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[Manual of Confession] *Confessione generale*  
In Italian and Latin, decorated manuscript on parchment  
Italy, Tuscany?, c. 1400-1450?

30 ff, preceded and followed by two paper flyleaves, apparently complete (collation: i-iii<sup>10</sup>), written in a rounded humanistic bookhand in brown ink, on up to 26 long lines per page, parchment ruled in light red ink (justification: 140 x 85 mm), vertical catchword (fol. 20v), contemporary quire signatures in lower right-hand corner, rubrics in pale red ink, paragraph marks in blue, numerous one-line high initials painted in blue, two larger opening initials "Q" never realized (ff. 1 and 11), title in pale red and Roman capitals (fol. 1), first three words of text also in Roman capitals. Nineteenth-century maroon morocco over pasteboard, smooth spine, both covers with a single gilt fillet frame with fleurons at four angles, gilt title in the center of the upper board: "Confessione generale. M.S." Dimensions 230 x 155 mm.

Written almost entirely in the vernacular, this is a Manual of Confession for the use of a nun with extensive passages for each type of sin. The first part provides colorful, sometimes impassioned, and surely unique examples of the nun's sinful thoughts and actions; many are quite explicit. The second part is the text used by priests to administer the Sacrament of Penance. The present manuscript offers an excellent example of this type of work, for which the vernacular tradition has yet to be properly appreciated and remains largely unstudied.

## PROVENANCE

Linguistic and material elements all secure an Italian origin for this manuscript. An annotation of the upper pastedown reads: "Manuscript on 30 leaves of vellum at the monastery of Pisa about 1360. £ 5-10" A closer linguistic analysis is certainly necessary, but the orthography and linguistic features suggest Tuscany as a probable region of copy and use for this Manual of confessors for the most part composed in the vernacular. For instance, one finds such spellings as "chapacita" (f. 8); "chattholicha" (f. 20).

Another modern note on recto of first flyleaf, in pencil: "ter (?) 1966 fl[orin] (?) 200", likely referring to price paid in 1966.

## TEXT

ff. 1-10v, Manual of confession, rubric, *Confessione generale*; incipit, "[Q]uando tu th'ai ad confessare fa che parecchi di innanzi tu t'apparechi in questo modo. Alchuno di innanzi fa oratione addio chetti concieda gratia..."; rubrics, *De dieci comandamenti della legge. Prima* (f. 1v); *De septe pecchati mortali. Primo* (f.

4); *De cinque sentimenti del corpo* (f. 5v); *De dodici articoli della fede sancta* (f. 6); *Delle tre virtu theologiche* (f. 7); *Delle quattro virtu cardinali* (f. 7v); *Delle sette doni dello spirito sancto* (f. 8); *Delle septe virtu contro a septe peccati mortali* (f. 8v); *Questa oratione si debba dire chi si communicha quando s'appressa il tempo della communione. Oratio; incipit, in Latin, "Omnipotens et misericors deus ecce accedo ad sacramentum unigeniti filii tui..."; Questa oratione si vuole dire innanzi a che explicit, "[...] tuti communicchi. Oratio; incipit, in Latin, "Gratias tibi ago domine sancta pater omnipotens eterne deus..."; explicit, "[...] perfecta gaudium sempiternum sanctitas plena. Per Christum dominum nostrum";*

ff. 11-30v, *Manual of Confessors, rubric, Come il confessore debbe esaminare il peccatore et dove a astare in chiesa a confessarlo et come. Et cosi a admonire il peccatore glistia adpie; incipit, "[Q]uando il peccatore viene al sacerdote per confessarsi lo debbe admonire se ignorante del confessarsi et faciasi il segno della crocie..."; first rubrics, *Examinatione che fa il sacerdote al peccatore di molte cose et prima dieci commandamenti* (f. 12v); *Examinatione de sette peccati mortali* (f. 15); *Examinatione de cinque sentimenti del corpo* (f. 18v); *Delle sette opere della misericordia temporali* (f. 19v); *Delle quattro virtu cardinali e tre theologiche* (f. 20); explicit, "[...] o altri navigli o facessisi nocchiere de saracino o chi desse consiglio o adiuto loro indetramento della terra sancta et fede crystiana. Questo e chaso papale per una extravagante etc. Finis."*

This manuscript contains a Manual of Confession composed of two distinct parts. The first part contains a Manual of Confession clearly composed for (or by?) a "feminine sinner," most likely a nun, perhaps an Augustinian nun (although this cannot be proven). Indeed there are a plethora of feminine endings and forms which all suggest the present Manual of Confession was destined for use by a woman.

Some examples follow. When discussing the transgression of the second commandment, "Thou shall not make wrongful use of the name of God," the penitent states: "[...] io non sono bella come l'altre..." (f. 2). For the sin of Pride (superbia): "[...] ancora mi sono vantata dicendo io sono bella, savia et astuta piu che l'altre..." (f. 4). For the sin of Anger (ira): "[...] sono stata inpatiente quando nonne stato facto et ordinato..." (f. 4v). Fittingly, there is no development associated with the transgression of the ninth commandment, "Thou shall not covet your neighbor's wife," given the fact that the penitent was a woman, this did not seem a potential risk (f. 3v). There are a few other clues that suggest that this manual of confession was copied for a nun, since in a number of passages the penitent states that she has been guilty of wrong-doing against her "sorelle" (sisters). When evoking the chilling transgression of the fifth commandment, "Thou shall not kill / commit murder," the penitent states: "In questo errato o hauto in hodio *le mie sorelle* o altre persone donde o desiderato loro la morte..." [Here I have sinned, for I have felt hatred toward my sisters or others and I have wished their death] (f. 3); or when listing possible transgressions of the eighth commandment, "Thou shall not engage in false testimony": "In questo o peccato alchuna volta falsamente accusando al mio superiore alchuna delle *mie sorelle*..." (f. 3v); again, when detailing the sin of Pride: "[...] o spregiato *le mie sorelle*" [I was contemptuous of my sisters...] (f. 4). Finally, there are two references (perhaps more) to Saint Augustine, in particular: "Ideo precor beatissimam et gloriosissimam virginem Mariam, beatum Augustinum..." (f. 9v); and "Et pero dice sancto Augustino che il sacerdote debba sapere leghare et sciogliere..." (f. 29v). Could this imply that the present nun was part of a congregation that venerated Saint Augustine of the Rule of Saint Augustine? This could be any one of a number of congregations, from the Augustinian Hermits to Dominicans (who followed the Rule of Saint Augustine).

As expected in a Manual of Confession, the penitent was to account for all sins, including those that concerned lust and fornication. In the present example, each potential category of sin is instructed with a number of very personal examples. In the case of infraction of the sixth commandment, "Thou shall not commit adultery": "In questo o errato alchune volte in sogni et desegni no hauto letitia o per me medesimo o con altri..." [Here I have sinned a number of times; I have sinned in my dreams, and in these wanderings I have taken pleasure by myself or with others...] (f. 3). When addressing the sin of Lust (luxuria): "Dico la mia colpa del septimo peccato mortale cioe luxuria colquale o offeso per mie parole o ricordamenti o tochamenti et mostrando le mia membra dishonestamente..." [I am guilty of the seventh deadly sin that is Lust to which I have succumbed through my discourse (conversation), my memories and my gestures [tochamenti], as well as revealing indiscreetly parts of my body] (f. 5v). The penitent even apparently engages in a form of masturbation, as in the case of the transgression of the fifth sense "Touch": "Dico mia colpa del tocchare o toccho dishonestamente li miei proprii membri o quelli d'altro..." [I am guilty of touching and I have touched indiscreetly my own body or that of another] (f. 6).

The second text belongs to a group of penitential manuals written in Latin and the vernacular called "manuals of confessors," which circulated widely throughout Europe from the thirteenth century through the late fifteenth century, quite often anonymously composed. These works were composed for the priest to facilitate and provide a ready text to administer penance to sinners. In the standard work on the subject, Michaud-Quantin (1962) notes that Italian examples first appear at the beginning of the fourteenth century (p. 95). Written mostly in the vernacular, our text begins with the formula common in Manuals of Confessors, where, after an introduction, the sinner is asked to identify himself to the confessor. This passage is interesting as it provides a snapshot of all levels of society: is the penitent ordained or not, is he the product of a legitimate marriage, a merchant or a servant etc.? It then proceeds to analyze the potential sins grouped under the Decalogue, the Seven Deadly Sins, the Five Senses, the Cardinal and Theological Virtues etc. The Manual provides towards the end those cases that are strictly reserved to bishops (ff. 29-29v) and to the Pope (ff. 29v-30v). Michaud-Quantin notes that there is no systematic study of penitential texts in the vernacular, but that in general they appear to be closely inspired by their Latin models (p. 97).

Confession, or the revelation of sins to another in order to receive God's forgiveness, counts amongst one of the most complex of Christian actions. Although confession and penance were recommended very early on, confession did not become compulsory until the thirteenth century. Annual confession progressively became obligatory, as well as frequent and repeated confession: from the fifteenth century on one denotes a more frequent practice of confession amongst ordinary Christians. Fixed places for confession appeared first in Western churches precisely at Pisa in the fourteenth century, but the anonymity of the later form of confession was not part of the medieval experience of confession.

Confession formulas such as these were certainly widespread and found in all European countries, displaying a general similarity (see the examples in Castilian below). However, the present example is quite interesting in that the first part was clearly composed for a woman (most likely a nun) to prepare for her own confession, followed by what her confessor would require from her. Was such a

Manual of Confession composed for each sister, was it composed specifically for a given sister, thus containing sins she herself thought of or for which she was guilty, which could account for the personal nature of the sins described?

## LITERATURE

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## ONLINE RESSOURCES

On lay confession

<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09094a.htm>

On Manuals of Confessors in Castilian

<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/projects/arroyo/man13.htm>