 mm.), written in black ink in gothic textualis bookhand, either on 21 lines of text or with seven lines of text and musical staves, square musical notation on four-line staves ruled in red, rastrum 6 mm., capitals highlighted in yellow throughout, 1-line initials in gold alternating on blue or burgundy grounds with gold highlights throughout, matching line-fillers throughout, 2-line foliate initials in gold on blue grounds with white highlights, or in white on gold grounds in-filled with leaves or flowers throughout, cadels highlighted in yellow begin occasional musical parts, EIGHTEEN SMALL FINELY-EXECUTED MINIATURES within Renaissance architectural frames highlighted with generous use of liquid gold, miniatures in the lower register excised on ff. 11v and 26, a few minor stains, otherwise in outstanding condition. Bound in fine late seventeenth-century red morocco, gold tooled with panels and corner fleurons, two leather straps with scallop catches in metal, gilt edges, lacking the upper catch-pin in metal, otherwise in excellent condition. Dimensions 160 x 110 mm.

This hitherto unknown Processional and its twin are the most luxurious of twelve early sixteenth-century Processionals made for the celebrated royal convent of Saint-Louis de Poissy. Its extraordinary miniatures pair the expected religious iconography with charming vignettes of the nuns of Poissy as they walk and sing in the religious processions included in this very book. Painted by Jean Coene IV, one of the leading illuminators in Paris, this manuscript was undoubtedly made for a nun from the highest echelons of French society.

PROVENANCE

1. Made for the Dominican convent of St. Louis de Poissy in the early sixteenth century, c. 1505-1515. The rubric beginning the processional office for the cleansing of altars at Maundy Thursday names the convent: "in ecclesia beati ludovici de pissiaco" (in the church of blessed Louis of Poissy), and the contents are essentially identical to those found in the other Poissy Processionals of the same date (although some texts are transcribed in a different order in different manuscripts); notably there are three processions that were specific to worship at Poissy: those in honor of St. Louis, St. John the Baptist, and the Nativity of the Virgin (the last two processions were introduced in the fifteenth century).

Philip the Fair of France (r. 1285-1314) founded the royal convent of Saint-Louis in Poissy, the birthplace of his grandfather, who was canonized in 1297. It was a prestigious religious house reserved for women of noble birth. Given the high quality of the manuscript, the standard of the illumination, and the amount of gold used, it is likely that the manuscript was made for a nun coming from an important French family; this nun's family coat of arms may have once appeared in one or both of the two miniatures, now missing, in the lower register of the first two illuminated page.

The style of the illumination and decoration, along with the evidence of the altars mentioned in the Office for the cleansing of the altars on Maundy Thursday allows us to date this Processional to the first quarter of the sixteenth century. There is no mention of the altar dedicated to the Crucifix, indicating that it had not yet been built and consecrated at the time the manuscript was made. The altar of the Crucifix is included in Poissy processionals made in the second quarter of the sixteenth century (cf. Naughton, 1995, II, no. 11). The text does include the altar dedicated to Sebastian and Yves, not yet included in Poissy Processionals made at the end of the fifteenth century, despite being built prior to the installation of the altar of the Crucifix (cf. Naughton, 1995, II, p. 264).

The private ownership of the manuscript in recent times indicates that it was probably among the books taken by the nuns from Poissy when they left the convent in 1790-1792. It may have been soon after this that Abbot Ythier acquired the book (see below). It is interesting to note that the nuns kept the Processionals in good condition and many were rebound in lavish bindings, such as the red morocco binding made for Elisabeth de Laistre probably at the same binder's shop around the same date as the binding of our Processional (Sotheby's, June 22, 2004, lot 81; for more on de Laistre's manuscript, see below). A Poissy Processional-Prosar, which was probably also bound around the same time, has scallop clasps similar to those in our manuscripts (Naughton, 1995, II, fig. 172).

2. Belonged to Abbot Nicolas-Pierre Ythier (1738-1809), dean and canon of the church of Saint-Quiriace in Provins, a town southeast of Paris. Ythier's book label was pasted inside the front cover, and "No. 16" is inscribed on it in black ink. Quite remarkably, Elisabeth de Laistre's Processional is no. 15 in Abbot Ythier's collection and is almost a twin of our Processional (see below). Ythier also owned at least two fifteenth-century Books of Hours, for the uses of Paris (Geneva, BGE, Comites Latentes, MS 136) and Troyes (current location unknown), as well as a fifteenth-century Dominican breviary, which he gave to the Bibliothèque municipale of Provins (MS 9). Abbot Ythier gave several of his books, including this Processional, to his niece (see below).
3. Belonged to Mme Colin de Saint-Marc from Coulommiers, niece of Abbot Ythier; her book label was pasted below that of her uncle. Her husband, Alexandre Jean Roch Colin de Saint-Marc (1743-1814) was a "receveur general" of farms in Rouen. Recently widowed, Mme Colin de Saint-Marc hosted the emperor of Russia, Alexander I, at her house in Coulommiers on 26-27 March 1814. In commemoration of this occasion, a medal was struck with a portrait of the emperor (housed today in the Musée Carnavalet in Paris).

TEXT

ff. 1-10, Preliminary chants and prayers for a Mass to protect against the plague (ff. 1-5) and for Sts. Vincent (ff. 5-7), Dominic (ff. 7-9), and Sebastian (ff. 9-10); [f. 10v, blank];

ff. 11-16, Processional Office for the Purification of the Virgin, or Candlemas, benediction of candles, "*In die purificationis. Benedictio candellarum*";

ff. 16-35v, Processional Office for Palm Sunday, benediction of palms, "Post partum virgo..." (verse);

The procession re-enacted Christ's entry into Jerusalem. At Poissy, the prior, the deacon, the subdeacon, and the acolytes entered the church to bless the palms, and the friar-cantor began the chant. The nuns in their choir joined in the singing and palms were distributed by the nun-sacristan. The gospel was read from Matthew (f. 27rv), and the nun-sacristan presented the cross and the blessed water to two sisters who led the procession. It began inside the church and moved out into the cloister. Re-entry through the church doorway was accompanied by the responsory "Ingrediente Domino in sanctam civitatem hebreorum..." (f. 34v). When the procession had ended, the palms were laid aside and mass began. (Naughton, 1995, I, p. 111);

ff. 35v-38, Kyrie for Holy Week, "Kyrie eleison...";

ff. 38-63v, Processional Office for Maundy Thursday, cleansing of altars, "*Feria quinta in cena domini: ordo altarium abluendorum in ecclesia beati ludovici de pissiaco*";

The procession moved through the church of Saint-Louis de Poissy stopping for chanting and praying at each of its altars in the following order: St. Louis, the patron saint of Poissy (ff. 39-41), the Holy Trinity (ff. 41-43), the Assumption of the Virgin (ff. 43-45), St. Augustine and St. Thomas (ff. 45-46v), St. Maur and St. Anthony (ff. 46v-49), St. Martin (ff. 49-50v), St. Stephen (ff. 50v-52), Angels (ff. 52-54), St. Denis (ff. 54-55), St. Peter and St. Paul (ff. 55-55v), St. Blaise (ff. 55v-56v), St. Loup and St. Giles (ff. 56v-57), St. Dominic and St. Peter Martyr (ff. 57-58), St. Sebastian and St. Yves (ff. 58-58v), the Annunciation of the Virgin (ff. 58v-59v), St. John the Baptist (ff. 59v-60), St. John and St. James (ff. 60-60v), St. Katherine (ff. 60v-61v), St. Mary Magdalene and St. Martha (ff. 61v-63), and St. Anne (ff. 63-63v).

ff. 63v-72v, Mandatum (foot washing) on Maundy Thursday, "*Feria quinta in cena domini. Ad mandatum. oratio. Actiones nostras quesumus domine...*";

ff. 72v-86v, Gospel reading from John after the Mandatum on Maundy Thursday, "*Feria quinta in cena domini. Lectio sancti evangelii. Secundum iohannem. In illo tempore. Ante diem festum pasche...*";

ff. 86v-102v, Antiphons, prayers, lessons for Vespers on Good Friday, cleansing of the chalice, "*Calicem Salutaris...*";

ff. 102v-111v, Adoration of the Cross on Good Friday;

ff. 112-115v, Processional Office for Easter Sunday and the two following days;

ff. 115v-119v, Processional Office for Ascension;

ff. 119v-123v, Processional Office for Corpus Christi;

ff. 123v-127v, Processional Office for St. John the Baptist;

ff. 127v-131, Processional Office for St. Dominic;

- ff. 131-135v, Processional Office for the Assumption of the Virgin;
- ff. 135v-140, Processional Office for St. Louis;
- ff. 140-143v, Processional Office for the Nativity of the Virgin;
- ff. 143v-145, Processional Office for the reception of legates;
- ff. 145-147v, Processional Office for the reception of secular princes;
- ff. 147v-152, Hymns and prayers for the profession of a nun, including response and versicle from the office of St. Agnes, "Amo Christum...", and the hymn to the Virgin, "Inviolata, integra, et casta es Maria...";
- ff. 152v-162, Prayers to be said before Communion;
- ff. 162-169v, Prayers to be said after Communion;
- ff. i-iii (end flyleaves), added in the late sixteenth century, "*De Sacramento ad processionem. Responsorium. Homo quidam fecit coenam magnam....*"

ILLUSTRATION

An extraordinary feature of this Processional are the eight small miniatures found in the lower register of each of the illuminated pages depicting nuns processing in the cloister at Poissy, led by a young nun carrying a cross and followed by six (or seven on f. 140) nuns processing in pairs holding their small Processionals open in their hands (except on ff. 11v and 26 where they have been removed). The architectural frames that adorn these illuminated pages are carefully constructed in space and decorated with Renaissance ornaments.

Ten small miniatures in the outer margins illustrate the relevant event or saint for each processional office:

- f. 11v, Presentation in the Temple (for the Purification of the Virgin); [lower register excised];
- f. 26, Entry into Jerusalem; [lower register excised];
- f. 113, Resurrection of Christ; nuns of Poissy in procession;
- f. 115v, Ascension of Christ; nuns of Poissy in procession;
- f. 119v, Blessed Sacrament; nuns of Poissy in procession;
- f. 123v, St. John the Baptist; nuns of Poissy in procession;
- f. 127v, St. Dominic; nuns of Poissy in procession;

f. 131, Assumption of the Virgin; nuns of Poissy in procession;

f. 135v, St. Louis; nuns of Poissy in procession;

f. 140, Nativity of the Virgin; nuns of Poissy in procession;

The text in this manuscript contains the chants and prayers that accompanied liturgical processions celebrated at the convent immediately before the mass. In total, at least thirty-three Processionals are known from Poissy; the present one is unrecorded among those inventoried by Michel Huglo (1999 and 2004) and Joan Naughton (1998 and 1999-2000).

Contemporary Processionals that the nuns at Poissy wrote and decorated themselves are characterized by an archaizing script and simple ivy leaf decoration. This is not the case with the manuscript here; it was written and decorated by a professional shop in Paris. However, its layout with twenty-one ruled lines is identical to the other early sixteenth-century Processionals intended for the nuns at Poissy (Naughton, 1995, I, pp. 140-141). Its text block is only slightly smaller than the others in the group (c. 101 x 62 mm.). Careful instructions must have been given to the Parisian shop so that the book conformed to the others used by the nuns.

The artist of the miniatures can be identified as Jean Coene IV, an illuminator active in Paris around 1490-1520. In scholarship he was initially known as the Master of the Paris Entries, for he was responsible for painting manuscripts describing the coronations and entries into the capital of two French queens, Mary Tudor in 1514, and Claude de France in 1517. A striking characteristic of this artist is his tendency to outline his figures and other major forms with a very thick black line. The figures are clothed in richly colored garments painted with minimal modeling, often with black lines accentuating sharp folds and with generous highlights of liquid gold. Skin is carefully modeled, and facial features (the long eyebrows, downward curve of the mouth and half-closed eyes) are drawn in black with a narrow brush. He designed intricate Renaissance frames with apparent ease and decorated garments, altar cloths, tapestry hangings with liquid gold ornaments and inscriptions. These long lines of letters, framed between two double lines, often include the enigmatic letters "VORSVS," or "VSVOR," etc. (ff. 11v, 119v, 127v, 135v), which are found again in a handful of books: a modest Book of Hours for the use of Paris (Caen, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Collection Mancel, MS 238; Airaksinen-Monier, 2016), a Gradual made for the church of Saint-Dié (Saint-Dié-des-Vosges, Bibliothèque Municipale, MS 74), the Hours of Jean Martin (Les Enluminures, BOH 160), and in the frontispiece of at least four copies of the *Statuts de l'ordre de Saint-Michel* (Cousseau, plates V-VIII, who attributes them to a collaborator of the Parisian illuminator, Etienne Colaud). We can attribute these copies of *Statuts* to Coene, who was undoubtedly sub-contracted for the commission by Colaud.

Elisabeth de Laistre's Processional (see above) was made for a nun at Poissy around the same time as ours and is our manuscript's "twin." Its layout and dimensions are the same, as well as the style of its initials and we can attribute the nine miniatures in the manuscript to the same artist, Jean Coene IV, the Master of the Paris Entries. Surprisingly the two manuscripts remained together throughout the centuries, being rebound, most probably, at the same Parisian binder's shop at the end of the seventeenth century, and they ended up next to each other on the bookshelf of Abbot Ythier in the eighteenth century, as nos. 15 and 16. Then the roads diverged, and the twin went to Stonyhurst College in Lancashire, before being sold at Sotheby's in 2004 (present location unknown).

The Processional is a fine work within the heterogeneous *œuvre* of Coene. In the manuscript there are several delicate details, such as the sumptuous cloud of angels, painted camaïeu d'or on a red ground, carrying the Virgin to heaven on f. 131. (For more on the artist, see especially Delaunay, 2000; König, 1993, 1997, 2000; Orth, 1992, 2015).

The making of the Processional coincides with a period of extraordinary events at Poissy, when the nuns found themselves in the midst of serious conflicts relating to the reform and governance of Dominican houses in northern France (see Naughton, 1995, I, pp. 136-139). Although the reform was introduced at Poissy in 1506 by Jean Clerée, the confessor to the king, Louis XII, and continued until at least about 1528, it does not appear to have been successful. Nonetheless it inspired an especially productive period of high-quality manuscript making.

LITERATURE

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ONLINE RESOURCES

Joan Naughton's thesis "Manuscripts from the Dominican monastery of Saint-Louis de Poissy":
<https://minerva-access.unimelb.edu.au/handle/11343/39437>

Fully digitized Poissy Processional of c. 1510 at Reed College, Portland (Oregon):
<https://rdc.reed.edu/c/poissy/home/>

Poissy Processional at Bryn Mawr College (Pennsylvania), including recordings of the processional's chants and a transcription of the entire text:
<http://poissyprocessional.brynmawr.edu/>

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