

[Monastic Ritual or Ceremonial] [*Ordo ad novicias benedicendas (Ordo professionis religiosae)*] [Ordo for the reception and clothing of novices] (Use of the Dominicans)
In Latin with Italian rubrics, manuscript on parchment
Northern Italy [Padua?], c. 1500-1525, with additions dated 1577

10 ff, on parchment (collation: i⁶, ii⁴), complete in itself, written in a gothic rotunda script in brown ink by a single scribe with later marginal additions (dated 1577), additions and corrections mostly giving plural or singular forms of selected words and formulae, text copied in one column, 23 lines per page (justification 157 x 103 mm), occasional red crosses in text, two-line initials throughout in red with purple infill and calligraphic penwork into outer margin, 4-line initials on f. 1 and f. 4v (perhaps later embellishments?) in purple with elaborate acanthus scrollwork infill, purple penwork headpiece on f. 1 and tailpiece on f. 19 (also later embellishments?), added note at the end of manuscript in purple ink, dated 1577. Unbound, but quires sewn together, likely a fragment of a once larger codex, now dismembered. Slight soiling on f. 1 (with no loss of legibility), but otherwise in very good condition. Dimensions 200 x 154 mm.

A rare document preserving the consecration rituals (Benediction rites of vestments and veils) for novices admitted into a Dominican nunnery before their actual profession and consecration after a period of probation. Once part of a larger manuscript (most likely a Monastic Ritual or Ceremonial), this fragment was revised (corrected and amended) in 1577 by both a Dominican Brother and Sister, according to an added colophon. Particularly noteworthy are the extensive rubrics in the vernacular.

PROVENANCE

1. Script and style of ornamentation, as well as linguistic features all point to Italy as a sure place of origin for this manuscript, likely written in the first quarter of the sixteenth century, possibly in Padua (see in particular the liturgical manuscripts produced in Padua during the "primo Cinquecento," Mariani Canova, 1999, pp. 410-415). All the rubrics are redacted in Italian, with the prayers and hymns in Latin, which in itself constitutes a rarity in such liturgical manuscripts. The references to Saint Dominic in the present *Ordines* (ff. 1, 1v, 3v, 4, 6, 9) as well as a later signature (see below) secure a Dominican origin for this manuscript. If we retain Padua as a possible place of production and use for these *Ordines*, there was a Dominican nunnery in Padova named Santa Anna (see L. Gargan, *Lo studio teologico e la biblioteca dei Domenicani a Padova*, Padova, 1971, p. 66).

2. Used or corrected in 1577 still within a Dominican environment, according to a colophon signed by a Brother Thomas Carrara, O.P. His signature and the following inscription figures in purple ink on f. 10: "Fr[ater] Thomas Carrara Ord[inis] Praed[icatorum] Anno domini millesimo quingentesimo septuagesimo septimo mensis augusti. Haec omnia fieri curavit D. R. S. Helisabeth Scalza Patauina" [Brother Thomas Carrara of the Order of Preachers, in the year 1577. These matters were overseen by *Domina Reverendissima Soror* (Sister) Elizabeth Scalza (Italian for "discalced," but apparently here the Sister's surname rather than a religious affiliation) from Padua]. Thomas Carrara might have been a member of the influent Carrara family, once Lords of Padova in the

14th century: the Carraresi were one of the most prominent and illustrious Paduan families. If Thomas of Carrara was indeed Paduan (which is not specified as such in the colophon), he might have been a member of the Dominican convent of S. Agostino in Padua, established since the 13th century [see C. Gasparotto, *Il Convento e la Chiesa di S. Agostino dei Domenicani in Padova*, 1967].

TEXT

ff. 1-4v, [Ordo for the benediction of the vestments of novice nuns (Dominicans)], heading in red, *Ordine che si ha da tenir nel vestir le novizze et la beneditione de vestimenti inanti il vestire*; opening rubric, *Prima detta la messa il sacerdote benedica le sue vestimenta in questa forma*; first prayer, "Domine Jesu Christe, qui pro salute nostra..."; final rubric (f. 4v), *Et mentre si canta, la detta vada a dar la pace a tutte le monache*;

The consecrated clothing ritual begins with Mass, then proceeds with the "marriage" of the young novice to Christ (symbol of the "Sponsa Christi"). The novice enters the church holding a candle, accompanied by two "paranymphs" (or bridesmaids). When the priest, referred to in the text as *sacerdote* (or in lieu of the *sacerdote*, the nuns), declares, "The bride of Christ approaches," the novice replies, "Behold, I am coming." With the blessing of the parents, the novice is presented to the Mother Prioress, who asks the prostrated novice: "Quid petis?" to which the novice replies: "Misericordiam dei et vestram." The Mother Prioress then proceeds to cut the postulant's hair and presents her with the consecrated vestments: tunic, scapula and mantle. Women could not be professed to the Dominican religious life before the age of thirteen. The formula for profession contained in the Constitutions of Montargis Priory (1250) demands that nuns pledge obedience to God, the Blessed Virgin, their prioress and her successors, according to the Rule of St. Augustine and the institute of the Order, until death. The clothing of the sisters consisted of a white tunic and scapular, a leather belt, a black mantle, and a black veil. Candidates to profession were tested to reveal whether they were actually married women who had merely separated from their husbands.

ff. 4v-10, [Ordo for the benediction of the veil and vestments of novice nuns (Dominicans)], heading in red, *Ordine che si ha da tenir nella professione dele novizze e la benedictione del velo (inanti la professione) e vestimenti*; opening rubric, *Prima avanti nla messa il sacerdote benedica le sue vestimenta e il vello in questa forma*; first prayer, "Deus eternorum bonorum fidelissime..."; last rubric, *De mentre cantano la novizza vadi a dar la pace alle monache*; colophon added in purple ink: "Fr[ater] Thomas Carrara Ord[inis] Praed[icatorum] anno domini millesimo quingentesimo septuagesimo septimo mensis augusti. Haec omnia fieri curavit D. R. S. Helisabeth Scalza Patauina."

The veiling ritual also begins with Mass. This time, the novice enters flanked by two "paranymphs" (assistants or bridesmaids) with a candle in her left hand, a crucifix in her right. After several introductory prayers, the prioress bestows the vows onto the novice by means of the rite of *professio in manibus*, whereby the postulant places her hands in those of the prioress (on the *professio in manibus* practiced by the Order of the Preachers, see Thomas (1969)). The prioress then veils the novice to the accompaniment of hymns. The rite finishes here with the kiss of peace (*osculum*) given by the novice to all the other nuns, sealing the acceptance of the new recruit into the community of the order (f. 10).

f. 10v, blank.

A rare and nicely preserved Ordo with part of the ritual for the consecration of novices entering a community of Italian nuns, probably Dominicans, originally written for a single novice but adapted in 1577 for several novices by the interlinear additions of plural (and inversely some singular) forms. The additions were apparently made or ordered by Brother Thomas Carrara, a Dominican Friar, under the supervision of Sister Elizabeth Scalza from Padova. The surname "Scalza" means "discalced" (or "barefooted"), so one could be tempted to see in Sister Elizabeth a member of the Discalced Carmelite Order, also a mendicant order that followed the Dominican Rite. But this seems unlikely and it seems more reasonable to consider "Scalza" as a surname, much like "Carrara" in the case of the Dominican Friar.

This manuscript (a fragment of a larger codex) contains the Dominican rite of clothing for female novices, as part of the profession rite of Dominican Nuns. The profession formula ("Ego N. facio professionem et promitto obedientem Deo...") is not found here, since the present Ordo is concerned only with the first reception of novices, in particular the rite of clothing or vestition (blessing of the habit and the veil) to be followed after a period of probation by the actual rite of profession.

Although the present Ordo is not explicitly said to be for the use of Dominican nuns, the attentive reader will find a number of references to Saint Dominic, patron of the Order, as well as to the Virgin Mary, equally venerated by the Order. As an Order, the Dominicans believed that they were established through the good graces of Christ's mother (f. 3v: "Ora pro nobis beate pater Dominice"; f. 4: "...et beatissime virginis Marie et beati Dominici..."; f. 4: "Deus qui ecclesiam tuam beati Dominici confessoris tui..."), as well as the reference to the "Re[verenda] Madre Priora" (ff. 2 and 7v), the Mother Prioress of the Community. There is the presence of a "sacerdote" (in Italian, "priest") mentioned a few times (ff. 1, 1v, 4v, 7), but the major rites appear here to be administered by the Mother Prioress.

Traditionally, the ritual of consecration and benediction of virgins was an episcopal and papal prerogative, one that was usually not to be shared with ordinary priests, abbesses or prioresses (see Metz, 1954, p. 160). Such an Ordo would generally have been included in a Pontifical (*Pontificale*), which was the liturgical book containing the rites which could only be celebrated by a bishop. The rite was defined in the Roman Pontifical as "Ordo ad virginem benedicendam" or in Guillaume Durand's *Pontificale* under "De benedictione et consecratione virginum" (see the very complete study on the subject by Metz, 1954). However, it appears that the episcopal prerogative was often curtailed, and it was not uncommon for the ritual of benediction and consecration of virgins to be administered within the convent by an abbot or an abbess (or prioress, in the Dominican Order). In this case, the present fragment might have been part of a Monastic Ritual or Ceremonial. A *Rituale* (*Rituale*) is the liturgical book containing texts for several non-eucharistic and non-office liturgies, generally intended for presbyteral use and for other sacramental celebrations (e.g. baptism, matrimony, penance, anointing the sick...). Essentially, the Ritual can be construed as the priest's equivalent of the Pontifical. An example of a Monastic Ritual is provided by V. Leroquais, who describes a "Rituel à l'usage d'un abbé cistercien" [Rituel abbatial ou Pontifical à l'usage d'abbes], which contains an "Ordo ad monachum benedicendam ac etiam moniales..." (V. Leroquais, *Les pontificaux manuscrits*, II, p. 431; see also vol. I, pp. VIII-IX). Monastic Rituals for the use of Dominicans appear to be relatively rare, and the present fragment is all the more interesting with the description of the rite in the rubrics, to the exception of the prayers and hymns, entirely redacted in the vernacular.

Finally, the present document bears testimony to the permanence and enduring practice of decorated and illuminated manuscript production in Padua and the Veneto, which lasted well into the eighteenth century (see G. Baldissin Molli, "La tarda miniatura," in Mariani Canova, 1999, pp. 533-543). Further research in Northern Italian archives and library holdings will certainly reveal similar examples of Rituals and *Ordines* copied and decorated for use in convents, well after the invention of printing. In particular, one should signal the existence of similar ordination rituals for S. Sofia di Padova (Benedictine nuns), see Padova, Biblioteca civica, MS. BP/297-XII-XIII: *Ordo et modus induendi novitias... a[mo] 1600, 1611...*

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ONLINE RESOURCES

Liturgical manuscripts: Ordines, Statutes and Customs

<http://aedilis.irht.cnrs.fr/initiation-liturgie/coutumes.htm>

Rites and Sacraments

<http://aedilis.irht.cnrs.fr/initiation-liturgie/rites.htm>

Dominicans, The Order of Preachers

<http://www.dominicans.org/>

<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12354c.htm>

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