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Agenda defunctorum, Office of the Dead (Carthusian Use)
In Latin, decorated manuscript on parchment
Germany, c. 1350-1400

44 folios on parchment, modern foliation in pencil, 1-44, complete (collation i^s ii¹⁰ iii-iv^s v¹⁰), no catchwords or signatures, ruled in brown ink (justification 69 x 45 mm.), written in brown ink in gothic bookhand (textualis) in single column on 12 lines, music in square notation on four-line brown staves, 5 staves per page, rastrum 8 mm. (ff. 42v-44v), rubrics in red, 1- to 2-line initials in red, a 3-line initial in green decorated with penwork flourishes in red (f. 1), stains and signs of use, text faded in places, but in overall good condition. EARLY BINDING, sixteenth-century(?) of cream-colored pigskin over wooden boards, blind-stamped with flowers and figures, back cover, Christ in the middle, St. Paul with sword and book to his right, still just discernible, sewn on two bands, a bookmark of twisted threads in blue and yellow detached from the spine but kept inside the book, leather very worn, loose at the hinges, revealing sewing structure. Dimensions 85 x 68 mm.

This very small manuscript bears poignant evidence that it was used for many years to pray for the souls of the dead by Carthusian monks in Germany. Strikingly personal, this little volume was perhaps copied by a monk for his own use and then passed down in the Charterhouse for use by others. Its sixteenth-century blind-stamped binding is a special feature, including figures of Christ and St. Paul which are still partially distinguishable despite wear. Above all, this is a wonderfully moving material object.

PROVENANCE

1. Written in Germany in the later fourteenth century, c. 1350-1400, based on the evidence of the script and decoration. The text is according to the use of the Carthusian Order (see the discussion below). The personal nature of this small volume suggests this may have been copied by a Carthusian monk for his own use.
2. Modern booksellers's markings in the margins of f. 1v.

TEXT

ff. 1-42, *Incipit Agenda defunctorum*, incipit, "Dilexi quoniam exaudiet Dominus vocem orationis mee..." (Ps. 114) ... *Psalmus*. De profundis (ps. 130) ut supra Requiem eternam dominum eis domine. Et lux perpetua. Domine exaudi etc. Collecte ut supra secundum exigenciam";

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ff. 42v-44v, [Antiphons], incipit, "Nos autem gloriari oportet in cruce Domini nostri Iesu Christi ..."; "Salve regina ..."; "Inter natos mulierum, non surrexit maior Iohanne Baptista ...";

All with musical notation. Followed by a note, perhaps in another hand, in a cursive script: "Finis. Fuit homo <illegible?> in Deo... <continuing in another line below, but now illegible>."

The Office of the Dead in our manuscript begins, as usual, with Vespers, found on ff. 1-9v. Psalms 114, 119, 120, 129 and 137 are followed by the Magnificat and Psalm 145 (*Lauda, anima mea, Dominum*). After the psalms come the Introit, "*Inclina, Domine, aurem tuam ad me*" and prayers for the funerals for different types of individuals, beginning with *Pro (defuncto) episcopo et sacerdotibus*, "*Deus, qui inter apostolicos sacerdotes...*" (ff. 7-9v). Vespers is followed by Matins (ff. 10-31v), here without the opening Psalm 94 and instead beginning immediately at the first nocturn for Mondays and Thursdays with Psalm 5 (*Verba mea auribus*) preceded by the antiphon "*Dirige*." The second nocturn for Tuesday and Friday (ff. 17-24), and the third nocturn for Wednesdays and Saturdays (ff. 24-31v), follow. At Matins, each of the three nocturns contains three lessons, and each lesson is followed by a responsory. These responsories differ according to different liturgical uses within different dioceses or different religious orders. The responsories in our manuscript indicate its use within the Carthusian order (Knud Ottosen's system, 14, 36, 46, 67, 51, 33, 60, 95, 53; Online Resources, and Ottosen, 1993, pp. 1993, pp. 101-102, 222-223). The Office of the Dead concludes with Lauds (ff. 32-42).

Although most discussions of late medieval liturgical manuscripts focus on Missals and Breviaries, the complete books for the Mass and Office, as well as the typically large-format books for the choir, Antiphonals and Graduals, this is an example of the type of small-format, portable liturgical manuscript that we can assume was probably copied in large numbers for the use of the secular and regular clergy. This book includes only the prayers and music for the Office of the Dead and a short section of Antiphons with music. Books such as this one, including the texts necessary for one type of liturgical occasion, copied in a convenient small format, and without elaborate decoration, were less expensive, easy to use, and portable. Liturgical scholars call books such as this one that include a text, or small group of texts, pertaining to one liturgical function, liturgical "*libelli*" (see Gy, 1990, esp. pp. 111 and 120; Palazzo, 1993, pp. 189-191). It is of interest that this example of a "*libelli*" was bound at a later date quite formally in wooden boards covered with pigskin, decorated with panel stamps.

The Office of the Dead are prayers that are recited over the body of the dead person before the funeral Mass (the Requiem Mass) and burial service. This Office was also said on the anniversary of deaths in memory of the departed, and contemplatively in preparation for one's own death. In many monastic orders, the Office of the Dead was said by all the monks or nuns together in Choir. For Carthusian monks this was rarely the case. This small volume was likely most often read by a Carthusian monk in his own cell.

The Carthusian Order, founded by St. Bruno of Cologne around 1084, embraces the strictest separation from the world, characterized by total dedication to contemplation through silence, prayer, penance, and almost continuous occupancy of a solitary cell. According to the Carthusian rite, the only Offices sung collectively were Matins (and sometimes Lauds) and Vespers. The remaining Hours were recited (or sung?) in the privacy and solitude of each monk's cell. Thus, the liturgical day of a Carthusian monk in the Middle Ages centered around the recitation of the Divine Office in his cell in between periods of work, study, and personal prayer, and attendance of the long night Office of Matins and the evening Office of Vespers in the church.

LITERATURE

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ONLINE RESOURCES

K. Ottosen, Responsories of the Latin Office of the Dead

<https://www-app.uni-regensburg.de/Fakultaeten/PKGG/Musikwissenschaft/Cantus/Ottosen/search.html>

Office of the Dead (Catholic Encyclopedia)

[https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Catholic_Encyclopedia_\(1913\)/Office_of_the_Dead](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Catholic_Encyclopedia_(1913)/Office_of_the_Dead)

"The Carthusian Order"

<https://www.chartreux.org/en/carthusian-way.php>

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