

## Noted Gradual

In Latin with French rubrics, decorated manuscript (stenciled)

on paper

France (Fricourt, diocese of Amiens), c. 1779

*ii (blue paper, i, lifted pastedown, now partially detached, leaving board uncovered, f. ii, crumpled) + 417 + ii (blue paper, ii=pastedown), pages on paper, apparently without watermark, original pagination now begins with p. 439 [pagination on the first leaf, now missing] – p. 453, 453 bis, 454-849, followed by three unnumbered leaves, page numbers are stenciled in black, top outer corner, complete (collation, i-x<sup>4</sup> xi<sup>3</sup> xii<sup>4</sup> xiii<sup>4</sup> xiv-xxxiii<sup>4</sup> xxxiv<sup>6</sup> [-5, cancelled following p. 699] xxxv-lii<sup>4</sup> liii<sup>3</sup>), stenciled horizontal catchwords, ruled with single full-length vertical bounding lines in lead, and with horizontal rules below the lines of text scored in blind (justification, 430-405 x 235 mm.), layout varies with up to eight lines of text corresponding to eight four-lines staves with square notation, text, running titles, page numbers, initials, and most of the decoration made with stencils, red running titles with page numbers in black, large stenciled initials in red and black, numerous initials stenciled in outline and decoratively filled, extensive stenciled decoration, including borders and initials, stencils of a vase, a spray of flowers and lions, major feasts begin with stenciled borders, large capitals in red and black, and large decorated initials (described below), generally in good condition apart from damage and staining at the beginning and end, f. 1, detached and missing the top, outer corner, with loss of the rubric and first line of text, and with damage in the outer margin, pp. 833-4 detached, first eight pages stained and with wear to outer corners, some staining throughout in lower margins and gutter, tears, usually in the lower margins, with repairs, pp. 441-2, 484-485, 490-1, and 506, last folios stained in all margins, pp. 854-855, worn at corners. Bound in its ORIGINAL BINDING of heavy wooden boards (about 10 mm. thick), originally covered with brown leather, tooled with a simple pattern of diagonally intersecting lines (visible on the lower board), with metal reinforcement on the upper and lower edges and outer corners, sewn on seven cords, which appear to be broken, and replaced by thin string or cord, edges dyed yellow, spine now partially uncovered, lower board, cover worn and scratched, upper board, most of the cover is missing, and the board itself is split, boards mostly detached. Dimensions 495 x 320 mm.*

This is an attractive example of a large-format Choir Gradual; its text, decoration, and probably musical notation were all executed using stencils. The use of stencils to produce complete books is a fascinating chapter in the history of the book, which flourished in France and Germany in the eighteenth century. This Gradual includes an account of the building of a chapel and the establishment of a confraternity in Fricourt, near Amiens, in 1777 and 1779, and it seems likely this volume was made for that chapel around that time on the eve of the French Revolution.

## PROVENANCE

1. This is the second volume of a Gradual; it begins on p. 437 with texts for the first Sunday after Easter; volume one would have included texts for the period from Advent through Easter. It is datable c. 1779, when the Confraternity of Notre Dame de Foy was established in Fricourt (diocese of Amiens), and most likely was made for the Chapel built in 1777 near the Village; the text on p. 736, for the Feast of the Visitation, 2 July, begins, "Principal fête des Confreres de la Ste. Vierge, établie en l'anné 1779 connüe en la paroisse de Fricourt depuis un tems Immemoriale sous le titre de NOTRE DAME de Foy," the passage continues, describing the foundation of a Chapel by Eugene le Sert

and Catherine le Sage, his wife, and the celebration of its first Mass on November 19, 1777 by M. le Roux, the curé of Fricourt, with M. Boullanger, the cure of Mametz, M. le Sage, curé of Lihons, and M. le Sert, curé of Moyencourt," concluding "Et pour secourir la grande devotion du people qui abondent de tous part il a été erigé une Confrerie sous le titre de N. D. de Foy." Included are a number of feasts celebrated in the diocese of Amiens; note the Decollation of John the Baptist, here among the feasts in the Temporal following the first Sunday after Easter, a custom in that diocese (elsewhere celebrated on 29 August), and St. Firmin, the first bishop of Amiens.

## 2. Private Collection, USA

### TEXT

pp. 437-693, Temporal with noted texts for the Mass and with the Epistle lessons, from the first Sunday after Easter until the twenty-fourth Sunday after Pentecost, the Decollation of St. John follows the first Sunday after Easter (pp. 443-442), other feasts included are the Priesthood of Jesus in October (p. 581), and the Sacred Heart of Jesus (p. 585); the first leaf is damaged, with loss of the heading and a few lines of text;

pp. 694-849, Sanctoral, from the Purification of the Virgin (2 February) to the Ember Days of December; includes the Annunciation (25 March), John the Baptist (24 June), St. Peter (29 June), Visitation (2 July), Dedication of a Church on the second Sunday in July, with octave, Assumption (15 August), Nativity of the Virgin (8 September), St. Firmin (p. 769), Ember days of September, Matthew (21 September), All Saints (1 November), Conception of the Virgin (8 December), and the Ember days of December (with a lengthy reading from Daniel 13:1-62);

pp. 850-855, "*Messe des Agonisans*" (Mass for the Dying).

### ILLUSTRATION

This is a very attractive volume, with thoughtfully laid out pages, and a restrained and handsome scheme of decoration in red and black. The most important feasts begin with impressive headings, usually using several sizes of text in red and black, with stenciled borders, and large initials, probably stenciled in outline, and then filled either by hand, or with decorative stenciled patterns: the hymns for these feasts also begin with larger decorated initials; see p. 437 (now damaged), first Sunday after Easter; p. 443, St. John; p. 478, Ascension, very elaborate with stencil border including half-length figures; p. 550, Trinity Sunday; p. 559, Corpus Christi; p. 590, fourth Sunday after Easter; p. 694, Purification; p. 706, Annunciation; p. 719, John the Baptist; p. 736, Visitation; p. 742, Dedication of a Church; p. 752, Assumption; p. 761, Nativity of Mary; p. 769, St. Firmin; p. 810, All Saints; p. 822, Ember Days, December; p. 850, *Messe des Agonisans*.

Decorative stencils are also used to fill space after a feast ending in the middle of the page, including a spray of flowers on pp. 453 and 741, and an urn with flowers on pp. 442, 477, and 589. A pair of rather whimsical stenciled lions appear three times: p. 530, two upright facing lions (comparable to lions rampant), p. 693, two lions, one on its back, and finally, p. 729, two lions, one biting the other's head off (following the feast of St. John!)

Choir books form a distinctive category of liturgical manuscripts. Most were copied in a very large format that enabled a group of singers to share one manuscript. This book is a Gradual, the

volume that contains the sung portions of the Mass, the Introit, Gradual, and Alleluia, all with musical notation of the type that dates back to the Middle Ages. This Gradual also includes the Epistle readings, not noted, but accented for public recitation.

At first glance, one might assume that this volume is a manuscript, and indeed, in format, layout, and general organization, it is a direct descendant of the liturgical Choir manuscripts copied in the later Middle Ages, and in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (and occasionally later). The script, however, although it is clearly not produced by type face, is also not written by hand, and it was in fact produced by a stencil. The stenciled letters can be recognized by the small breaks in the body of the letter (stencil-templates must avoid contiguous shapes that would cause them to fall apart). In this book, the text, musical notation (most likely), initials, and decorative borders are stenciled; the musical staves were probably drawn by a rake.

Stenciled liturgical manuscripts, most of them very large Choir books with musical notation like this one, are an extremely interesting artifact in the history of the book that flourished in France and Germany in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Gilles Filleau des Billettes composed an extensive account of the process for the "Description des Arts et Métiers" of the French Royal Academy of Science c. 1700; it was unpublished until it was used by Diderot in his Encyclopedia (Eric Kindel of the University of Reading, and Fred Smeijers reconstructed the stenciling apparatus and procedures described by Des Billettes; see Kindel 2003, p. 70, note 14). In his description he suggests the practice originated c. 1620-60. Another early historian of these books, Fischer van Waldheim, writing c. 1800, suggested that they were invented by a Trappist monk in 1674. The volume copied by a canon at Reims in 1680 is an early example; (see <http://ccfr.bnf.fr/portailccfr/jsp/>).

Most examples of these completely stenciled books date from the later half of the eighteenth century and the early years of the nineteenth century. The practice flourished in Germany in the monasteries around Mainz (see Schreiber 1927; Gottron 1938; Rodrigues 1973; and Rosenfeld 1973); the most famous practitioner was Thomas Bauer (d. c. 1780), who entered the Carthusian monastery in Mainz in c. 1720. Three books stenciled by him are now, Mainz, Stadtbibliothek II 137, 142 and 145 (Rodrigues 1973). Numerous stenciled books were also produced in France, although they have been less carefully studied (see O'Meara 1933). The earliest commercial makers of stencil letters were working in Paris in the 1780s, although there probably were others earlier. By the second quarter of the nineteenth century, this process was no longer used for liturgical books. In Germany the practice ceased when the monasteries were disbanded at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

It is hard not to be struck by the labor that was required to produce a volume like this Gradual. Would it not have been easier simply to copy the volume by hand? Eva Judd O'Meara asked William Addison Dwiggins, a modern stencil maker in the United States in the 1930s-50s, this question; Dwiggins's opinion was that stenciling was quicker than writing. Certainly the books produced by this method have their own striking aesthetic appeal.

It is difficult to judge how many stenciled choir books are still extant. Descriptions of these books often fail to recognize the process. There has been no attempt at a general census. Gotton (1938, listed below), identified forty examples in German institutions. O'Meara (1933, listed below) mentioned that there are probably "a score or more" in the Bibliothèque nationale de France; she listed a further fifteen or so probably examples in French municipal libraries.

Single leaves from stenciled choir books are not uncommonly offered for sale amidst the numerous manuscript leaves from late medieval and early modern Choir books offered by dealers. This volume, in contrast, offers the opportunity to acquire a complete stenciled volume, still in its original binding, and with an interesting provenance.

#### LITERATURE

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#### ONLINE RESOURCES

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<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04223a.htm>

Introduction to liturgical manuscripts

"Celebrating the Liturgy's Books"

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Eric Kindel, Reading University, staff profile, with bibliography of his articles on stencils  
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