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## THREE CURIOUS MINIATURES OF SAINT DOMINIC

BY

WARREN F. MANNING

During my search of the public and private libraries of Western Europe in quest of manuscripts of the Life of Saint Dominic in the medieval vernacular, I have found three very curious miniatures which I believe will prove of interest to medievalists and especially to members of the Dominican Order.

The first miniature, depicting the decapitation of Saint Dominic, is to be found at the head of the Life of the saint in MS 9228 of the Bibliothèque Royale in Brussels<sup>1</sup>.

The manuscript is a fifteenth century copy of the French translation of the *Legenda aurea* of Jacobus de Voragine by Jehan de Vignay, by far the most popular of the medieval French versions. The manuscript is a large folio volume in parchment of 415 leaves, 41 cm. long by 30 cm. wide, bound in brown leather. The red stamp of the Bibliothèque Nationale of Paris has been scratched out on ff. 7<sup>r</sup> and 414<sup>v</sup>, and the volume now bears the Belgian escutcheon and the inscription: "Bibl. royale". It is written in 2 columns, 42 lines to the column. The initial letters are filigreed, and alternately red and blue, and the rubrics are in red. Besides one large miniature, which occupies the upper half of f. 7<sup>r</sup> and depicts two scenes, on the left the Last Judgement and on the right the Annunciation, the manuscript contains many small and fine miniatures. The Life of Saint Dominic occupies ff. 186<sup>v</sup>-193<sup>r</sup>.

In the miniature, Saint Dominic is represented kneeling, his eyes bandaged, in an attitude of prayer, awaiting the blow of the executioner's sword. Dominic is dressed in black and white, with a golden halo. The executioner, an Albigensian, wields an oriental scimitar, and is dressed in blue with a brown scarf. It is interesting to note that the artist has drawn the tonsure over the bandage.

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<sup>1</sup> Published by permission of the Bibliothèque Royale of Brussels.



**S**eminique ad duc  
lordre dei preecheu  
et noble pve dei pa  
ties  
igne. dune ville e  
anon callo rega d

Folio 188 verso of MS Paris, B. N., fr. 241 (original miniature: 8×8.5 cm.)

for; este renduz pour rachater les poines  
donner meins par amegrissement du  
car il donnoit touz iours meins a son  
qui ne comoit. de saint dominique



**D**ominique fu duc de lordre de  
pêcheurs et noble pere des ptu  
de sonne d'une ville qui a na

Folio 186 verso of MS Brussels 9228 (actual size of miniature)

Of one thing we can be certain. The manuscript was not produced in a Dominican scriptorium. The creator of the miniature would not have been instructed to portray the decapitation of Saint Dominic, nor would he have been permitted to incorporate such a scene in the manuscript.

How can one explain this startling portrayal of the death of Saint Dominic? It could not be the result of confusion with the death of Saint Peter Martyr, since the latter was stabbed to death by assassins. Furthermore, the miniaturist, who was very probably a hired lay artist, would have been unfamiliar with the life and death of the Dominican martyr.

Is the miniature a symbol of the threats made against Saint Dominic by the Albigensians and their hired assassins, or a symbol of the desire for martyrdom expressed several times by Saint Dominic? In none of the Latin or vernacular prose versions of the Life of Saint Dominic, in the passage in which Dominic replies to the menaces of his would-be murderers, does he mention in his detailed plea for martyrdom the cutting off of his own head<sup>2</sup>. It is interesting to note, however, that the only version which mentions the use of the sword for decapitation is in the Old French verse Life of Saint Dominic<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> This plea is well summarized by Jean de Mailly in his *Life of Saint Dominic* (M. D. Chapotin, O.P., *Les Dominicains d'Auxerre*, Paris, 1892, pp. 319-320): "Rogarem vos, ait, ne me brevi et levi morte occideretis, sed paulatim et successive membra singula mutilantes, et ipsos tandem oculos eruentes, semi vivum et truncum corpus permetteretis in suo sanguine volutari, et prorsus ad libitum necaretis".

<sup>3</sup> " Certes, " fait-il, " je vous dirai 2236  
 La verité, si que je sai.  
 Avant vos laiss[iss]iés atrenchier  
 Ma tieste et les iex tous sains  
 Des autres membres; c'est li mains 2240  
 Que je vous voloie proier,  
 Que vous le fesissiés trenchier  
 L'un apries l'autre et tot detraire,  
 Por moi plus de martire faire; 2244  
 Quant tuit seroient decoupé  
 Li membre a vostre volonté,  
 Et li oel bien veü l'avroient,  
 Ki joiant et liét en seroient, 2248  
 Ambesdeus dont les crevissiés,  
 Et le tieste apries trenchesiés;  
 Tout mesissiés en un monchiel,  
 Le char, et les os, et le piel, 2252

Another possibility is that the miniaturist was following the fantastic instructions of the one who had ordered the manuscript, since the copy was made in the fifteenth century. Then again, it happened occasionally that in the case of relatively popular legends which were mass-produced the artist drew his inspiration from previous models. This practice may well have been followed in the case of MS 9228. It is noteworthy that the miniatures of this manuscript contain eleven other scenes of beheading, all realistically and artistically drawn. Therefore, I am inclined to believe that in this case the artist was motivated by his own predilection for scenes of decapitation <sup>4</sup>.

MS Paris, B.N., fr. 241 is a parchment volume written in the middle of the fourteenth century. It has 344 leaves, 42.5 cm. long by 29.5 cm. wide, and is bound in leather, with the royal stamp of France on the front and back covers. The initial letters are ornamented, the rubrics red, and the manuscript contains many beautiful miniatures. Inside the first cover of the book is the following inscription: "Richard de monbaston libraire a fait escrire ceste legende des sains en françois l'an de grace nostre seigneur mil. CCC. XLVIII". The Life of Saint Dominic occupies ff. 188<sup>v</sup>-195<sup>r</sup>.

The miniature, which precedes the Life, is in red, blue, green, black, and gold, and represents Saint Dominic disputing with an Albigensian *perfectus*. The remarkable peculiarity of this miniature is that Dominic is portrayed in the costume of a Franciscan. Thus, evidently, the manuscript was not the product of a Dominican or a Franciscan scriptorium, and the miniaturist was in all probability, as the inscription mentioned above seems to indicate, a hired lay artist.

MS Paris, B.N., fr. 242, written in the beginning of the fifteenth century, is bound in fawn calfskin, with a red morocco back, and the eagle of France on the covers. The manuscript consists of 336 folios paginated in Roman numerals (f. 336<sup>v</sup> is blank), preceded by 2 blank

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Dedens le sanc, ki espondus  
 Seroit des membres et issus;  
 Adonc el sanc me baigneroie.  
 C'est li deffense que feroie                      2256  
 Encontre vous, c'est verités."

(The Life of Saint Dominic in Old French Verse, ed. W. F. Manning, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1944, pp. 199-200).

<sup>4</sup> Ff. 46<sup>v</sup>: Fabian; 73<sup>r</sup>: Valentine; 99<sup>v</sup>: Secundus; 110<sup>v</sup>: Marcellinus; 136<sup>r</sup>: Gordian; 137<sup>r</sup>: Pancratius; 184<sup>v</sup>: Stephen, Pope; 193<sup>r</sup>: Sixtus, Pope; 215<sup>r</sup>: Symphorian; 225<sup>v</sup>: John the Baptist; 229<sup>r</sup>: Savilian.

folios and 3 folios (A, B, C), and followed by 2 blank folios, totalling 343 folios, 39 cm. long by 28.5 cm. wide, written in 2 columns, 48 ll. to the column. The initial letters are ornamented, and the rubrics are in red. The colors used in the miniatures are red, blue, green, brown, pink, and gold, and there are numerous sketches in  *camaïeu* . On f. C<sup>r</sup> is found the following inscription: " Cy apres commence la table et les rubriches des festes nouvelles selon l'usage de paris translatees de latin en françois par un maistre en theologie de l'ordre de nostre dame du carme. L'an mil quatre cens et deux ". F. 336<sup>r</sup> ends with the following common cry of relief on the part of the scribe: " Explicit iste liber qui scripsit sit crimine liber ". The Life of Saint Dominic occupies ff. 161<sup>v</sup>-167<sup>r</sup>.

The miniature portrays Dominic standing with a book in his hand. A dagger is planted in his breast. This may symbolize the threats of violence made against Saint Dominic by his Albigensian adversaries, or the anguish of the saint over the sins of mankind <sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> The miniatures from MSS Paris, B.N., fr. 241 and 242 are published by permission of the Bibliothèque Nationale of Paris.