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ISIDORUS HISPALENSIS [ISIDORE OF SEVILLE], *Sententiarum sive de summo bono libri III*; JULIANUS POMERIUS, *De vita contemplativa*
In Latin, decorated manuscript on paper
Poland (Silesia)? or Bohemia (Prague?), c. 1400

61 ff., lacking two leaves at the end (collation: [1] + i-ii², iii⁴, iv¹², v¹⁰ [12-2]), on paper (watermark close to Briquet, "Cloche," no. 4002, Würzburg, 1402; Kitzingen [near Würzburg], 1407 and Mosin and Traljic, *Filigranes des XIIIe et XVe siècle* [1957], no. 2961/2, Krakow, 1390-1400; and Briquet, "Y formé par trois croix latines," no. 5674, Schweidnitz [Silesia], 1400 and Prague, 1399 and Mosin and Traljic, *Filigranes des XIIIe et XVe siècle* [. . .], no. 3610/13, Krakow, 1390-1400), ruled in brown ink, written in a highly abridged gothic hybrid script in brown ink, text on two columns (justification 220 x 145 mm.), with up to 52 lines per column, some capitals touched in red, rubrics and headings in red, Roman numerals for chapters in red, painted initials in red, mostly 1-line high, some higher, opening 6-line high painted initial decorated in red. Modern imitation binding of quarter pigskin over wooden boards, pigskin tooled in blind, back sewn on 4 thongs, leather and brass clasp. Dimensions 290 x 210 mm.

Two early medieval writings on contemplative values much influenced by Saint Augustine are paired in this rare manuscript probably used in an educational context in Poland or perhaps Bohemia. The first, one of the "great books" of the Middle Ages by the famed encyclopedist Isidore of Seville, the *Book of Maxims* helped assure the survival of the thinking of the Church Fathers through the Dark Ages. The second, the earliest pastoral handbook to have survived, Julian Pomerius's *On the Contemplative Life* still requires a modern critical edition. Both works enjoyed enormous popularity throughout the Middle Ages and were used frequently in monastic and cathedral schools.

PROVENANCE

1. Watermarks point to a central European origin for this manuscript, with a strong possibility the manuscript was copied in Poland, likely in Silesia, which was under German influence in the Middle Ages or slightly further east in the region of Krakow. Interestingly, although erroneously, the second treatise is attributed to a native of this region, Henricus de Bitterfeld who was a Dominican Friar in Silesia (Convent of Brieg belonging to the "Polish" Dominican Province), and another native of these regions is quoted as a possible author for the third treatise (here missing): Matthaeus de Cracovia. At the end of the second treatise, after the explicit, a scribe (?) has added the following inscription at the bottom of the column:

“Hactenus haec dicta domine Conrade sufficient” [Enough, these words suffice, by Master Conrad].

2. Private Collection, Europe

TEXT

f. 1, Inscription providing the contents of the manuscript, in a later 15th script: “Isidorus de summo bono. Item tractatus de vita contemplativa activa et virtutibus. Item tractatus de frequenti communione magistri Henrici Betterwalt [Henricus de Bitterfeld] doctoris alias magistri Mathie de Cracovia [Matthaeus de Cracovia]”;

The inscription lists three works, with first Isidore of Seville’s *Sententiarum sive de summo bono libri III*, the second, *De vita contemplativa et activa*; and the third, a *Tractatus de frequenti communione* attributed here to either Henricus de Bitterfeld or Matthaeus de Cracovia. The second text, although they bear similar titles, is not by Henricus de Bitterfeld (whose *De vita contemplativa et activa* is discussed by Koudelka, 1953, pp. 38-44, but rather *De vita contemplativa* by Julianus Pomerius. The third text-- here missing--named “De frequenti communione,” could be the work entitled “De crebra communione” [On Frequent Communion] by Henricus de Bitterfeld (see Koudelka, 1953, pp. 35-36) or that of Matthaeus de Cracovia, *Dialogus rationis et conscientiae de frequenti communione*. It seems that this third announced work was lost, probably when the volume was restored and rebound.

f. 1v, blank;

ff. 2-9, Isidorus Hispalensis, *Sententiarum sive de summo bono libri III*, Liber I, incipit, “Summum bonum deus est et corrumpi omnino non potest...”; explicit, “[...] ascendit et nos ascensuri sumus” (published in Cazier, 1998, pp. 7-90; PL 83, 538-600);

ff. 9-18v, Isidorus Hispalensis, *Sententiarum sive de summo bono libri III*, Liber II, rubric, *Incipit liber secundus capitulum primum*; incipit, “Omnis qui secundum deus sapiens est beatus est...”; explicit, “[...] sed etiam periculum exhibet” (published in Cazier, 1998, pp. 91-193; PL 83, 600-654);

ff. 19-35, Isidorus Hispalensis, *Sententiarum sive de summo bono libri III*, Liber III, rubric, *Incipit liber tertius capitulum primum*; incipit, “Divine sapientie subtilitas sicut interius...”; explicit, “[...] non quos celestis aula letificando includit” (published in Cazier, 1998, pp. 194-330; PL 83, 654-738);

Born in Spain, Isidore of Seville (c. 560-636) was the last of the ancient [Christian](#) philosophers, as he was the last of the great Latin Fathers of the Church. Undoubtedly the most learned man of his age, he exercised a far-reaching influence on the educational life of the [Middle Ages](#). His voluminous writings are said to constitute the first chapter of Spanish literature. It is not, however, in the capacity of an original and independent writer that Isidore is most celebrated, but as an indefatigable compiler of all existing knowledge. The most important and by far the best known of all his writings is the *Etymologiae*, or Etymologies, a work so popular that it is thought to exist in at least 1000 manuscripts. The Etymologies is a vast storehouse of universal knowledge—grammatical, scientific, and theological—that served as a crucial source of information for the entire Middle Ages. Thanks to the Etymologies above all, Isidore became the patron saint of

students and schoolchildren in the Middle Ages. Today he is championed as the first-ever information technologist, named by the Pope in 1999 the patron saint of the Internet, because of his extraordinary, seemingly extra-human, ability to assimilate and organize information.

Isidore's important position in history is further secured by a second work, preserved in the present manuscript, his *Sententiarum libri III*, or Book of Maxims, which is his chief theological writing. Composed between 612-615 A.D., the *Sententiarum libri III* are in fact a collection of short essays and dogmatic rules on a great multiplicity of themes connected with speculative, practical, and ritual theology, forming a sort of "manual of divinity" with the same encyclopedic character as the *Etymologiae*. The opinions and maxims are often taken from the Church Fathers such as Augustine and Gregory. The first book treats the divine attributes, Creation, and evil, among other subjects. The second book offers rules of thumb to achieve personal wisdom, discussing the Cardinal Virtues, grace, conversion, backsliding, repentance, sin, and so forth. The third book deals with ecclesiastical orders, the judgment and the chastisement of [God](#). It is believed that this work greatly influenced [Peter Lombard](#)'s famous *Sentences*.

Many of Isidore's maxims have contemporary application for study and contemplation: "By reading we learn what we did not know; by reflection we retain what we have learned"; "In reading we aim at knowing, but we must put into practice what we have learned in our course of study"; "The man who is slow to grasp things but who really tries hard is rewarded, equally he who does not cultivate his God-given intellectual ability is condemned for despising his gifts and sinning by sloth."

Like the *Etymologies*, the *Sententiarum* enjoyed a rich manuscript tradition, with over 500 extant codices recorded (for a list of manuscripts, see Roblès, 1970, pp. 80-85. Cazier, whose critical edition is based on the manuscripts that date between the eighth and eleventh centuries, adds to Roblès's list approximately 20 codices (1998, p. LXI).

f. 35v, blank;

ff. 36- 36v, [Julianus Pomerius], *De vita contemplativa*, Preface, incipit, "[Diu multumque renisus sum voluntati tuae] O mi domine studiosissime pontificum Juliane non velud..." (PL, 59, col. 415-417); table of chapters with rubric, *Ordo capitulorum* (PL, 59, col. 417-418);

ff. 36v-42, [Julianus Pomerius], *De vita contemplativa*, Book I, incipit, "Contemplativa vita est in qua creatorem suum creatura intellectualis..."; explicit, "[...] discutienda continetur ratio disseramus" (PL, 59, col. 418-440);

ff. 42-43, [Julianus Pomerius], *De vita contemplativa*, Book II, Preface and table of chapters, incipit preface, *Superiori libro racionem...*" (PL, 59, col. 441-442);

ff. 43-51, [Julianus Pomerius], *De vita contemplativa*, Book II, incipit, "Si omnes una egritudine mentium laborant..."; explicit, "[...] volumine donante Deo disputemus" (PL, 59, col. 443-472);

ff. 51-51v, [Julianus Pomerius], *De vita contemplativa*, Book III, Preface and table of chapters, incipit preface, "De vita contemplativa et quantum ab ea differat..." (PL, 59, col. 472);

ff. 51v-61v, [Julianus Pomerius], *De vita contemplativa*, Book III, incipit, "Quesistis quantum a veris virtutibus virtutum..."; explicit, "[...] verba sunt instituta. Hactenus haec dicta domine Conrade sufficient" (PL. 59, col. 473-520).

Incorrectly ascribed to Henricus de Bitterfeld (died c. 1405), a Dominican Friar in Silesia, by a fifteenth-century hand on f. 1, *De vita contemplativa* [On the Contemplative Life] was often also misattributed to St. Prosperus Aquitanus. The work is actually by Julianus Pomerius (died 498). Little is known about the author. Born in Mauritania, he seems to have emigrated from North Africa to Gaul, becoming a teacher of rhetoric in a school at Arles where St. Cesarius of Arles was pupil. The last-recorded of the rhetoricians of Gaul, Pomerius had high regard for Augustine, whose ideas are plentiful throughout *De vita contemplativa* and who is clearly the author's professed model. Although four treatises are attributed to Pomerius, the *De vita contemplativa* is the only one to survive.

An important treatise for the history of early medieval mysticism, *De vita contemplativa* is the expression of the ideals of the contemplative and the active life, supplemented by a discussion of the vices and virtues. The first book poses the philosophical problems of whether a bishop--or any cleric for that matter--engaged in pastoral duties ever attain the reward of the saint who withdrew from the world? Are priests engaged in pastoral duties able to share the contemplative ideal? The second book of the treatise investigates the active life of a good priest. The third book identifies four major vices and the four cardinal virtues, applicable to both the laity and the clerical population in a sort of practical Christian handbook. This work survives as the oldest pastoral instruction manual in the West.

Over ninety manuscripts survive, starting from the tenth century, as clear proof of the treatise's popularity (see Laistner, for a list of manuscripts, 1956, pp. 352-355 and 358). Yet, there is still no modern edition of Julianus Pomerius's *De vita contemplativa* (other than Migne), answering the requirements of scholarship.

LITERATURE

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Suelzer, M. J. ed. *Julianus Pomerianus: The Contemplative Life*, Westminster, 1947.

ONLINE RESOURCES

Isidore of Seville, The Latin Library

<http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/isidore.html>

On Isidore of Seville

<http://www.st-isidore.org/isidore.html>

On Julianus Pomerius

<http://www.ccel.org/s/schaff/encyc/encyc09/htm/iv.iii.xxiii.htm>