

SAINT BENEDICT, *Regula sancti Benedicti* and SAINT AUGUSTINE *Regula sancti Augustini episcopi*

In Latin, illuminated manuscript on parchment

Northern Italy (?), c. 1350-40, with 19th- or 20th-century added miniatures.

79 ff., plus an unfoliated back pastedown made from a fourteenth(?)-century Italian Choir Book with music on four-line red staves, foliated in modern pencil (the Rule of Benedict also foliated in medieval ink, but ignoring the table on ff. 6-8, and thus usually three behind the modern foliation), complete (collation: i⁴⁺¹, ii⁶, iii-vi⁸, vii¹⁰, viii⁸, ix⁴, x⁸, xi⁶; f. 1 is inserted, ff. 2-5 belong between ff. 8 and 9), catchwords, each text apparently written as a separate phase: both are written in brown ink in cursive gothic script, the Rule of Benedict with up to 23 long lines per page within frame-ruling (justification c. 115 x 65 mm.) ruled in brown pencil, rubrics in red, the Rule of Augustine written with 18 lines per page, without rubrics, on leaves ruled in hard-point; two full-page miniatures depicting St. Benedict (f. 1v) and St. Augustine (f. 65v), likely added in the 19th or perhaps 20th century, small initials in plain red sometimes with minor flourishes (the lower margins of ff. 8 and 65 cut away and repaired using medieval parchment, perhaps at the time of the present binding, with minor signs of use and ages-e.g. wormholes, see below-but generally in very good condition throughout). Bound in 19th-century burgundy velvet over pasteboards, each cover blind-stamped with a panel, the spine stamped with a title in gothic lettering "Regula / S[an]c[t]i / Bened[i]c[t]i", three rust-stains at the fore-edge of ff. 6-7 are evidence of the metal clasp-fittings of an earlier binding, when these leaves were in their correct position (some signs of wear, the velvet and the joints worn, some cords broken, but in sound condition). Dimensions c. 145 x 115 mm.

This charming, attractively written pocket-sized manuscript contains an extremely rare pairing of texts: the two greatest foundation documents of early Western monasticism. Monks were not allowed to own personal property such as books, and this suggests that the present manuscript was perhaps written for a wealthy layperson. Yet, there is clear evidence that a Benedictine monk or abbot owned the volume in the fifteenth century.

PROVENANCE

1. It is not clear what sort of person would have wanted the Rules both of St. Benedict and of St. Augustine (one would not normally expect a Benedictine monk to have wanted a copy of the Rule of Augustine, and vice versa) and indeed manuscripts containing both Rules appear to be exceptionally rare: the Schoenberg Database records only two examples, namely the present manuscript and a compilation of several texts, sold in 1719. The differences between the two texts (method of ruling, number of lines per page, foliation) suggest that the Rule of St. Benedict was written first, and the Rule of St. Augustine added soon thereafter in a very similar script.
2. In the fifteenth century the manuscript had a Benedictine owner, as shown by the wording of the title he added "Incipit prologus regule patrum meum Benedicti" (f. 2) as well as his note about following the Rule of Benedict: "Liber directus ad unumquemque abrenunciantem propriis voluptibus et Christo militantem a glorioso Christi famulo Benedicto. ..." (f. 8v).
3. In the 17th (or 16th?) century numerous biblical references were added in the margins of Chapter 4 (ff. 12v-14).

4. L'Art ancien, Zurich, *Catalogue 38: Manuskripte und Inkunabeln, Bücher des XVI. und XVIII. Jahrhunderts*, 17 June 1964, no. 261.
5. Harry and Virginia Walton Collection, Covington, Virginia, USA; bought c. 1964 (not recorded in Faye and Bond).

TEXT

ff. 6-8, which are out of sequence and belong at the beginning of the volume, contain a table of contents headed *Tabule Regule sancti Benedicti*, incipit "Prologus, Divisio, De generibus, Qualis debeat esse abbas ...", ending "De eo quod non omnis iusticie observacio in hac sit regula constituta. *Explicit tabula, sequitur Regula sancti Benedicti in sequenti folio*";

ff. 2-5v, 9-65, *The Rule of St. Benedict*: rubric *Prologus*, incipit, "Ausculta o fili precepta magistri ...", with three sections marked *Divisio*, followed by the chapters each with a rubric, the first being "De generibus monachorum. Monachorum quattuor esse genera manifestum est ...", ending "... tunc demum ad maiora que supra comemoravimus doctrine virtutumque culmina deo protegende pervenies. *Explicit*";

ff. 66-68, Tble of Cntents of the *Rule of St. Augustine*, "Incipit tabula regule sancti Augustini episcopi. Ut canonici in unum unanimes sive proprio et sub proposito habitent qui unicuique necessaria distribuat ... De legenda regula. Expliciunt capitula. Sequitur regula";

ff. 68-79, *The Rule of St. Augustine*, incipit, "Hec sunt que ut observetis precipimus in monasterio constituti ... orans ut sibi et debitum dimitatur et in temptationem non inducatur. *Explicit Regula sancti Augustini episcopi. Et finit xliiij capitula*".

St. Benedict of Nursia (c. 480-ca. 550) lived as a hermit in order to withdraw from the sins of the world, but a considerable number of followers congregated around him, so he founded twelve monasteries of twelve monks each and withdrew with a small number to Monte Cassino, where he developed his ideas for a reform of monasticism and composed his Rule c. 540. The Rule became the foundation of Western monasticism from that date onwards. Probably no other single text had such a profound effect on the lives of religious men and women in the Middle Ages: Benedict's Rule was the point of departure for the way of life of many of the other religious orders, even when those orders specifically chose to lead their lives according to guidelines different from Benedict's. Within the Benedictine order, the largest and most powerful religious order for several centuries, a chapter of the Rule was read to the monks each day in the monastic Chapter House (from which it derives its name), and thus every Benedictine monk would have learned the Rule by heart, and it guided every aspect of his life, including prayer, manual labor, and sleep.

The considerable wealth of some monasteries led them to become lax in their observance of the Rule, and caused groups of men and women to seek alternative structures for a religious lifestyle closer to the ideals of the earliest monks and hermits, notably the Cistercians from the very end of the eleventh century and the Franciscans and Dominicans in the thirteenth century.

The Rule of St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430), although written in the fifth century, did not have a wide influence until the late eleventh century, when it became the standard rule by which Canons Regular (secular, or non-monastic clerics) ordered their lives. But the sanity of the Rule of St. Augustine, its adaptability, and the repute of its author led to its adoption by a number of monastic bodies, both active and contemplative, including the Dominicans.

Ironically, the Rule of St. Benedict specifically forbade the ownership of books such as this. Chapter 33 begins: "The vice of personal ownership must by all means be cut out in the monastery by the very root, so that no one may presume to give or receive anything without the command of the Abbot; nor to have anything whatever as his own, neither a book, nor a writing tablet, nor a pen, nor anything else whatsoever . . ." In practice, there is evidence that monks were sometimes given the use of a book for their lifetime, and that it reverted to the monastery after their death.

ILLUSTRATION

f. 1v, St. Benedict (on an inserted leaf that does not share the wormholes in ff. 6 onwards, which would originally have been at the front of the volume);

f. 65v, St. Augustine (occupying the otherwise blank verso of a text leaf).

These physical features demonstrate that the miniatures must have been added some time after the book was written and first bound. Their style is difficult to parallel and their date and place of origin is therefore elusive. Their inspiration comes from Lombard illumination of the second quarter of the fifteenth century, such as work by Frater Jeronimus or the so-called Olivetan Master. Most likely, however, they are additions made in the nineteenth or even twentieth centuries intended to enhance the visual appearance of the manuscript.

LITERATURE

The literature on the Rules of Benedict and Augustine is vast. Most studies of monasticism, and of each order, will include a discussion of the Rule in the life of Benedictine monks and Augustinian canons. Among the most recent editions are:

St. Augustine, *The Rule of Saint Augustine*, with introduction and commentary by Tarsicius J. van Bavel, translated by Raymond Canning, London, 1984.

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ONLINE RESOURCES

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<http://www.osb.org/rb/index.html>

The *Rule* of St. Augustine, general information:

<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02079b.htm>

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