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Statutes of Società del Santissimo Corpo di Cristo (Society of the Most Holy Body of Christ) in Mantua

In Italian and Latin, illuminated manuscript on parchment

Northern Italy (Mantua), September 3, 1519 (dated)

58 folios on parchment, contemporary foliation in brown ink, 2-58 (first leaf unnumbered), complete (collation i¹⁰[-10, lacking one leaf after f. 9, without loss of text; contemporary foliation continues without break] ii-iv⁸ v¹⁰ vi¹⁴ vii¹), no signatures or catchwords, ruled in lead point (justification c. 170 x 112 mm.), written in brown ink in an upright late humanist script with elements of italic on c. 17-23 long lines, several manicules in the margins, rubrics in red, capitals beginning paragraphs decorated with cadels, 2- to 4-line initials alternating in red with blue penwork flourishes and in blue with red penwork flourishes, one 7-line foliage initial in pink, blue, red and green infilled with an area in blue with white penwork on a gold ground, accompanied by floral antennas painted in blue extending in the upper and inner margins, a full-page coat of arms painted in gold, silver and colors, signs of frequent use, some leaves stained (e.g. ff. 1-3, 26v-27) but text legible throughout, in overall good condition. ORIGINAL BINDING of brown morocco over wooden boards, covers gold-tooled with a frame decorated with fine curving stems and foliage, fine brass fittings and bosses in the corners and the center of the covers, four pairs of brass clasps and catches, kept in a modern case in buckram covered in light blue paper and entitled on the spine "SS. Corpo di Cristo / Statutes / Ms. on vellum / Mantova / 1518 (date of foundation)," a small round hole cutting through the entire text block in the inner lower corner of the leaves presumably for keeping the manuscript together with a cord before it was bound (?), minor wear to leather and brass fittings, in overall excellent condition. Dimensions 210 x 150 mm.

This large, impressive manuscript bears witness to the importance of the lay confraternity of the Società del Santissimo Corpo di Cristo, founded in the cathedral church of Mantua. Copied by Giuseppe Zappelli, son of the Mantuan painter, Domenico Zappelli (d. 1527), it is the earliest known manuscript from the confraternity, made in the year following its foundation. The handsome binding and script of this book correspond to the styles of medieval manuscripts from previous centuries. The manuscript is adorned with a luxurious full-page coat of arms of Cardinal Sigismondo Gonzaga, the organization's patron, and a large opening initial, both finely illuminated in gold and colors.

PROVENANCE

1. The colophon on f. 58v states that the manuscript was written on September 3, 1519 by Giuseppe, son of the painter, Domenico Zappelli (Zapelli): "Ego Joseph Filius Magistri Dominici de Zapelis pictoris Scripsi Anno domini M ccccc xv iiii die iiii Setembris." The illumination might also be by him or perhaps by his father. Nothing appears to be known about the Mantuan painter Domenico Zappelli, except that he died in 1527 at the age of 70 (cf. Gualandi, 1842, p. 25, D'Arco, 1857, p. 48, and *Allgemeines Künstlerlexikon*, Online).

The arms of Cardinal Sigismondo Gonzaga (1469-1525) on f. 2v and the supplication to the cardinal on ff. 3-4 indicate the confraternity was founded under his aegis.

2. Modern booksellers' marks in pencil on the front pastedown: "1500-," "5134," "13" (encircled), "11" (encircled and crossed out), and "146/30/3". On the front pastedown are visible remains of something that was once pasted there, probably a bookplate.

TEXT

ff. 1-58v, Statutes of Società del Santissimo Corpo di Cristo (Society of the Most Holy Body of Christ) in Mantua, with the following contents:

f. 1, [Note in capitals about the foundation of the society by Mapheo da Osma on 25 March 1518], "Primus huius sacratissime [sic] societatis inventor fuit Mapheus Hosma anno domini nostri Ihesus Christi MDXVIII die XXV marzii.";

ff. 1v-2, [Copy of a request sent by Mapheo da Osma to Cardinal Sigismondo Gonzaga for permission to establish the confraternity, dated March 1, 1518], incipit, "In Christo Jesu. Calonici desiderando V.S che si faccia una Compagnie nella Chiesa Cathedral ... da mi Mapheo da Osma il primo di Marzo i sid. Fiat Capitula Sancti Petri Mantua. Jo Mapheo da Osma";

f. 2v, Full-page coat of arms of Cardinal Sigismondo Gonzaga (1469-1525);

ff. 3-4, [Supplication to Sigismondo Gonzaga], *Supplicatione*, incipit, "Illustrimo et Reverendissimo Monsignor dela Sancta Roma ghiesa Cardinale diacono et legato ... prosperi et favoris chi li voti di venerabile Roma Sancta a la quale di core se Racomanda.";

ff. 4-9, [Prologue], *Nel santo nome delo Ultissimo dio Incomincia el prologo del libro de le ordinatione de la venerabile societa del Santissimo corpo di christo fundata in Sancto Pietro ghiesa Cathedrale de mantua*, incipit, "Lo spirito secondo el quale como Giovanni apostolo scrive nel tercio caplo del evangelio ... Il quale vive et regna in sempiterno. Amen.";

ff. 9-34, Statutes divided into nine chapters as follows: [ff. 9-11, chapter 1], *Del modo quale se ha ad osservare in ricevere le persone quale vorranno nela compagnia entrare, ...*; [ff. 11-13, chapter 2], *Como ciascuno dela compagnia due volte alanno oltra el statuto tempo dela ghiesa si exhorta ad volersi confessare et comunicare, ...*; [ff. 13v-15, chapter 3], *Come ciascuno dela compagnia nostra debba dire ogni zorno cinque pater noster, cinque ave maria ad honore del sancto sacramento in memoria del beneficio de la Redemptione nostra ricevero, ...*; [ff. 15-18, chapter 4], *Come ogni prima Giobia dil mese dali venerandi canonici et sacerdoti sia cantata una messa solemne in la ghiesia cathedrale alla Capella deputata ala compagnia nostra in honore del sancto sacramento del corpo del signore nostro meser Jesu christo, ...*; [ff. 18-22v, chapter 5], *Del modo et ordine con quali si debba honorare el sancto sacramento del corpo de christo quando fia portato alli infermi y cosi la giobia sancta et de una processione quale se ha a fare una fiata alanno la tertia festa dela pentecoste, ...*; [ff. 22v-27, chapter 6], *De le subventione et suffragi i quali se debono fare per la compagnia alli [in]fermi et alli defuncti di quella, ...*; [ff. 27-32v, chapter 7], *Dela electione deli officiali quali con fede e integrita hanno a governare la compagnia, ...*; ff. 32v-33, chapter 8 (entitled "capitolo ultimo"), *Como tre fiata alanno si debbano legere alla compagnia le soprascripte ordinamenti, ...*; [ff. 33v-34, chapter 9], *Per quelli ch' non pagano*, incipit, "A utilita dele Anime dele nostre fratele ... essere tutti solliciti acio non sia nesuno in corra in simile errore, ...";

ff. 34v-35, Notarial document signed "Hieremias" on December 1, 1523 by the episcopal vicar Girolamo Marcobruno;

ff. 35v-36v, [Records of donations given by Pietro di Zignon, Andrión de Voltolina, Jeremia di Lusadri (chancellor of Cardinal Sigismondo Gonzaga), Baldesar di Zanbelli, Antonio Zampon, Amabilia Schiavona, Domminico Marcheselis and Simon de Capodistria to the confraternity between 1519 and 1525, and of the offices and masses that were founded in the memory of these donors], incipit, "A di 29 aprile lo Officio ch' se fa per l'anima de mistro pietro di Zignon per una Lassa posta dedrio del Castello la qual lui dono ala Compagnia ... in lo Catastro de la compagnia"; One inscription added in 1585 recording a donation by Caterina di Marchesi; [ff. 37-42, blank];

f. 42v, [Prayers in Latin to be said in the beginning and end of the meeting], *Oratione da farsi nel principio della congregatione*, incipit, "Veni sacre spiritus, reple tuorum corda fidelium ... Post Congregationem. Confirma hoc Deus, quod operatus es in nobis. R. A templo sancto tuo, quod est in Hyerusalem"; [ff. 43-44, blank];

ff. 44v-45, Orders of the venerable Company for the bell ringer, dated 1581;

f. 45v-57v, [Calendar of feasts on which religious Offices are to be celebrated (mostly blank); beginning on f. 45v with a foreword explaining the celebration of defunct members of the confraternity, the details of which are described in the martyrology of the confraternity; before this foreword is a record of memoria celebrated in honor of individuals who gave donations to the confraternity, beginning with Cesar Spada who had a new oratorio built], incipit, "In isto libro omnia officia specialia et generalia quae de bent solvi per spectabilem massarium societatis corporis christi sunt anotata ordine pro quolibet suo mense que officia debent celebrari a Reverendis sacerdotibus Ecclesie cathedralis mantua pro animabus omnium defunctorum sancta dicte Societatis ..."; [f. 58, blank];

f. 58v, [Colophon], "Ego Joseph Filius Magistri Dominici de Zapelis pictoris Scripsi Anno domini M ccccc xv iiii die iii Setembris".

ILLUSTRATION

f. 2v, full-page coat of arms of Cardinal Sigismondo Gonzaga (1469-1525), painted in gold, silver, black and red, within a gold bar border and surrounded by the inscription: "Illustrissimo et reverentissimo domino Sigismondo Gonzaga Cardinale";

f. 3, illuminated 7-line initial 'I' formed of foliage in pink, blue, red and green infilled with an area in blue with white penwork on a gold ground, accompanied by floral antennas painted in blue extending in the upper and inner margins.

The text in capitals on f. 1 in our manuscript states that the Società del Santissimo Corpo di Cristo was founded in the cathedral church of Mantua by Mapheo da Osma on 25 March 25, 1518: "Primus huius sacratissima societatis inventor fuit Mapheus Hosma anno domini n. Ihesus Christi MDXVIII die XXV marzii." The *Ordini della Compagnia del Santissimo Corpo di Christo* was printed by Francesco Osanna in Mantua in 1578. There is a copy of this very rare edition at the Biblioteca comunale Teresiana in Mantua, and an image of the frontispiece online (see Online Resources), but we have not been able to locate any other copies and compare the texts in our manuscript to the statutes printed sixty years later.

Before the re-emergence of the manuscript, the oldest known document testifying to the existence of this confraternity dated from 1529 (Avanzini, pp. 22-23). Our manuscript provides evidence that the Società del Santissimo Corpo di Cristo in Mantua was founded more than ten years earlier than was previously thought.

Religious confraternities, serving both the spiritual and temporal aspirations of lay people, were a ubiquitous feature of medieval and early modern Europe. The statutes for the Società del Santissimo Corpo di Cristo in Mantua were copied in our manuscript a year and half after the confraternity was founded. They give information about new members joining the confraternity (chapter 1), the regular confession that members are expected to make twice a year (chapter 2), and prayers that members should say daily: five Pater Nosters and five Hail Marys (chapter 3). The statutes also describe the solemn mass sung on the first day of each month by the canons and priests of the cathedral church in the chapel dedicated to the confraternity (chapter 4), and the manner and order of the administration of the Holy Sacrament of the Corpus Christi to the sick, as well as the procession made at the time of Pentecost (chapter 5). They also discuss the subventions and suffrages to be made to the sick and deceased (chapter 6), the election of officials for governing the confraternity (chapter 7), how the statutes should be read to the confraternity three times a year (chapter 8), and how to proceed with members who do not pay (chapter 9).

Lay confraternities, such as the Società del Santissimo Corpo di Cristo in Mantua, developed in Italy in the sixteenth century to provide charity for the poor and the sick, as well as to reinforce Eucharistic piety. These confraternities combined traditional motifs of piety and devotion with more modern ideas of inner conversion, setting a good example, and individual ritualistic piety.

The confraternity of the Santissimo Corpo di Cristo was especially widespread in the countryside, and its development in Mantua was strongly supported by the Gonzaga family (Mozzarelli, 1987, p. 80, and Nicoli, 2016, pp. 24-25). The bishop of Verona at the time our manuscript was copied, Gian Matteo Giberti (1495-1543), provided significant intellectual inspiration for the development of lay societies, and his role in the history of religious life in Mantua has been studied by Roberto Rezzaghi and Mario Bendiscioli (Rezzaghi, 1986 and Bendiscioli, 1960). The older Compagnia del Preziosissimo Sangue di Gesu Cristo, a confraternity devoted to the relic of the Holy Blood of Christ, which, according to tradition, was brought to Mantua by the centurion Longinus, is well known. The evidence of our manuscript from the much less well-known confraternity dedicated to Corpus Christi thus represents an important new source for the history of confraternities and lay religious life in Mantua, and more broadly, in Italy, in the sixteenth century.

LITERATURE

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ONLINE RESOURCES

Ordini della Compagnia del Santissimo Corpo di Christo, Mantua, 1578

<https://edit16.iccu.sbn.it/resultset-titoli/-/titoli/detail/CNCE15481>

"Domenico Zappelli," in *Allgemeines Künstlerlexikon Online*

https://www-degruyter-com.bnf.idm.oclc.org/database/AKL/entry/_00198962/html

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