

ANONYMOUS, confessional manual; ANTONINUS FLORENTIUS (ANTONINO  
PIEROZZI), *Confessionale*, Book II  
In Latin, decorated manuscript on parchment  
Northern France, c. 1450-1500

85 folios on parchment (in agreement with "feuillez iii<sup>xx</sup> . & cinq" in a late 15<sup>th</sup>-century hand, f. 82v), seventeenth- or eighteenth-century foliation in ink, top outer recto, 1-82, leaving the first three leaves unnumbered (collation, i<sup>s</sup> [including pastedown], ii-x<sup>s</sup>, xi<sup>s</sup>), quires signed with Roman numerals, bottom outer margin (occasionally trimmed), catchwords, ruled in ink and pricked (in the outer margin) in one column of twenty-eight lines, with full length bounding lines on all sides (justification 130-135 × 82-86 mm), written below the top line in a gothic bastarda bookhand, with guide letters rarely visible for initials (ff. 17v, 29v, etc.), red rubrics, slashing of majuscules in red (ff. 1r, 1v, 3r, 5r, 7r, 8r, etc.), space has been left throughout for the inclusion of red paraph marks which have been added on occasional pages, especially toward the beginning of the manuscript (ff. 1r, 5r, 8r, etc.) but also again at the end of the manuscript where the rubricator has also added two marginal notes in red (ff. 80r, 81r), black pen-flourished paraphs occasionally added at the beginning of lines (e.g. ff. 24v, 31r, etc.), space left for 2-line initials which have been left blank or (beginning on f. 4v) have been filled in with 1-line humanistic majuscule initials in black (erased on f. 23r), occasional decorative pen-flourishing in the form of line-fillers in red (ff. 6v, 16r, etc.) and black (ff. 29v, 32r, 33r, etc.) and pen-flourished descenders and ascenders, usually very simple (ff. 13v, 14r, 16r, 18v, etc.) but occasionally more elaborate (ff. 33v, 34r, 38r). The writing is legible and the mid-grade parchment in good condition without tearing or damage resulting in loss of text. Contemporary binding of brown leather, blind stamped in concentric rectangles of (moving from center outward) roses, the initial "P", stags, and prickled foliage, mostly in good condition but with some loss of the leather through insect holes and other damage to show the wooden boards beneath, bound with five thongs now broken, with the result that the back board is now completely detached and the front remains attached only by the pastedown, spine rebaked in brown leather with gilt over the thongs, now split, with considerable damage and some loss, gilt trim on the spine over the thongs and gilt edges to the pages. Dimensions 215 × 140 mm.

The text in this manuscript, one of the most important confessional manuals of the Middle Ages, is here condensed into a convenient and practical guide for the instruction of inexperienced confessors. This is an elegantly copied, large-format manuscript of this popular text, still preserved in its original blind-stamped binding, setting it apart from numerous copies that were practical manuals for humble friars. Its French provenance (most surviving copies of Antoninus's text are Italian in origin) adds to its interest.

## PROVENANCE

1. Written in Northern France, in the second half of the fifteenth century. The script, as well as the record of the number of folios (feuillez iii<sup>xx</sup> . & cinq) are evidence of a French origin. Signs of early use include occasional marginal notes and both marginal and interlinear corrections, in at least three hands. One of these, whose neat notes and corrections can be found especially on ff. 22r-39v, is likely the same fifteenth-century writer who added the extract from *Poeniteas cito* on the front pastedown (see below under Text), and may also be the author of occasional manicules (e.g. f. 30v, 39r, etc.). The relatively large format of this manuscript, and its elegant script, suggests that it was copied for the use of priest of some means, rather than a humble friar, or even for a layperson, as a guide to the sacrament of confession.

2. Scribbled pen-trials appear on ff. 21r, 47v, and 82v, perhaps in the same 16<sup>th</sup>-century hand that has added a brief and hastily-written note (f. 82v): "In morte tentat diabolus ignorere[?] de obstinatione de in[fi]delitate et desperatione misericordiae dei."

3. Written on the front pastedown in an eighteenth-century hand: "30" and "No. 66."

4. Belonged to an unnamed friend of the Rt. Rev. John Percy Phair (1876-1967), dean of Ossory, Southern Ireland, from 1923-1940, and later bishop of Ossory until his retirement in 1961. The manuscript had been found in the attic of Phair's friend in 1937, and Phair undertook to research the book on her behalf, consulting a scholar in Dublin whose unsigned letter of description (dated February 16, 1937 from 5 Dartmouth Rd., Dublin) is included with the manuscript.

## TEXT

front pastedown, incipit, "Confessor dulcis affabilis atque benignus / Sit justus sapiens sit mitis conpaciensque ... Nunc virgam patris nunc prebeat viscera matris / Sibilet et cantet stimulet dum cogat oportet";

Extract from William de Montibus (d. 1213), *Poeniteas cito*, sometimes attributed to Peter of Blois, John Garland and others. This short excerpt is not in the hand of the manuscript's main scribe, but has been added by a fifteenth-century reader, perhaps the same one who has contributed occasional marginal notes and manicules throughout the manuscript, particularly highlighting quotations within the text. For a modern edition of the *Poeniteas cito*, see Goering 1992, p. 127, ll. 69-76. The full poem (incipit: *Poeniteas cito peccator cum sit miserator*) is in its longest versions about 150 lines and exists in a large number of manuscripts (more than 150) and early print editions. It can be broken down into a number of smaller verse-units (like the excerpt appearing here), often marked off in manuscript copies of the full work by a system of rubrics (Goering 1992, p. 108).

The popularity of the work is in part due to its wide use as a didactic tool, an important school text for primary students learning Latin (Goering 1992, p. 107). The work also attracted many medieval commentaries and glosses. Its inclusion here is no doubt prompted by the appropriateness of its subject-matter, as the poem is itself a sort of short-form verse confessional, and is evidence of an active engagement with the manuscript by one of its early users.

ff. i, recto – ii, verso, *Incipiunt Rubrice Prescripti Libri*, incipit, "de votis ... Forma absolucionis ab excommunicatione minori";

Table of contents, in alternating red and black, corresponding to rubrics used throughout the text, and supplemented by a seventeenth- or eighteenth-century hand (the same responsible for adding the foliation), supplying the appropriate folio numbers, as well as entries for some rubrics that had not originally been included.

f. iii recto-verso, blank;

ff. 1-4v, *Incipit quoddam breue inductum ad confessionem per exempla et sacerdotem instruit de interrogaconibus* [sic] *fiendis . Editum per fratrem anthonium* [sic] *archiepiscum florentinum*, incipit, "[I]N primis sacerdos debet pio et suaui eloquio inducere peccatorem ad confessionem et compunctionem proponens ei beneficia que contulit sibi deus per passionem christi quia non uenit propter iustos sed propter

peccatores quia quos bene penitet postea a deo magis diliguntur et exaltantur ... Percussio uiolenta in cleros uel religiosos vsurarii publici sacrilegia dispensacio male oblatores incertorum uel certorum facientes falsum instrumentum Incendiarii voluntarii”;

Despite the rubric’s introduction of the text as Antoninus Florentinus’s, his *Confessionale* does not properly begin until f. 4v (see below), and this initial, anonymous portion is not part of Antoninus’s text. The present text shares the incipit *In primis sacerdos* with at least one other text, the *Summula in foro poenitentiali* attributed to Berengarius Fredoli, but should not be confused with that longer work (see Michaud-Quantin, 1967). Instead, this text is an anonymous digest, perhaps never intended to stand on its own, but rather to serve as a preface indeed to the Antoninus that follows. It is not original, being drawn in part from *Summa de casibus poenitentiae* by Raymond of Peñafort (c. 1180-1275), a guide to confession, whose Book III, tit. 34, from which this digest’s incipit was drawn, frequently circulated as an independent work, and was an important source on confession frequently quoted in the Middle Ages by subsequent writers (including Antoninus).

The short manual begins with general advice for confessors. The text then continues (f. 1v) with specific instructions on the sorts of questions necessary to ask (Title: “Qualibet Interrogaciones debeant fieri”) and then with a “Modus confitendi” of the various subjects to address over the course of the confession, consisting of taxonomies of the Seven Deadly Sins, the Ten Commandments, the four sins crying out to heaven (“Quatuor peccata clamantia ad celum”), etc., and the various transgressions that might fall under these categories.

ff. 4v-82r, [title in black] *Secuntur Interrogaciones fiende*, incipit, “Postquam ille qui uult confiteri dixit ex se ea que uoluit de peccatis suis si non dixit sufficienter quid quasi semper accidit interroga de hiis que plene non dixit prout uidebitur expedire . . . Omnia bona que facis et quitquid pateris et pacieris sint ad laudem dei et remissionem omnium peccatorum tuorum in augmentum gracie et in premium uite eterne . Amen,” *Deo gracias*.

Antoninus Florentinus (Antonino Pierozzi, 1389-1459), archbishop of Florence, *Confessionale*, Book II (Interrogatorium). There is no modern edition of the text, but it was printed frequently in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, at least as early as 1468, in Cologne (Goff 1973). Most manuscripts of Antoninus’s works (including the *Confessionale*) are from Italy, so this is an unusual example of a French copy: two copies of this text have been sold at auction since 2000, both of Italian origin. The text was translated in the fifteenth century into both Spanish and Italian, and in addition to multiple manuscript copies in Italian, there were two Italian print editions before 1501, and nine Spanish editions, as well as the more than fifty Latin editions, a measure of the breadth of its popularity (*Gesamtkatalog*, 1968). In manuscript, there are hundreds of extant copies in institutional libraries around the world, the vast majority of them in Italy: more than 175 manuscripts, including 23 in Florence, 14 in Rome, and 22 in the Vatican, compared to only a dozen in France and eleven in the United States (Kaeppeli, 1970). This manuscript represents, therefore, an example of popular text as it was produced outside the Italian heartland of its popularity.

The text of the *Confessionale* as it appears here is not the entire work, but only the second of the three books. The first of the three (and thus the work as a whole) opens with the incipit “Defecerunt scrutantes scrutiny,” quoting Psalm 63:7. Book I addresses the background for confession, including explanations of the confessor’s powers, describes the characteristics of a good confessor, and offers instructions on preparation. Book II (the “Interrogatorium”), with its incipit “Postquam ille qui uult...” treats the act of confession itself, including the particular

questions that should be asked of the penitent to guide him or her through an appropriate description of sin. It includes sections on how to interrogate the penitent for a breach of the Ten Commandments, reasons related to the Seven Deadly Sins, and how the confessor should adjust his interrogation to suit people of different social status. Book III addresses absolution. The recension history of the *Confessionale* is complicated by the incorporation of the beginning of Book I into Antoninus's *Summa moralis*, where it forms chapters 1-16 of *pars* 1, *titulus* 17 (see *Summa theologica*, 1740), and by the circulation of the three "books" of the *Confessionale* both together, where they make on up one longer work, and independently, as in this manuscript.

The treatment of Book II as a stand-alone text sets this manuscript apart from the majority of manuscript copies, and has transformed the *Confessionale* from a more general discussion of confession into a practical manual directed at the confessor – a shift in focus that explains, too, the minor abridgement of the text by the omission of the very end of Book II, where Antoninus offers the correct verbal forms not just for the act of absolution, but for the celebration of the other sacraments as well. This information is apparently deemed irrelevant to the more focused goal of the confessional manual. As it stands, the *Interrogatorium*, or "book of questions," is a series of searching examinations to pose to penitents, in order to ensure that the conscience has been thoroughly examined. Coupled with the anonymous short opening "digest" and the apparatus of rubrics keyed to the table of contents, features not provided in most manuscripts, the book has been further adapted for ease of reference and utility.

Antoninus Florentinus, a contemporary and associate of Cosimo de Medici, was born Antonino Pierozzi in Florence, where he founded the Dominican convent of San Marco in 1436 and became archbishop of Florence in 1446. Influential as a preacher and an authority on canon law, he was canonized by Pope Adrian VI in 1523. His two most famous works are the *Summa moralis* and the present text, the *Confessionale*, but he is the author also of many other works including sermons, letters, and two other confessionals ("Omnis mortalium cura" and "Curam illius habe"). He was canonized in 1523.

Manuals for confession were important practical guides in the late Middle Ages, both for confessors and for penitents. One of the sacraments in the Catholic Church, confession became more and more regularly practiced over the course of the twelfth century, with the requirement of yearly confession for all Christians put in place by the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215. The spread of the Mendicant orders, and especially the Dominicans (granted Papal approval in 1216), increased the need for specialist instructional guides for confessors, as these itinerant clergy focused on the activities of preaching and hearing confession, as opposed to the traditional liturgical duties of the secular clergy and traditional monastic orders (Biller 1998, pp. 9-10). From then on, the importance of confession only grew for the medieval faithful, and by 1400, confessional manuals – which had existed for many centuries – took off as never before (see Michaud-Quantin, 1962, p. 68). Among this fifteenth-century explosion, Antoninus's *Confessionale* was not only popular, it was also notable for its excellence not as a theoretical theological tract, but for its practical insight into the psychology of the penitent (Michaud-Quantin, 1962, p. 74). The importance of the text today is not just as an artifact of late-medieval religious history, but as widely-read window into ethical thought.

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