

Ferial Psalter

In Latin, with additions in German, illuminated manuscript on parchment
Germany (Eastern, Diocese of Merseburg) c. 1300

i (paper) + 226 + *i* (paper) folios, ff. 1-222 folios on parchment, ff. 223-226, later paper folios, modern foliation in pencil, top, outer corner recto 1-48, 50*-159, 159bis*-226, earlier modern foliation every ten folios, top outer corner to f. 90, and then bottom outer corner (collation, *i*⁸ [-1, before f. 1, and -6 through 8, following f. 4, with loss of text] *ii*⁸ [+ one leaf before 1] *iii-xxvi*⁸ *xxvii*¹⁰ *xxviii*⁵ [original structure uncertain] *xxix*⁴ [added paper leaves]), no catchwords or signatures, ruled in ink with the top two and bottom two horizontal rules full across on most folios, single full-length vertical bounding lines (justification, 74 x 55-60 mm.), written below the top line in a gothic bookhand in eighteen long lines by at least two scribes with the second scribe beginning on f. 164, calendar in red and black with red or blue KL-monograms with contrasting pen decoration, one-line alternately red and blue initials within the text, three-line alternately red and blue initials with pen flourishes in the opposite color, three- to five-line fine gold initials, edged in black, infilled with pink with fine silver tracery on a lobed blue ground with white tracery following the shape of the initial, or infilled in blue on a pink ground, seven-line pink, blue and green historiated initial, f. 6, of King David, on a gold ground, one full-page miniature of the Crucifixion, f. 5v; original imperfections in the parchment, some with traces of sewing, for example f. 158, in very good, legible condition, but with signs of use throughout, miniature, f. 5v, and initial, f. 6, show some wear, parchment darkened and soiled, especially the opening leaves and in the lower margins, initial f. 135v, rubbed, text rubbed ff. 180, 185, and 189, f. 222v, text obscured by later repair, trimmed close to the text space with loss of pen flourishes in the outer and top margins, bound in a fine blind-tooled German binding, late sixteenth- or seventeenth-century, of pigskin over wooden boards, tooled with one design on both boards that wraps across the spine, with broad bands of lattice-work interspersed with small rosettes at the top and bottom, and two narrower bands with classical heads in profile in the middle, all bordered by triple fillets, rounded spine with three raised bands, two clasps, with tooled straps and brass clasps fastening from the back to metal fore-edge pegs, edges dyed red, small holes with rust stains, probably from an earlier binding, top and bottom margins, ff. 1-2, in excellent condition, with slight wear on the hinges. Dimensions 93 x 74 mm.

Psalters were one of the most important books for private devotion throughout the Middle Ages, and this was especially true in Germany and Austria. This small-format volume, which begins with a miniature of the Crucifixion, is a fine example of a manuscript from Eastern Germany. The calendar shows it was made for use in the diocese of Merseburg, and additions in the calendar suggest it was used soon after by a Nun from the famous Convent of Nonnberg in Salzburg.

PROVENANCE

1. The script, style of the illumination, the saints included in the calendar, and the Use of the Office of the Dead, all support a date for this manuscript in the later thirteenth century, perhaps as late as c. 1300, and an origin in Saxony in Eastern Germany. The manuscript was copied by two scribes; the first scribe used a very conservative gothic bookhand, avoiding letter unions, and abbreviating "et" (and) with both a tirionian "7" and an ampersand; the script of the second scribe, beginning on f. 164v, however, is more up-to-date, and is in keeping with a date at the end of the thirteenth century. A date at the end of the thirteenth century is further supported by the style of the pen decoration.

The saints in the calendar show that this manuscript was copied for use in the diocese of Merseburg in Eastern Germany (cf. the later example of a Merseburg calendar in Grotefend, vol. 2, pp. 121-125); especially Regulus (31 March), bishop of Senlis, usually April 23, with translation on 30 March, but observed on this date in Merseburg, Gerontius (9 May), not in Grotefend, but venerated in Merseburg, Lawrence (10 August), in red with octave, and Maurice, in red (22 September); the Cathedral in Merseburg is dedicated to John the Baptist and St. Lawrence; also included is Ludger (26 March), bishop of Munster, who founded an Abbey in Helmstedt.

The calendar is not very helpful in dating the manuscript, but it is worth mentioning that the manuscript includes a feast for Peter Martyr on 17 April. There is a feast of St. Peter, a deacon, observed on 17 April (included on this date in the Grotefend calendar), but the scribe of our manuscript clearly wrote Peter Martyr. Peter of Verona, or Peter Martyr, was canonized in 1253; his feast is celebrated on 29 April, which suggests our scribe may have been thinking of him, when he was entering the feasts for the other Peter on the 17th. The calendar lacks later feasts such as the Visitation (1389). The litany includes Elizabeth, probably St. Elizabeth of Thuringia, who was canonized in 1253.

Although the Saints included in the calendar indicate that the manuscript was made for someone in the diocese of Merseburg, the text of the Office of the Dead suggests that it is possible that it may have been copied and illuminated elsewhere in Saxony, perhaps in Magdeburg, which was an important center for manuscript illumination in the thirteenth century.

Merseburg held an important place in the history of the German church from the tenth century. The bishopric of Merseburg was founded in 968 by Otto I; around 135 of the Cathedral's books are still preserved in the Cathedral library (Krämer, vol. 2, pp. 573-576). The Benedictine Abbey of St. Peter in Merseburg was founded in 1091 (Cottineau, vol. 2, col. 1826), and was suppressed in 1544 (thirteen manuscripts from the Abbey identified in Krämer, vol. 2, pp. 572-3). However, there is no evidence that this manuscript was made for a monk from St. Peter's, or for someone associated with the Cathedral. Although we cannot know for certain, it is the type of small format, modestly illuminated volume that might have been made for a layperson or perhaps a Nun, a conjecture supported by the additions in the calendar, discussed below, and the notes in German added in the lower margins of ff. 7v, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 13, which explain the function of the Psalm. For example, on f. 8, Psalm 4, "Dissen salman zu deme nuen manen gote tzv eren"; f. 9, Psalm 5, "Dissen salman vor di sele der toten," and f. 13, Psalm 8, "Gottis gewalt vor den deme gutis ganst."

2. Belonged soon after to the Benedictine monastery for Nuns, Nonnberg, in Salzburg, Austria, as indicated by additions to the calendar: Erentrude, "domina nostra abbatisa" (4 September), and her relative, Rupert (24 September) also added to the calendar. Nonnberg was founded in the eighth century by Rupert, bishop of Worms; St. Erentrude

was the first abbess (ca. 650-718). Nonnberg was one of the most enduring and important foundations for Nuns in Austria.

3. Ownership inscription of Josef Wirner, 11 May 1897, f. 5.

TEXT

ff. 1-4v, Calendar, now beginning imperfectly with February, and lacking October-December, including Ludger (26 March), Regulus (31 March), Eufemia (13 April), Gerontius (9 May), Mary Magdalene, in red (27 July), Lawrence, in red, with octave (10 August), and Maurice, in red (22 September); additions include Erentrude (4 September) and Rupert (24 September);

ff. 6-194, Psalms 1-150 in biblical order; preceded by a full-page miniature of the Crucifixion on f. 5v [f. blank];

ff. 194-210, Gallican Canticles, as follows: Confitebor domino, Ego dixi in dimidio, Exultat vit cor meum, Cantemus domino gloriose, Domine audivi, Audite celi, Benedicte ominia opera dominum, Te Deum, Benedictus dominus deus, Magnificat anima, Nunc dimitis, and Quicumque vult (see Mearns. p. 80, this manuscript with Canticles 1-7, 11, 8-10, 15);

ff. 210-213v, Litany, Fabian and Sebastian, Denis and Maurice among the martyrs; Servatius, Benedict, Bernard and Augustine among the confessors; and Mary Magdalene, Mary of Egypt, Gertrude, "Wallurgis" (Walpurgis?), Scholastica and Elizabeth (of Thuringia?) among the Virgins;

ff. 214-221v, Office of the Dead with responsories to the lessons classified as Type 44 by Ottosen (see Ottosen, pp. 178-179, and 346-7), representing the major offices in eight German dioceses including Hildesheim, Magdeburg, Brandenburg, and Halberstadt, as well as Hamburg, Werden, Constance and a Danish diocese (see Ottosen, pp. 178-179, and 346-7);

ff. 221v-222v, added, s. XIV, Sequence, ending imperfectly, incipit, "Ave mundi spes maria, Ave matris, ave pia .." [text on f. 222v, damaged and obscured by later repair].

ff. 223v-225 [added paper leave, f. 223, blank] Later German notes, added in the seventeenth century, apparently discussing the liturgy [ff. 225v-226v, blank].

ILLUMINATION

The major divisions of the Psalms begin with five- to three-line polished gold initials infilled with pink with silver tracery on blue grounds with white tracery, or infilled with blue on pink grounds (some initials use both colors for the infilling or the ground). As was traditional in many Psalters, the illuminated initials in this manuscript mark the Psalms recited at Matins for each day of the week, beginning with Psalm 1, with an initial depicting King David on Sunday at Matins, and continuing with Psalm 26 on Monday, Psalm 38 on Tuesday, Psalm 52 on Wednesday, Psalm 68 on Thursday, Psalm 80 on Friday, and Psalm 97 on Saturday; there is also an initial at Psalm 109, said on Sunday at Vespers. The presence of illuminated initials at Psalm 51 and 101 reflects the older tradition of dividing the Psalter into three parts:

f. 39v, Psalms 26;
f. 62v, Psalm 38;
f. 78, Psalm 51;
f. 79, Psalm 52, 5-line initial;
f. 95v, Psalm 68;
f. 116v, Psalm 80;
f. 135v, Psalm 97, 5-line initial (rubbed);
f. 138, Psalm 101, 4-line initial;
f. 157, Psalm 109.

The first Psalm begins with a seven-line white-highlighted pink, blue and green historiated initial depicting King David, seated, holding his harp, dressed in green with a pink over-mantle; his hands are large, with very long fingers. Facing this page is a full-page miniature of the Crucifixion, flanked on either side by Mary and John on a gold background (most of the gold is rubbed away, revealing the yellow-gold under-pigment). Colors are vivid, with deep green, rose-pink, blue and deep red (red used for Mary's halo, contrasting with blue for Christ and pink for John). The draperies and faces of all the figures are finely crafted and emotive. Stylistically it can generally be compared to Munich, Clm 23094, an earlier Psalter from Magdeburg, dating around 1265 (Klemm, vol. one, pp. 262-266, no. 235, and fig. 664, and Büchler, p. 219, fig. 2).

The weekly recitation of the one hundred and fifty Psalms was the heart of the Divine Office said by members of religious orders, but the Psalms were also the center of devotion for the laity; this manuscript was owned early in its life by a Nun at Nonnberg in Salzburg, and it may originally have been made for a nun, or possibly a lay person. Psalters were the primary book for private, lay devotion before the thirteenth century. In the thirteenth century and later, their popularity was eclipsed by Books of Hours in many parts of Europe. In German-speaking countries, however, Psalters continued to be the primary book for the laity. This fashion can be seen in the earliest printed books; Paris was renowned for numerous editions of printed Books of Hours, whereas the German printers produced Psalters.

Included are a calendar, the 150 Psalms, Canticles and prayers, a Litany and the Office of the Dead; the Office of the Dead began as monastic services said the evening before and on the day of the funeral; they became pious devotions praying for the beloved dead in purgatory, as well as meditations on one's own death.

LITERATURE

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ONLINE RESOURCES

Introduction to liturgical manuscripts:

"Celebrating the Liturgy's Books":

<http://www.columbia.edu/itc/music/manuscripts/>

"Psalms," New Catholic Encyclopedia:

<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12533a.htm>

Monastic Matrix: A scholarly resource for the study of women's religious communities from 400 to 1600 c.e.:

<http://monasticmatrix.usc.edu/>

Nonnberg: <http://monasticmatrix.usc.edu/monasticon/index.php?function=detail&id=4979>

Nonnberg, Salzburg:

<http://www.sacred-destinations.com/austria/salzburg-nonnberg-convent.htm>

and

<http://www.benediktinerinnen.de/nonnberg.html>

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