Cistercian Portable Breviary (ca. 1250)
produced in a Benedictine environment,
and used probably by monks who had to
develop activities out of their monastery

Cistercian Portable Breviary, produced in central Europe (probably Germany), ca. 1250, written in Latin, 257 ff. (50 x 70 mm). The volume is virtually complete and in good state of conservation. Some of the original folios were replaced in the 15th century, especially at the beginning and end of the codex. The writing area, from ca. 35 x 50 mm, is dry-point ruled and initialled in red and blue. Headings at the beginning of paragraphs or relevant sections of the text are highlighted in red. Its binding, in calfskin and on wooden boards, is probably from the 15th century, and its guard sheets are reinforced with fragments of parchment that contain texts from a 14th-century ecclesiastic cartulary. The closing leather band and the volume's latch are lost.]

This portable breviary was produced in a Benedictine environment, in a monastery of the Cistercian branch, in the mid-13th century, probably in Germany. It would have been used regularly until the beginning of the 16th century when this type of work began to fall into disuse. Composed of 257 folios (ca. 50 x 70 mm), it is written in Latin in Gothic script, in black (now brown) and red. The writing area is approximately 50 x 35 mm, and dry-point ruling was used to lay out the pages throughout the volume. Capital letters are highlighted in red and blue. It was bound in the 15th century on wooden boards covered in parchment and, on its spine, is labelled with the number "346", surely an indicator of the codex's order number in a (non-identified) collection of which it was part during the 18th or 19th centuries. Some additional folios were added, apparently, in the 15th century.

A breviary (a word derived from the Latin *breviarium*, namely *summary* or *compendium*) is a liturgical book used especially in the Catholic sphere to say prayers at certain times of the day. This type of volumes had great prominence in daily monastic life, since they were used at seven very precise times of day: *laudes*/lauds (dawn), *prima*/prime (sunrise), *tertia*/terce (mid-morning), *sexta*/sext (midday), *nona*/none (mid-afternoon), *visperas*/vespers (sunset), *completas*/compline (rest).

The structure of breviaries is not fixed, and their use or function varied from region to region. Typically, breviaries contain psalms, passages and brief interpretations of the scriptures, texts by the Fathers of the Church, specific prayers for Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter and Pentecost,

Phone / WhatsApp: +54-9-11-5695-6253 casazza.roberto@gmail.com

sanctorale, hymns and prayers. The origin of these works goes back to early Christianity, although, since the 16th century, the *Roman Breviary* became the standard form of this manual of religious practice in the Catholic Church. Breviaries were not used on altars during mass, but in daily services of monks and priests. However, some copies also were drawn on by lay people. During the late Middle Ages, in particular, the Breviary coexisted and rivalled with a similar type of work, the Book of Hours, a genre that became popular especially in the courtly milieu, its possession becoming a symbol of social status.

The breviary offered here contains a) a list of relevant dates of Catholic Church festivities, combined with a sanctorale (mostly martyrs, bishops and abbots), b) a collection of brief prayers for specific rites, c) prayers for the Advent season, and d) a series of hymns scheduled for the entire year. The Breviary's date of production has been estimated ca. 1250 due to the inclusion of some saints into the sanctorale (especially Saint Lambert and Saint Edmund of Abingdon, both venerated since 1246), and the absence of Saint Peter the Martyr (venerated since 1255, and generally incorporated to contemporary sanctorales).[1] Based on the systematic examination of the handwriting, the writing material (*vellum*), inks, page design, etc., it has been determined that these are perfectly compatible with said date.

Although, in general, breviaries used to have varied sizes, some larger and others smaller, they are usually found—following the American Library Association's size standards—in *octavo* (ca. 150 x 220 mm), in *duodecimo* (ca. 120 x 180 mm) or in *trigesimo-secundo* (ca. 90 x 140 mm). It is, however, rare to find this type of work in *sexagesimo-quarto* (ca. 50 x 80 mm), as is the case of this volume, which makes it of special interest. Certainly, its reduced dimensions, which would allow labelling it as a "pocket book", point to personal use and it might have been, quite likely, designed for the reader's personal devotion. What could have been the reasons for producing this work in such a small size? The shortage of writing materials? The relative comfort in its reading? The challenge involved in its production? The advantages of its portability? Perhaps all of these are concomitant, although everything indicates that the latter, i.e. the advantages of portability, must have played a predominant role.[2] Its very small dimensions suggest, above all, a specific intention to facilitate its carrying and to streamline its use. The volume was likely used during the travels of certain monks (probably in a position of authority) for personal use or to hold religious services in neighboring churches or monasteries. For instance, someone who had to supervise various monasteries or assist them in this or that sense: thus, likewise, a superior of the order, or an abbot, or a monk under duties as architect, apothecary, or doctor, might have needed it while travelling from one place to another across a certain region.

By the way, scholars agree that pocket books became popular in the 13th century and that they were more common among mendicant orders, such as the Franciscans and Dominicans, due to their itinerant nature.[3] However, in the Cistercian order, known for its vow of stability, pocket editions were less frequent, which makes this document an especially rare and valuable piece.

1 See, on this point, Quaritch's recent description of the volume.
2 See https://medievalfragments.wordpress.com/2014/07/25/size-matters-portable-medieval-manuscripts/
3 See https://books.openedition.org/psorbonne/28845?lang=es

Phone / WhatsApp: +54-9-11-5695-6253 casazza.roberto@gmail.com

Hence, its study could reveal unknown aspects of reading practices between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.

Though not quite belonging to the genre, it is difficult not to relate this volume to the Girdle Books tradition, namely, books whose binding was attached to a leather extension that could be hung from a belt or carried like a bag. Clearly, in the preparation of this volume, there is an intention to devise a work that is agile as well as easy to carry and use, and its wear (not so common in contemporary codices) reveals that it has been a frequently read volume, amply fulfilling that aimed function. The edges of the folios exhibit a dark discoloration, a result of frequent contact of hands and fingers, which allows us to infer that it was assiduously read.

No less important for the study of aspects concerning "Medieval Fragmentology" (a rising field of philological science) is the study of medieval parchment fragments used in the breviary's bookbinding. On the inner end sheets of both the cover and the back cover, two parchment fragments are attached: these are parts of the same document, namely, a bull by Pope Innocent VI (1352-1362), written in a "recentior cursive Gothic letter", according to Albert Derolez's classification. The convent mentioned in the document is unknown: "*et conventus monasterii predicti*". However, a careful exploration of the corpus of papal bulls could reveal their origin.
In broader terms, it is worth highlighting here that this work is a typical Cistercian product. During the 10th and 11th centuries, the Benedictine Order went through two major reforms in France. The abbot Berno of Baume (ca. 850-927) began the first of such reforms in Cluny in 910, under the auspices of Duke William I of Aquitaine. Berno sought to harden monastic customs, recovering the true spirit of the *Rule of Saint Benedict* (written in 516). The second one, known as the Cistercian reform, had a purpose similar to the first one. It was undertaken almost two centuries later after its mentors pointed out a certain moral relaxation and laxity in customs in the then influential abbey of Cluny. Started by Robert of Molesme (1028-1111), when founding the Cistercian Abbey in Citeaux (Burgundy) in 1098, it later expanded significantly throughout Europe, especially in the regions currently occupied by eastern Germany, Austria, Poland and the Czech Republic. Central to this process was the figure of Saint Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153), a leader of extraordinary strength and conviction. He attracted multitudes of young people to the Order, making it grow exponentially. This breviary is a typical product of German Cistercian culture, emanating from this second reform.

Of special interest, concerning the "biography" of this codex is its *provenance*. Besides its undoubted value during its long "monastic life", for which there is no precise information, some of its later possessors are, however, known. We know, first, thanks to a presumably autograph signature on f. 1v, that the gentleman Hermann Isaak von Aussem (1744-1825), owner of a Dry-Cleaning Store in Aachen, added it to his rich collection of books and manuscripts. Later, the Irishman William O'Brien (1832-1899), a well-known judge active at the court of Dublin and a bibliophile, housed this breviary in his notable library. As a court judge in Dublin, O'Brien presided over two important cases in his time, namely, the Phoenix Park Murders and the Lough Mask Murders, taking centre stage in society and the press of its time. However, his performance as a judge received criticism in the chronic *Old Munster Circuit* (1939), written by the lawyer Maurice Healy, who in the first chapters of the work praises the Irish judicial system that he knew

Phone / WhatsApp: +54-9-11-5695-6253 casazza.roberto@gmail.com

in his youth, although making the exception of O'Brien, whom he describes as a terrible judge. In any case, William O'Brien was a committed bibliophile and acquired every valuable work he could get his hands on. In 1897, a couple of years before his death and already old, single, and without offspring, he bequeathed his library to the Jesuit community at Milltown Park, Dublin, where this volume remained until 2017.

Jesuit presence in Milltown Park had its heyday between the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Originating as a Jesuit Novitiate around 1860, the institution initially focused on the training of novices and evolved into an upgraded School of Theology around 1889, reaching the degree of Pontifical Faculty by 1932. Afterwards, in 1968 the novitiate was repurposed as a research institute, the Milltown Institute of Theology and Philosophy. It was eventually incorporated into the National University of Ireland. Between 2015 and 2020, based on tensions arising from the Institute's religious imprint and the need for national funding resources, the Milltown Institute was closed, and its properties were sold. In that context, this breviary was put up for sale at Sotheby's in 2017, along with many other valuable medieval and Renaissance volumes that belonged to Judge O'Brien and the Milltown Jesuits. The following owner was the Auction House Quaritch, who in turn sold it in 2023.

In short, many reasons contribute to make this work a unique piece of special interest to any university or specialized library. It is, in any case, a remarkable medieval manuscript, of very rare features, and whose systematic study can reveal unknown aspects relating to: a) liturgy and monastic life, b) writing and reading practices, c) the evolution of sanctorales, d) regional cultures of central Europe, e) the production of codices, f) the history of bookbinding, etc. It is not difficult to imagine that in the coming years, a doctoral thesis could feature this manuscript, in dialogue with other related sources, as one of its star documents.

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