

## Office of the Dead; Processional (Use of the Dominican Nuns of Poissy)

In Latin, illuminated manuscript on parchment

France (Poissy), c. 1500

145 ff., preceded and followed by a single paper flyleaf, missing at least a quire between ff. 34-35 (collation: i<sup>2</sup>, ii-viii<sup>8</sup>, ix<sup>9</sup> [10-1, with x cancelled], x-xii<sup>8</sup>, xiii<sup>2</sup>, xiv-xvi<sup>8</sup>, xvii<sup>2</sup>, xviii<sup>8</sup>, xix<sup>6</sup>, xx<sup>2</sup>, xxi<sup>2</sup>), a few catchwords (e.g. f. 10), quire numbers in the inner margin, perceptible and partly caught in the stitching, written below the top line in brown ink in a conservative gothic bookhand on up to 24 long lines, red four-line staves and square music notation, ruled in red ink (justification 117 x 69 mm.), majuscules within text struck in pale yellow, red rubrics, one-line burnished gold or painted blue initials with contrasting filigree decoration in dark blue or red ink, line fillers in burnished gold and blue, 1- to 4-line high initials in blue or pink with white tracery and floral or vine leaf infill, on gold grounds, some coupled with descending baguettes in blue and white ending with burnished gold leaves and colored vine leaves, larger cadels in brown ink on pale grounds of pink and/or yellow wash, some with a few anthropomorphic features, 1 historiated initial (f. 3) painted blue and highlighted in white tracery on a burnished gold ground, illuminated full borders on ff. 3 and 34v of gold and blue baguettes and scrolling rinceaux with colored and burnished gold vine leaves, a bird in the outer margin of f. 3, painted arms in the lower border of f. 3 (opening leaf). Bound in a late 17<sup>th</sup> or early 18<sup>th</sup> century French binding à la "Du Seuil," black morocco gilt, covers with double frame of triple fillets with gilt fleurons at outer angles of inner frame, spine richly gilt in compartments, gilt turn-ins, edges gilt, marbled pastedowns and endleaves (Boards very lightly scuffed, a small wormhole on the upper cover, overall in very good condition). Dimensions 190 x 130 mm.

This elegant portable Processional was copied at the Royal Abbey of Poissy, founded by Phillip IV in 1304 in honor of his grandfather, St. Louis, King of France. Joan Naughton, in her study of the manuscripts of the Abbey identified twenty-seven Processionals from Poissy and the count has now reached some thirty-one Processionals. This Processional is unrecorded and is of interest because it contains a historiated initial at the opening of the Office of the Dead, as well as the arms of the first owner, likely a sister or a patron of the Abbey.

### PROVENANCE

1. Made for the celebrated Dominican convent of the Nuns of St. Louis de Poissy, perhaps copied in the abbey itself or in nearby Paris for use in the Abbey, in the last quarter of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The convent was closely associated with the royal family for several centuries, and it was the site of the "Colloque de Poissy," an unsuccessful attempt at the reconciliation of Catholics and Huguenots in 1561. For the most recent and complete history of Poissy, see S. Moreau-Rendu (1968).

The codex includes processions for St. Dominic, St. Louis (the patron of the Abbey), as well as Corpus Christi, the Birth of the Virgin, and John the Baptist; the latter two Processions were unique to Poissy. Also noteworthy and found in Poissy Processionals is the Cleansing of the altars of the convent (ff. 48v-49). Although many of the rubrics and liturgical directions are provided in masculine

form, there are rubrics that specifically refer to female nuns (*sorores*), for instance in the rubrics found on ff. 48-48v. Also a rubric introduces the chants to be sung *In professione sororum* [For the profession of faith of sisters] (f. 97). The Office of the Dead which precedes the Processional is specifically for Dominican use.

The script and decoration in this Processional are deliberately conservative in style and would suggest an earlier mid-century date. However, the cadels high-lighted in pale wash colors coupled with the persistence of very conservative script and ornamentation well into the 16<sup>th</sup> century tend to confirm that we are in fact in the presence of a manuscript copied towards the very end of the 15<sup>th</sup> and more likely during the first decade of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The style of the historiated initial and the garb of the female figure would tend indeed to place the manuscript towards the early 16<sup>th</sup> century.

Unidentified arms painted in the lower margin of f. 3, probably those of the first owner: *D'azur, à la croix engreslée d'or, cantonnée de quatre oiseaux (corneilles ?) de sable*. An inscription in French erroneously attributes the arms to a certain "François de Brugière": "Manuscrit sur vélin, écrit en rouge et en noir; lettre initiale en or et en couleur; la première miniature représente Job sur le fumier. Au bas du premier feuillet se voient les armes de François de Brugière, secrétaire du roi." Indeed the Brugière family is listed in Rietstap, *Armorial général*, vol. 1: *D'azur à la croix denchée d'or, cantonnée de quatre aigles de même*. The arms in our manuscript do not correspond with those in the Rietstap description, and thus a member of the Brugière family cannot be the original patron of this manuscript.

First owners of Poissy processionals frequently personalized their copy by having their heraldic arms painted in the border decoration as noted by J. Naughton (1999/2000, p. 171). Each nun owned a Processional, hence the large number of exemplars that have survived.

## 2. European Private Collection.

### TEXT

ff. 1-2v, Added prefatory leaves (added in the late 17<sup>th</sup> c.?), with noted responsories, versicles and antiphons [these and those on ff. 144-145v are placed here almost as flyleaves];

ff. 3-34, Office of the Dead, Dominican Use (see Knud Ottosen, *The Responsories and Versicles of the Latin Office of the Dead* [Aarhus, 1993] 108-109, and 239-242), with noted responses, versicles, and Psalms;

ff. 34v-35, Seven Penitential Psalms [wanting ending], rubric, *Secuntur septem psalmi penitentiales*;

ff. 35-97v, Noted Processional [wanting beginning], beginning with rubric, *Postea aspergatur aqua benedicta*, followed by rubric, *In processione antiphona*, and including Blessing of the ashes (f. 39v); Palm Sunday (f. 42v); rubric, *Feria quinta in cena domini...due sorores ante gradus altare...* (f. 48); Feast of the Cleansing of the altars of Poissy, rubric, *Ordo altarium abluendorum* (f. 49); Dominic and Peter (f. 59), Louis (f. 49v, f. 90); John the Baptist (f. 60v); Corpus Christi (f. 81v); Nativity of John the Baptist (f. 83v); Dominic (f. 85v); Nativity of Mary (f. 92); f. 94, rubric, *In solenni receptione conventus dicatur de beata virgine...*; f. 94v, rubric, *In receptione legatorum et prelatorum*; f. 95v, rubric, *In receptione secularium principum*; f. 97, rubric, *In professione sororum*;

f. 97v-101v, *Missa temporis pestis*; followed by Mass for Saint Dominic, rubric, *De sancto Dominico*;

ff. 102-112, Services to the sick, with long rubric beginning, *Ad communicandum infirmum vadat prelatus vel ille cui invenerit indutus camisia et super pellico cum stola...* [masculine forms given: "Cum frater morti penitus..." (f. 111)];

ff. 112-114v, Kyrie and Litany, including Dominic (listed twice, f. 113), Louis (f. 113); explicit, "Finita letania si adhuc vixerit dicant fratres septem psalmi penitenciales..." [again masculine forms];

ff. 114v-142v, Services for the dead and burial, beginning with rubric, *Sequitur commendationis officium*;

f. 143, Added leaf (early 16<sup>th</sup> c. hand), begins imperfectly: "[...] filium dei accedamus cum fiducia ad thronum fiducie..."

f. 143v, blank;

ff. 144-145v, Added later leaves (late 17<sup>th</sup> c.?), with noted responsories, versicles and antiphons.

This manuscript contains an Office of the Dead, a Processional and the Services to the ailing, the dead and for burial, following the use of the Dominican nuns at Poissy. The Poissy Processionals, which contain the texts and chants necessary for liturgical processions, and the texts that often accompany them (Horae, Office of the Dead, various prayers), have been well studied and recorded, but the list increases as unknown manuscripts resurface, such as the present manuscript. In her studies of Poissy Processionals from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries, J. Naughton (1998 and 1999/2000) identified 27 processionals, and to this list, M. Huglo (1999 and 2004) reaches a count of some 31 processionals (of a group of circa 80 codices associated with Poissy). We have catalogued recently on [www.textmanuscripts.com](http://www.textmanuscripts.com) a rare illustrated fourteenth century codex (TM 524), and further codices have appeared on the market.

The Royal Abbey of Poissy was founded by Phillip IV in 1304 in honor of his grandfather, St. Louis, King of France on the Seine outside of Paris. It was a prestigious house, restricted by its foundation charter to women of noble blood, which maintained close relationships to the royal family. Numerous manuscripts associated with the monastery survive, dating from the fourteenth through the sixteenth century, sometimes illuminated. Most of these were small, portable books, appropriate for the use of a particular nun, often Processionals that accompanied each nun in the liturgical processions central to monastic life. As J. Naughton has observed, Books of Hours from Poissy are uncommon. Thus in many cases the small Processionals from the Abbey, such as the present manuscript, seem to have been the functional equivalent of Books of Hours for the nuns: personal books that included not only the texts necessary for liturgical Processions and the Rites associated with death and burial, but also texts for personal devotion and the Mass.

The text of the Processional leaves little doubt that it was made at Poissy, and it reflects in-house liturgical practices: in addition to Dominic and Louis (the patron of Poissy), our manuscript includes a procession for the feast of Corpus Christi, generally observed in the Dominican Order from c. 1324, as well as the processional offices for the feast of John the Baptist and the Birth of the Virgin, which date from the fifteenth century. Also included are rubrics that explicitly refer to the *sorores* (sisters) of Poissy, specifying where they are to walk or stand before various altars in the chapel and monastic buildings. Also proper to Poissy liturgy is the processional office for the cleansing or washing of the altars of the Abbey (f. 49) and the offices for the reception of ambassadors (f. 94v) and secular princes (f. 95v).

As Naughton rightly stresses, generally one notes the absence of what she terms "expansive pictorial content" in Poissy manuscripts which contain few miniatures and historiated initials, unlike other famous Dominican codices. The emphasis in the Poissy group of manuscripts is placed on the liturgy, not on the images. These books were used for the "daily duties to be performed in the choir, namely to sing correctly, loudly and clearly the Dominican liturgy..." (J. Naughton, 1998, p. 89). The Processionals of Poissy were "functional tools" rather than deluxe possessions, used every day or during cloistral processions on special Feast days by nuns and female cantors in the choir. In this sense, this manuscript is typical of Poissy Processionals, although the first quire of the Processional is missing and might have been illustrated. Progressively in the fifteenth century, illustrations and pictorial cycles appeared more frequently, as discussed by Naughton (1999/2000).

## ILLUSTRATION

f. 3, historiated initial "D," Job on the dungheap, mocked by his wife, one his sons in the background, dimensions 38 x 41 mm.

The Office of the Dead placed at the start of this codex opens with a historiated initial. Illustration in Poissy processionals is not common, as most processionals are devoid of any figurative elements, allowing for only decorative elements. In the present case, it is not the Processional per se which is illustrated, but rather the preceding Office of the Dead. The fact that this manuscript contained at least one historiated initial (perhaps there was another at the start of the notated processional, there is a missing quire at the beginning of the processional) suggests that the codex was likely commissioned for an important patron of the convent or sister. Identification of the arms would of course reveal the original patron.

The style of the historiated initial is not easy to define. It appears to be Parisian, and the face of the Job's mocking wife loosely recalls the style of the Master of the Très Petites Heures d'Anne de Bretagne (Jean d'Ypres ? active 1490-1508) or rather his workshop and numerous followers. On the Master of the Très Petites Heures d'Anne de Bretagne and his workshop, see Exhibition catalog, *France 1500* (2010), pp. 243-249: recent research has suggested that Jean d'Ypres was one of the sons of Colin d'Amiens (alias Nicolas d'Ypres); see Avril and Reynaud, 1993, pp. 265-270; Exh. cat. *France 1500*, 2010, p. 220 which discusses the "Style d'Ypres" adopted by a number of Parisian artists. On a small Book of Hours attributed to the Master, see R. Watson, *Victoria and Albert Museum. Western Illuminated Manuscripts*, vol. I, no. 66.

The dress of the woman clearly adopts a fashion current around 1500, close in style to the dresses depicted by Parisian artists in the first decade of the sixteenth century such as Jean Pichore (see his female figures in a Petrarch, Paris, BnF, MS fr. 225, repr. Avril and Reynaud, 1993, p. 415, dated circa 1503). See also similar dresses in manuscripts attributed to other Parisian masters such as the Master of Philippe de Gueldre, such as the female figures in a *Danse macabre*, repr. Avril and Reynaud, 1993, p. 280, also datable to the first decade of the sixteenth century.

## LITERATURE

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## ONLINE RESOURCES

Introduction to liturgical manuscripts: "Celebrating the Liturgy's Books"

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

General Introduction to liturgical processions (New Catholic Encyclopedia, "Processions")

<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12446b>

Joan Naughton, "The Poissy Antiphony in its Royal Monastic Milieu," *La Trobe Library Journal* 51 and 52 (1993); with digitized images of the historiated initials

<http://nishi.slv.vic.gov.au/latrobejournal/issue/latrobe-51-52/t1-g-t6.html>

TM 626