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GREGORIUS MAGNUS, *Dialogorum libri quattuor de vita et miraculis patrum italicorum et de aeternitate animarum* [Dialogues]

In Latin, illuminated manuscript on parchment
France, Paris, c. 1400-1425

211 ff., on parchment, preceded by 2 and followed by 3 ruled parchment flyleaves, ruled parchment pastedowns, missing 4 leaves respectively before f. 1 and after ff. 39, 81 and 145, mostly in quires of 8 (collation: i⁷ [8-1, missing i], ii-v⁸, vi⁷ [8-1, missing i], vii-x⁸, xi⁷ [8-1, missing iv], xii-xviii⁸, xix⁴, xx⁷ [8-1, missing i], xxi-xxviii⁸, xxviii⁴, xxix⁴ [this last quire ruled blank]), written in brown ink in a Gothic bookhand, on up to 23 long lines (justification: 120 x 68 mm.), parchment ruled in pink, some quire signatures, some catchwords, some capitals touched in yellow, rubrics in red, line-fillers in pink and blue with white tracery and burnished gold disks, 1-line high burnished gold initials on pink and blue grounds decorated with white tracery, 2-line high initials throughout in alternately pink or blue on burnished gold grounds with colored vine-leaf infill and extending marginal decoration of penwork sprays with gold bezants and colored floral or petal motifs. Bound in a 16th-century dark red velvet binding over woodboards, back sewn on 5 thongs, remnants of clasps (A few negligible stains, generally in very fine condition with wide margins, velvet worn, but nonetheless original velvet from the 16th c.).
Dimensions 195 x 130 mm.

Deluxe copy of a work that had a significant impact on the literature and spirituality of the Middle Ages. Gregory's *Dialogues* are very important as evidence for the unity of Mediterranean literary culture and relations between Eastern and Western Christendom. Once owned by the Duchess of Lorraine Philippe of Guelders, who spent the second half of her life in a Poor Clares convent, this manuscript is a touching reminder of the solace a woman of the world would find in books she either brought with her or was given once her vows pronounced.

PROVENANCE

1. Doubtless written and illuminated in France as suggested by the script and illumination. Although missing the opening leaves for each of the four books, this luxurious codex surely boasted beautiful illuminated frontispieces, judging from the quality and finesse of the extant decoration. Some comparisons can be found with the manuscripts produced in Paris during the first quarter of the 15th century, with similar border decoration (see for instance, the *Breviaire de Chateauroux*, illuminated in Paris, c. 1413, in [Exhibition] *Paris 1400*, 2007, no. 69; or the *Breviary of Louis de Guyenne*, painted by the Master of Bedford, c. 1413, in [Exhibition] *Paris 1400*, p. 277, fig. 77). Offsets are still visible (for example on f. 145v), confirming this manuscript once included elaborately illuminated frontispiece leaves introducing each of the

four Books of Gregory's *Dialogues*. It was most likely produced over a century before it was owned by Philippe of Guelders.

2. Owned by Philippe of Guelders, Duchess of Lorraine and Queen of Sicily, with inscription on verso of second ruled flyleaf: "A Seur Phelipe de Gheldres. Dialogues de St-Gregoire." Philippe of Guelders was born in Brussels in 1464 and died in 1547 in the convent of the Poor Clares at Pont-à-Mousson, where she was a nun from 1520 onwards (see C. de Merigot, *La vie de la serenissime Philippe de Gueldres...*, Pont-à-Mousson, 1627; J.-F. Henry, *Philippe de Gueldres, reine, duchesse et pauvre dame*, Briey, 1947). Philippe of Guelders was raised at the Flemish Court in the company of her cousin Mary of Burgundy, and later entrusted to her maternal uncle Pierre de Beaujeu, accompanying the wanderings of the French court with Anne de Beaujeu and Jeanne de France. Philippe of Guelders was known for her great beauty but also her profound piety and devotion. She married René II, Duke of Lorraine in 1485 (his second marriage, René died in 1508), to whom she bore 12 children, thus ensuring the succession of the Duchy of Lorraine. She was very active at the Court of Lorraine, called the "Good Queen" by her subjects, and was a patron to a number of religious foundations including the Poor Clares of Pont-à-Mousson, where she would eventually retire in 1519, pronouncing her vows in 1520. The ex-libris in the present book refers to her as "Seur" [Sister] so must date after 1520, and before 1547, the year of her death. Her funeral monument was sculpted by Ligier Richier and is now visible at the Church of the Cordeliers, in Nancy (On Philippe of Guelders, see G. Michaux, "Gueldre, Philippe de," in *Dictionnaire de biographie française*, 16, Paris, 1985, col. 1430-1431; see also *Études franciscaines* 51 (1939), pp. 5-22; 133-164; 267-286; 379-414). Compare her autograph signature reproduced in J. F. Henry, 1947, pl. p. 133: "Seur Philippe de Gheldres et pauvre ver de terre" with the present ex-libris inscription, clearly written by another more formal hand. Amongst the manuscripts commissioned for the Duchess, one should signal a *Vita Christi* copied and painted in 1506, with a miniature showing the Duke and Duchess flanked by their five sons (Lyons, Bibl. mun., MS 5125). For other manuscripts owned or commissioned by Philippe of Guelders and her husband René II of Lorraine, see Avril and Reynaud, 1993, pp. 278-279 (Master of Philippe de Gueldre); pp. 380-383 (we know that the Diurnal [Paris, BnF, lat. 10491] painted for René II de Lorraine was brought by Philippe of Guelders to Pont-à-Mousson); p. 387, again a Passional having belonged to Philippe de Guelders and subsequently bequeathed to the Poor Clares of Pont-à-Mousson; see also Gautier ed., 2009, pp. 330-331; 391-392; see finally Guillaume, 1852, pp. 373-411. The present manuscript is listed by l'Abbé Guillaume and is said to have already been missing its four frontispiece leaves with presumably its miniatures in 1852.

3. M. Barthélemy, 19th century private collector, who owned the manuscript in 1852, according to Guillaume, who confirms: "Il porte la suscription A Seur Phelippe de Gheldres...il est recouvert de velours cramoisi..." (Guillaume, 1852, pp. 384-385). We have not traced this owner.

4. European Private Collection.

TEXT

ff. 1-39v, Gregorius Magnus, *Dialogi Libri IV de vita et miraculis patrum Italicorum*, Book I, incipit, "[...] quod nulla nisi celestia cogitare..."; explicit, "[...] pedibus iter fecit. Aperte igitur [...]" (missing beginning and ending) [ed. A. de Vogüé, Paris, 1979, pp. 12-118];

ff. 40-81v, Gregorius Magnus, *Dialogi Libri IV de vita et miraculis patrum Italicorum*, Book II, incipit, "[...] [vo]luptati dedit. Sed dum in hac terra ad huc esset..."; explicit, "[...] dixit Si non abiero paraclitus non [...]" (missing beginning and ending) [ed. A. de Vogüé, Paris, 1979, pp.126-248];

ff. 82-145, Gregorius Magnus, *Dialogi Libri IV de vita et miraculis patrum Italicorum*, Book III, incipit, "[...] precessit memorie defuisse..."; explicit, "[...] in subsequenti hoc quarto volumine demonstrabo," followed by rubric, *Incipit liber quartus. Gregorius* (missing beginning) [ed. A. de Vogüé, Paris, 1979, pp.256-433];

ff. 145v-211, Gregorius Magnus, *Dialogi Libri IV de vita et miraculis patrum Italicorum*, Book IV, incipit, "[...] [-]terito experimentum tenent. Si enim pregnans mulier..."; explicit, "[...] si ante mortem deo hostia ipsi fuerimus," followed by rubric, *Explicit liber quartus dialogorum beati gregorii pape urbis rome* (missing beginning) [ed. A. de Vogüé, Paris, 1980, pp. 18-206].

Gregory I, pope from 590 to 604 and the last of the Latin Fathers of the Western Church, also known as Gregory the Great, was the first monk to be elevated to the papacy. A member of the Benedictine Order, St. Gregory exemplified the ideal that the pope should be the "servant of the servants of God" and he was the first to use this formula. He was a prolific writer, focused primarily on the practical and spiritual sides of Christianity.

This manuscript contains the *Dialogues* of Gregory the Great, a collection of miracle stories concerning mainly Italian saints. Sometimes referred to as "wild tales," the *Dialogues* are the subject of the most serious controversy in Gregorian studies with its authenticity seriously contested as early as the sixteenth century. The *Dialogues* present Gregory's teachings in a didactic question and answer format, with the use of anecdotes and saints' lives taken from the Lives of the Desert Fathers and other hagiographic sources. They are written in a style very different from the one adopted by Gregory in his sermons and exegetical works. In the *Dialogues*, Peter the Subdeacon is his interlocutor, and he complains that the world seems bereft of living saints. Gregory's answers set a portrait of holiness, presenting the quotidian virtues of Christian life: charity, obedience and discipline of the flesh. Books One and Three consider saints in Italy and its environs, while Book Two is devoted to the life of St Benedict. Book Four deals with theological issues: how can the soul live on after the body dies? Is there corporal fire in hell? Is there a cleansing fire after death?

Until not long ago, critics regarded the *Dialogues* as "an aberration of an otherwise noble mind" (see Petersen, 1984, pp. xv-xvi) and as essentially a popular work for less enlightened members of society (see J. Richards, 1980, pp. 261-262, who states that "the stories spoke plainly and simply, through their own experience to convert and teach the common man"). However, the problems of attribution and authenticity have since been sorted out and recent scholarship explains that the miracles emanated from Gregory's "inclination to view the world allegorically" (W. D. McCready, 1989, p. 5). For his *Dialogues*, Gregory was not so much interested in historical accuracy; instead it

was the spiritual significance of the miracles that really mattered to the author, with their intrinsic apologetic value.

In addition, much work has been devoted to Gregory's significance as a transitional figure between Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages and between Western and Eastern Christendom (see Petersen, 1984). Many of Gregory's sources were of Greek origin. The *Dialogues* were widely read in both the East and the West. The Greek translation of the *Dialogues* by Pope Zacharias (741-752) was so popular that Gregory became known in the East as "Gregory of the Dialogues" (Petersen, 1984, p. 191). The *Dialogues* were copied very frequently through the Middle Ages so that it is quite impossible to establish a *stemma* among the surviving manuscripts. There are a number of editions. While awaiting the critical text of the Corpus Christianorum, the best critical text remains that of A. de Vogüé (Paris, 1978-1980) who discusses the manuscript tradition in his authoritative Introduction (see also L. Castaldi, 2003). A good synthesis of the impact of Gregory's Life and Works, including his *Dialogues* is found in Straw, 1996 and color plates of early Romanesque codices are found in L. Ricci, *Gregorio Magno e l'invenzione del medioevo*, 2006, see in particular a copy of the very early *Dialogues* copied circa 747 in Bobbio (Ricci, 2006, pp. 78-81).

Gregory's Latin text was quickly translated into other languages. About a century and half after Gregory had completed the *Dialogues* in 593-594, Pope Zacharias (died 752) translated the work into Greek (see PL, 77, 149-430, in juxtaposition with the Latin text). At the behest of King Alfred the Great, the text was translated into Old English c. 891. In the twelfth century, a French translation was made in the vicinity of Liège, and in 1212 a canon from Oxford provided an Anglo-Norman verse translation. Italian, Dutch and German translation appeared in the later Middle Ages (see Claassens, in Bremmer ed., 2001, p. 208).

The present elegant, deluxe copy must have been copied for an important patron, not necessarily in a monastic environment. As mentioned above (see Provenance), the manuscript was passed on to the Duchess of Lorraine and Queen of Sicily Philippe of Guelders, who had not relinquished all worldly goods as she preserved a library in her new conventual dwelling: "Elle [Philippe de Gueldres] avait à son usage une bibliotheque ascétique dont les religieuses de Sainte Claire de Pont-à-Mousson conservèrent les volumes avec un soin extrême et une dévotion toute d'amour, d'admiration et de reconnaissance" (Guillaume, 1852, p. 379). A list of books having belonged to the Duchess-Queen was compiled by l'Abbé Guillaume in 1852, providing even the names of private owners of certain books that once owned by Philippe of Guelders. Guillaume describes in some detail three early imprints (*Le livre de la discipline d'amour divine* [Paris, 1519]; *Le livre de vraye et parfaicte oroison* [Paris, 1530]; *Le dialogue de consolation entre lame et roison* [Paris, F. Regnault] and some six manuscripts (including a copy of the previous printed *Dialogue de consolation*; Hours of Philippe of Guelders; a Missal; the French translation of the *Vitae Christi* (now in Lyons, BM; painted by the Master of Philippe of Guelders, see Avril and Reynaud, 1993, pp. 278-279)). Amongst these manuscripts, the present copy of Gregory's *Dialogues* is cited and described (see Guillaume, 1852, pp. 384-385; printed books and other manuscripts discussed pp. 380-399). Guillaume states that the manuscripts and books owned by Philippe of Guelders were dispersed at the Revolution (Guillaume, 1852, p. 400). Were the four illuminated excised leaves to resurface, we would have additional evidence for a better localization and dating of this codex. Even in its present condition,

it remains an eloquent witness to early fifteenth-century taste and refinement, as well as to the transmission of the work of Gregory the Great in the later Middle Ages.

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ONLINE RESOURCES

English translation of Gregory the Great,

http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/gregory_01_dialogues_book1.htm

On Gregory the Great

<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06780a.htm>

Digital article on Philippe de Gueldres and her books: Guillaume, 1852, pp. 373-411, with entry for the present manuscript on pp. 384-385:

<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k336735.r=.langF>