

THOMAS A KEMPIS, *Imitatio Christi*, in Italian translation, here attributed to LORENZO GIUSTINIANI; Commentary on the Lord's Prayer in Italian; Easter Table
In Italian and Latin, illuminated manuscript on parchment
Northeastern Italy (Venice?), c. 1460-80

i (parchment) + 75 + ii (parchment) folios on parchment, modern foliation in pencil top outer corner recto including the first endleaf as f. 76, complete (collation, i-vii¹⁰ viii⁶ [-6, cancelled with no loss of text]), horizontal catchwords middle lower margin, very small leaf and quire signatures in quire two with a letter designating the quire and roman numerals the leaf, second leaf in quire five numbered with an Arabic numeral in pen, ruled in ink (horizontal rules) and lead (single full-length vertical bounding lines), prickings in the top margin on some folios for the vertical bounding lines, a few folios (see ff. 4 and 41-45v) also with a single pricking in the outer margin, considerable variation in the written space, ranging from 105 x 90 mm. on f. 3 to 125 x 87 mm. on f. 46, variation does not seem to be obviously linked to change of quire or scribes (most common justification, 115-113 x 88-85 mm.), written below the top line by as many as three scribes (new hands beginning at f. 48v and f. 67) in a very small running gothico-antiqua script (scribe one) with some cursive elements (scribe two), and in a small humanistic cursive script (scribe three) in thirty-three to thirty lines, majuscules within the text stroked with red, red rubrics and numbers within the chapter lists, alternately red and blue paragraph marks, two-line alternately red and blue initials with contrasting violet or red pen decoration ff. 1-20v (quires one and two), and red pen decoration for both color initials thereafter, initials, ff. 21v, 30, and 31v with drolleries, two five-line blue initials, ff. 25v and 57, with polished gold frames, following the shape of the initial, infilled and with very fine red pen decoration, on f. 25v, extending the full length of the page, TWO FINE ILLUMINATED INITIALS WITH BORDERS, f. 16v, five-line three-dimensional red initial on a diagonally-checked ground of gold, green, red, and blue, framed in blue, with lush orange and green acanthus extending from the initial full-length of the written space, ending with delicate ink tendrils in the upper and lower margins set with round flowers or buds with touches of red and green, green leaves and blue and gold disks, and f. 1, four-line gold initial filled in green on a dark red and blue ground with silver tracery, extending into a red bar border, full-length of the written space, ending with delicate ink tendrils set with similar motifs in the upper and lower margins, in fairly good condition, with text legible throughout, f. 1, darkened, with some stains, ff. 1-10, stained from damp in all four margins, ff. 61-end, stained in the three outer margins, otherwise most folios have slight stains in the top and bottom margins, ink powdering, ff. 15v-16, and 36, cockled. Bound in a modern pastiche binding in the style of 15th-century humanistic bindings by Roger Devauchelle (1915-1993) (signed inside back cover), blind-tooled brown leather over wooden boards, spine with three raised bands, and vellum label, "Imitatio christi," front and back boards with four small brass bosses, fastenings from waxed twine, closing back to front in excellent condition apart from warped boards, in modern decorative paper and leather case with "Thomas a Kempis, Imitatio Christi, MS c 1470, B.P.H.," lettered on spine in gilt. Dimensions 173 x 123 mm.

The *Imitation of Christ* is one of the most important literary expressions of the spirituality of the *Devotio moderna* – and one that is still widely read today. Although it was printed in thirteen editions in Italian from 1488 to 1530, manuscripts in Italian are much less common; this is the only copy listed in the Schoenberg Database. It occupies a critical place in the history of Reform movements in Italy, and its attribution to Lorenzo Giustiniani makes it a manuscript of fundamental importance to the history of the Italian translations.

PROVENANCE

1. Written in Northern Italy, c. 1460-1480, as indicated by the script and decoration; the opening rubric mentions Lorenzo Giustiniani as Patriarch of Venice, an office he held from 1451-1456; an origin in Venice is quite likely given the manuscript's mention of Lorenzo Giustiniani and its textual affiliation with a manuscript from Lorenzo's monastery, San Giorgio in Alga (see discussion of text, below).

The text includes occasional nota marks, and marginal corrections, ff. 11, 28v, 30 (boxed); the quality of the parchment, the two rather fine decorative illuminated initials, and the quality of the pen decoration, all suggest this was a fairly expensive, carefully produced manuscript, albeit not a luxurious one (and the variations in the layout and script suggest a greater concern with function than appearance). The two texts in Italian suggest that it was probably made for a devout layman or woman, perhaps someone who was associated with San Giorgio in Alga, but the early addition of the Easter table suggests that it may also have been owned early in its history by a cleric.

There is an erased inscription, f. 75v, after the text, which is illegible, but appears to be contemporary with the manuscript or slightly later; probably an ownership note.

2. Belonged to Acton Griscom (b. 1891) of High Point, New Jersey, his manuscript It. 42, who acquired it from Gilhofer and Ranschburg, cat. 218, c.1930, no. 246 (see De Ricci, 1935-40, volume 2, p. 1166, no. 25).
3. Sold at Sotheby's, 29 November 1990, lot 114.
4. Belonged to Joost R. Ritman (b. 1941), Amsterdam, the Dutch businessman and distinguished collector of art and books, who acquired it from Sotheby's in 1990; Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica MS 128; briefly described in *Medieval Manuscripts in Dutch Collections* (see Online Resources); pencil notes, inside back cover; the manuscript was bound in eighteenth- or early nineteenth-century vellum when it was sold by Sotheby's in 1990, and was rebound while owned by Ritman.

TEXT

ff. 1-71v, *Incomenza lo libro de la imitatione de Christo composto per lo devoto homo miser Laurentio Iustiniano patriarcha venetiano, e prima del contempto de tutte le vanitate. Capitulo primo*, [chapter list] incipit, "Como se dovenio tenere humili fra nuy medesimi ..."; f. 1, *Incipit liber de imitatione christi et contemptu omnium vanitatum mundi capitulo primi*, [text], incipit, "Qhi [sic] seguita mi non ambula ne le tenebre dice lo signore. Queste sono parole de Christo ..."; f. 16v, *Incomenza lo libro secundo e prima dela interna conuersatione*, [chapter list], incipit, "Como douero sometere ..."; [text], incipit, "Lo regno de dio e in nuy dice lo signore ..."; f. 24v, *Incomenza lo libro 3 al nome de dio e prima dela interna consolatione che ha lanima fidele sposa de christo*, [chapter list] incipit, "Como la uerita per la deutro ..."; f. 26, [text] *Incomenza lo libro terzo e prima dela interna consolatione che ha lanima fidele sposa de christo*, incipit, "Al diro quillo che per la ..."; f. 57, *Incomenza lo quarto e primo pone una deuota exhoratione a la sacra commuionione del pretiosa corpo de christo*, [text] incipit, "Venite tutti a noe ... dite mirabile et ineffabile." *Finis*;

Thomas a Kempis, *Imitatio Christi* in Italian translation, here attributed to Lorenzo Giustiniani; four Italian translations of the text are discussed in Puyol, 1898, pp. 445-461; the manuscript described here is related to an unpublished translation he describes as "Padovano," known to

him in one manuscript, Padua, Bibl. Univ., MS 811, from San Giorgio in Venice (see Puyol, 451-452); the Padua manuscript does not attribute the translation to St. Lorenzo Giustiniani. A study of the text of these two manuscripts, and their relationship to the transmission of the Latin text of the *Imitatio* in Venice, as well as the other Italian translations of the *Imitatio* is needed, especially given the importance of Lorenzo Giustiniani and his monastery of San Giorgio in Alga to the history of the Modern Devotion in Italy. The link between these two manuscripts was first pointed out in the Sotheby's description in 1990, but it does not seem to have been the subject of further scholarly discussion.

The first Italian translation of the *Imitatio* was printed in Venice in 1488 (GW M46878), and it was printed in twelve subsequent editions from 1488-1530 (six in Venice, two in Milan, and five in Florence, GW M46765, M46855, M46857, M46859 - 46861, M46865, M46857, M46869, M46870, M46874, M46881). None of these editions repeat the attribution to Lorenzo Giustiniani, and none appear to include this translation.

The Latin text was edited by Pohl, 1904, and Lupo, 1982; Delaissé, 1956, is a diplomatic edition of Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale, MS 5855-61, copied by Thomas a Kempis in 1441, which includes the *Imitatio christi*, as well as other texts by Thomas. Manuscripts of the *Imitatio* vary in terms of which books they include, and their order. The earliest dated copy of book one was copied in 1424; all four books can be found in a dated manuscript from 1427, but there was certainly considerable variability, especially in the early manuscripts, and in different regions (English copies, for example, often include only books 1-3). Compared with the usual printed texts including Pohl's edition, the Brussels autograph of 1441 includes four books, arranged book 1, 2, 4, 3. The four books in this translation found are arranged in the order usually found in the Latin printed editions (1, 2, 3, 4).

The surviving manuscripts are surveyed in Axters, 1971, although estimates on the total number have grown since that time; scholars now speak of the text surviving in between 800 and 900 manuscripts and one hundred early printed editions (Van Engen, 2008, p. 9). At least 639 editions were published between 1500 and 1650 in a wide variety of languages, making it the most frequently printed and translated book in that period apart from Bible (Von Hapsburg, 2011, p. 1; he includes a Short Title Catalogue of editions up to 1650 in his appendix).

ff. 71v-73, *In comenza la espositione del pater noster ne la quale se contiene li 7 doni de lo spirito sancto contra li 7 peccati mortali*, incipit, "Pater noster qui es in celis sanctificetur nomen tuum. Cio<r?> nostre a dire signor ... la sancta trinitade laudata e benedeta senza fine. Amen. De cio dise Christo ne lo evangelio beati pacifici q[ua]m filii vocabuntur" [Ends top f. 73, col. b; ff. 73v-75, blank];

Text in Italian on the Pater Noster, the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit and the seven deadly sins.

f. 75v, [Easter Table in Latin, presumably added on a leaf originally left blank], <opening words erased> *constitutione tabule in reperiendo diem pascem resurrectionis* <erasure> XVII, incipit, "Cum sit quod duo sint termini diei per scalis quorum brevior est in xxii marcii qui est xi kalendis aprilis ... linea descendendo vt inferiis continetur"; "Summe aureum numerum ... omnia predicta festa mobilia. Finis."

Three short paragraphs; probably added on a leaf left blank at the end of the volume, but copied in a fifteenth-century script.

The *Imitatio christi* was translated into the vernacular from an early date; there are eighty surviving manuscripts in Dutch, and thirty-two in German; at least three different French translations were made, by David Aubert for Philip the Good in 1447, for Margaret of York, and for Louise de Savoie in 1490. To my knowledge there is no census of the surviving manuscripts in Italian, or a modern scholarly survey of the Italian translations (Von Hapsburg, 2011, focuses on French and English translations). As outlined above, Pohl identified four different versions, and the *Imitatio* was printed, in both Italian and Latin, many times in the fifteenth century in Italy.

The question of to what extent we can speak of the *Devotio moderna* in Italy is debatable (see Favreau-Lilie, 2004, Picasso, 1999, Petrocchi, 1961, and Rando, 2004), but it is certainly true that similar ideals were current in the reform movement in Venice in the first half of the fifteenth century, featuring prominent figures such as Antonio Correr (1369-1445); Gabriele Condulmer (1369-1447), who became Pope Eugenius IV in 1431; Ludovico Barbo (1381-1443), who served as bishop of Treviso, 1437-43; and St. Lorenzo Giustiniani (1381-1456). Inspired by the Dominican reformer, Giovanni Dominici (1356-1419) and eager to live a more devout and ascetic spiritual life in common modeled on the life of the apostles, they settled at San Giorgio in Alga, the first foundation in the order ultimately recognized as the secular canons of San Giorgio in Alga. Their life there was very reminiscent of the lives of the canons associated with the Modern Devotion in the Netherlands. Ludovico Barbo, who was the commendatory abbot of S. Giorgio and who went on to become abbot of the monastery of St. Justina in Padua and a leading figure in the reform of the Benedictine order, is associated with the dissemination of the *Imitatio christi* in Italy.

St. Lorenzo Giustiniani (1381-1456), that is, Lawrence Justinian, in an Anglicized form of his name occasionally used, was a member of one of the most distinguished families in Venice; his brother Leonardo was a prominent humanist. Lorenzo was brought up by pious parents, and at the age of nineteen a vision prompted him to enter the religious life, ultimately entering the monastery of San Giorgio in Alga (St. George in Alga) probably around 1403. He was instrumental in the reform of the house, and the Congregation of secular canons of San Giorgio in Alga was recognized by the Pope in 1404. Throughout his life, as a religious, and later as Bishop of Castello from 1433 and then Patriarch of Venice from 1451-6, he was known for his fervent espousal of humility, chastity, and absolute poverty. In addition to his legacy of sanctity, charity, and humility, he left a number of books including *De gradibus perfectionis*, *De institutione et regimine praelatorum*, the *Fasciculus amoris in coena domini*, and other works that show the influence of Richard of St. Victor and the *Devotio Moderna*. Whether he can also be credited with this Italian translation of the *Imitatio christi*, is a matter for further research.

The *Imitatio Christi* ("The Imitation of Christ") has been called "the most influential devotional book in Western Christian History" (Van Engen, 1988, p. 8), and it has been the subject of countless scholarly works, many of which have been concerned with the lively and enduring debate about the identity of its author. It has been ascribed to a very long list of authors including, among many others, Augustine, Bernard, Bonaventure, Jean Gerson, Chancellor of Paris (d. 1429), and to a presumed Italian Abbot, "John Gersen," and to Geert Grote (1340-1384) himself. Delaissé's critical study, published in 1956, of the Brussels manuscript (MS

5855-61) that was signed and dated by Thomas a Kempis in 1441, was key to convincing most scholars that it was by Thomas, and he is widely accepted as the author today.

Thomas a Kempis (1379/80-1471), or Thomas of Kempen, born in Kempen, Germany, was part of the second generation of the *Devotio Moderna* after Geert Grote, the founder of this religious movement. He was educated in a school of the Brothers of the Common Life in Grote's native Deventer, Holland, and then became a canon at the Agnietenberg Priory (Mount Saint Agnes), near Zwolle, a priory of the Congregation of Windesheim, where his brother John served as prior. He made his profession there in 1406 and was ordained in 1413. He was a prolific author, composing numerous devotional tracts, as well as a Chronicle of the priory.

The *Imitation* is a collection of hundreds of spiritual sayings, inspired by the practice encouraged by Groote and his followers of recording notable sayings in commonplace books, or *rapiaria*, to serve as a focus for spiritual reflection. Each of its four books originally circulated as independent booklets ("Useful Reminders for the Spiritual Life," "Suggestions Drawing One toward the Inward Life," "On Inner Solace," and "The Book of the Sacrament" [that is, Holy Communion]), and as noted above, manuscript copies of the *Imitation* often vary in the number of books they include, and in their order. There are at least thirty early copies dating c.1424-1441, many with only one of its four books. The oldest copy with all four books dates from 1427 (Brussels, Royal Library, MS 22084).

In this work, Thomas encapsulated the spirituality of the *Devotio moderna*, or the New Devout, especially their emphatic emphasis on Christ, the importance of the Bible, the recommendation of the use of the vernacular for religious writings, and their focus on the interior life and a calm withdrawal from the world. The importance of the Bible, especially the Gospels, is found throughout the *Imitation*, since hearing and reading the Bible in the right spirit is central to a desire to follow Christ (Book one, chapter five). The degree to which Thomas himself internalized the Bible is found in the astounding number of scriptural citations found throughout the work; Becker, 2002, lists 3,815 scriptural sources in the *Imitation*.

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Canons regular of San Giorgio in Alga

[http://www.augustiniancanons.org/About/houses_and_congregations_through_copy\(1\).htm#Alga](http://www.augustiniancanons.org/About/houses_and_congregations_through_copy(1).htm#Alga)

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