

How was the Geese Book made?

Volker Schier

Saint Monica

The liturgy of one feast allows us to find interesting details about the compilation of the Geese Book. St. Monica's Day was probably the most recent addition to the liturgy of St. Lorenz prior to the making of the Geese Book.

For much of the Middle Ages, the cult of Saint Monica, the mother of the church father Augustine, was centered at the monastery of Arrouaise in the North of France. In the 12th century, one of the canons claimed to have found Monica's relics while visiting the old Roman seaport of Ostia, her known place of death. He took parts of the body back with him to the monastery, but the impact of this incident must have been rather limited since we do not read about large numbers of pilgrims flocking to her tomb.

It would take another 200 years until the cult of Saint Monica gathered momentum. In the year 1430 it was reported that a different body belonging to the saint had been discovered at the same location, the ruins of Ostia. It was not uncommon in the Middle Ages that several bodies or body parts of a saint were uncovered, often under questionable circumstances and sometimes by shady characters. Based on the limited attraction of the first body one might suppose that the new find would suffer a similar fate, but this time the tides of time had changed in favor of St. Monica: On the order of Pope Martin V, the relics were taken to Rome with great pomp and buried in a marble sarcophagus in the church San Trifone (later renamed San Agostino).

The new interest in Monica did not originate by chance: In the 15th century members of the Italian humanist elite began to re-evaluate the texts of classical antiquity under Christian auspices. Before that, many of these texts had been frowned upon as relics of pagan ideas. What these humanists wanted to achieve was a symbiosis of classical philosophy and Christian doctrine. The colonization of antiquity as either the foreshadowing or the acknowledgment of the role of Christ as son of god and savior brought those authors into the limelight who themselves had recognized (at least according to the teachings of the medieval church) the "ultimate truth" and undergone a conversion. The foremost example was the son of Monica, Saint Augustine.

Augustine was born in Roman Africa in the 4th century and was educated in classical rhetoric. He took up the profession of orator, a combination of teacher, politician, and lawyer. In his early career he

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became attracted to Manichaeism, a cult that originated in Persia in the 3rd century and quickly spread within the Roman empire. It combined elements of several Eastern beliefs, including Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, and Christianity, but also light metaphysics. What was even more fundamental for Augustine's faith was Neoplatonism, formulated by the philosopher Plotinus. The idea of absolute transcendence and a depersonalized deity appealed to many intellectuals. After an interlude in Rome, Augustine moved to the imperial court in Milan as teacher of rhetoric, where he became acquainted with the charismatic bishop Ambrose, converted to Christianity, and was baptized. When he returned to Africa he was ordained as priest and became bishop of Hippo. Later in his life he described the whole process in masterly Latin prose. This book, his *Confessions*, became one of the "must-reads" of those seeking a Renaissance of classical ideas and learning.

As for Monica, it was mainly one universally interested humanist in the first half of the 15th century who created her image as the perfect Christian mother: Maffeo Vegio (1406-1458), secretary of papal briefs, later apostolic datary, and canon at St. Peter's, was renowned for his knowledge of classical Roman literature, especially Virgil. Vegio was most influential in pedagogy, a discipline that had received only limited attention during the Middle Ages. With his book *On the Education of Children and their Moral Foundations* from 1443, he led the way for the use of classical texts for educational purposes. Vegio transformed Monica into the motherly teacher since her child-rearing had laid the foundation for Augustine's professional success and, more importantly, his conversion. According to Vegio, Monica's Christian belief – in contrast to the background of his "pagan" father – enabled Augustine to recognize the right path. She never gave up on her son and followed him wherever he went to exercise her positive influence. When Augustine decided to return to Africa in the year 388, Monica accompanied him but died during her journey.

The picture that Maffeo Vegio had created was there to stay, and it has hardly changed over the centuries. For Monica's translation and canonization in the year 1430, Vegio compiled a biography and also two offices (one for her feast day, the other for the translation of her relics), thus providing the necessary liturgical framework to initiate and promote her cult. Vegio also donated a gilt head reliquary and the white marble sarcophagus into which pope Martin V himself placed her relics. Others would follow Vegio's example to advance the veneration of Monica, among them Cardinal Guillaume d'Estouteville (ca. 1403-1483), a wealthy power broker at the heart of the Roman curia. The papal chamberlain and protector of the Augustinian Hermits provided the adequate edifice by building the church of S. Agostino in the style of the Roman Renaissance, relying solely on his own extensive funds. Despite these concerted efforts and her canonization, it would take another hundred years until in 1576 her office was finally entered into the Roman breviary.

If we shift our focus to Nuremberg we realize that the arrival of Monica in this merchant city north of the Alps fell into the period when her cult was spreading quickly in northern Italy. The adoption of Monica as one of the patrons of the Augustinian Hermits must have quickened the dissemination of her cult. Monica made her first high profile appearance in Nuremberg in the church of the Augustinian monastery St. Veit. The hermits commissioned a splendid new main altar between 1440 and 1450. Augustine and Monica play a prominent role in the visual program of the altar. The artist placed them here on the wing, visible when the altar was open on feast days.

The text presented by the angel quotes from the vita of Augustine, written by the monk Jordan of Quedlinburg in the 14th century. Jordan condensed a central passage taken from the *Confessiones* (liber IX, 10): After a long and hard journey Augustine and Monica had reached Ostia, waiting to embark for Africa. In a quiet moment mother and son stand together at a window, overlooking the serene garden

in the center of the house where they were lodging. They “speak in private but in sweet words” [“colloquebantur soli valde dulciter”] about the eternal life of saints.

About fifty years later, in 1504, Sixtus Tucher signed a donation charter. This was one of the last documents Sixtus issued at end of his eight-year tenure as provost of the church of St. Lorenz. The contract stipulated that for all eternity the feast of St. Monica was to be celebrated on every fourth of May with festive vespers and a series of masses at his church. According to Sixtus’s stipulations, the mass was to be endowed with all the splendor otherwise reserved for patron saints: All the clerics were instructed to attend; choir boys from the school of St. Lorenz sang the choral parts of the mass under the supervision of the schoolmaster, and the organist further embellished the liturgy, performing on the famous swallow-nest organ clinging to the wall of the nave. So that the celebration of this new feast would not occur unnoticed it was announced publicly on the preceding Sunday. When the day and hour for the mass had come, the tolling of the large bell of St. Lorenz signaled to every person in town that the festivities of Saint Monica were about to begin.

If we compare the elaborate festivities in Nuremberg with the official Bamberg church calendars [in the printed missals], we notice a discrepancy. The feast of St. Monica in Nuremberg does not find any counterpart at the cathedral of Bamberg. We must conclude that Saint Monica was not venerated on the diocesan level. In light of this discrepancy, Sixtus’s decree that elevates all parts of the festivities to the status of the other patron saints of the church is even more surprising. One would not expect to find the de facto expansion of the number of patrons formulated in a donation charter. Under normal circumstances the introduction of an additional patron was connected to the erection of a new altar or chapel. According to canonical law it would have been necessary to involve the diocesan authorities in the process, since this rite was restricted to episcopal authority.

We thus may conclude that Sixtus Tucher almost singlehandedly introduced a major feast in “his” church. He was aided by the Nuremberg city council – occupied and controlled by many friends and relatives from the patrician cast. The council not only administered the 90 guilders of capital provided by Sixtus to cover the costs, but – as part of a package deal – also approved the liturgical stipulations set forth in the contract. In authorizing this liturgy, the council clearly overstepped its bounds. On the other hand, the city owned the church buildings and furnishings and also salaried the sacristan and church master. Thus, the city council took control over many issues that we would expect today to be the sole purview of the parish.

In light of this disregard for episcopal authority (although it is unclear how openly the whole procedure was handled), it is remarkable that the other Nuremberg churches also introduced the feast of Saint Monica. Thus, Nuremberg collectively deviated from the diocesan calendar. It must have been the goal of the two Nuremberg parishes to create a largely homogenous liturgy within the city. In order to achieve uniformity, a leaflet was printed that contained the texts of two mass formulas for Monica. These leaflets were inserted into the missals used at the Nuremberg parishes.

This is one of the two copies of the missal for the Bamberg diocese purchased for the parish of St. Sebald by the church master Sebald Schreyer. It was printed by Johann Sensenschmidt in 1490. The bifolium with the liturgy for Saint Monica was glued into the binding.

Sixtus’s donation charter gives us additional details about his intention to have the leaflet included in the missal and about the specifics of use.

“And [all the prebendaries] shall read one of the special masses for Saint Monica as they are included in printed form in all missals with three collects [prayers]

and otherwise as they are found there.”

The prescribed veneration went beyond the ritual endowed by Sixtus and was extended to all prebendaries serving at altars in the church. Even though these prebends were independent institutions not bound to the liturgy of the parish but to the charters drawn up by their donors, the prebendaries were thus obligated to perform the mass for Monica. We may assume that also the books belonging to the prebends were upgraded with the leaflet, which speaks for a larger number of copies.

Only two surviving liturgical manuscripts from Nuremberg transmit the first of these mass formulas with musical notation: The gradual Nuremberg, Landeskirchliches Archiv der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche in Bayern, Nbg. St. Lorenz, St. Lorenz 3 and the Geese Book. The oldest part of St. Lorenz 3 was completed by the Dominican monk Johannes Gredinger in the year 1421. By the end of the 15th century his gradual had been extended through the addition of several quires. It now seems likely to me that the original Gredinger manuscript had been bound as one volume. It was then the many additions that necessitated a rebinding as two volumes, in the 1470s. Only the second volume survives today. [See the video: Why was the Geese Book made?]

The mass for Saint Monica is the first of four formulas that were inserted between a quire containing ordinary chants and the sequentiary. The insertions include not only the mass for Monica but also alleluias and sequences for Saint Ulrich, the patron saint of the diocese of Augsburg, the church father Saint Jerome, and Saint Wolfgang, patron saint of the diocese of Regensburg. Since the ruling of the three leaves with the mass for Monica differs from the preceding and following leaves, we must conclude that the mass formula was produced as an independent self-contained entity, a so called libellus. It is even thinkable that it was initially written as a stand-alone booklet reserved for the feast of Monica and was only added to the gradual when it was rebound.

When was this libellus with the mass for Monica written? The style, layout, and binding indicate that the collection of four formulas was a significantly later addition to the manuscript. When we peruse the formulas to identify scribal hands, we note that the formulas were copied by the same person. It is once again the style of the initials that allows us to attach a name: The initial “o” at the beginning of the Alleluia verse in the formula for Saint Wolfgang [fol. 186v] contains one of the faces that are characteristic for the work of Georg Rayl. We found these unique drawings in another Nuremberg manuscript that he signed.

This discovery raises new questions. Georg Rayl died in the year 1494, ten years before Sixtus Tucher donated the mass. This is even more puzzling if we consider that Sixtus received his call to Nuremberg in 1496, two years after the death of Rayl. How could Sixtus introduce a feast that was already part of the liturgical books?

Perhaps Sixtus sought to codify a feast that had been celebrated more or less informally and probably without much pomp. Based on the evidence in St. Lorenz 3, we must assume that the veneration of Monica at St. Lorenz started during the tenure of Sixtus’s cousin Lorenz Tucher, who had held the provostship of St. Lorenz since 1482. Perhaps familial continuity strengthened the interest of Sixtus in the saint.

Sixtus was about to retire. This was the time to settle matters – and of course Sixtus still held the authority to make decisions. What becomes clear though is that Sixtus made St. Monica a cause of his own. If we ask the question where and when Sixtus made an acquaintance with the saint, we have to focus on his student years in Italy at the university of Bologna. The canons regular of Santa Maria di Reno served as a kind of pastoral center for the university students. Since the canons lived according

to the rule of Saint Augustine, his mother Monica played a significant role in their liturgy. Santa Maria di Reno also became a center for religious reform that influenced many other collegiate institutions. The “Renana” congregation of Augustinian houses was especially prominent in Italy, and the cult of Saint Monica must have spread parallel to this reform movement. Even though St. Lorenz was not a collegiate church but a parish, the communal life of priests and deacons in the large rectory must have been very similar to that of canons.

Sixtus’s vital interest in the writings of the church fathers must have played an even greater role for his admiration of Monica. Since he made a first career as university teacher, they may have been his role models in devoting energy to scholarship. Not only Sixtus’s letters but also his vita tells us that he was especially drawn to Jerome and Augustine, whose works he wished to study following his retirement.

Inserting a feast day was no easy task. However, as long as it held an informal status and its liturgical profile was kept low it could be celebrated in coexistence with established feasts. In case of conflict, it might even be moved to another day. The common feast day for Monica on May 4th was occupied in Bamberg and Nuremberg by the feasts of the martyrs Godehard and Florian. Replacing these saints with Monica was no option, both from the standpoint of the provost of St. Lorenz, who had to take care not to deviate too drastically from the mandatory cathedral liturgy, as well as from the standpoint of the donor, who did not want to “devalue” his investment by placing “his” saint in a competitive situation with other popular saints.

Sixtus Tucher indeed took this problem seriously, as we again see from the charter: The feast of Saint Monica was to be moved to the day after May fourth. If additional conflicts arose in respect to Sundays or other feast days it was to be postponed even further. Also, no memorial services were to be performed that necessitated the voicing of the name of any other donor, thus reserving the day exclusively to the remembrance of Sixtus Tucher. Indeed, one problem was already foreseeable: The dedication of the cathedral of Bamberg, one of the most prominent feast days at the bishop’s church, was celebrated on May 6th. Even though the dedication of the cathedral was not celebrated in Nuremberg, the possible performance of an unapproved new feast on that very day at St. Lorenz that was to receive the equivalent emphasis could have been seen as competition by the bishop and the cathedral chapter.

Interestingly Sixtus stipulates that solutions were to be worked out by the sacristan and not his successor in the office of provost. Today we would not expect a sacristan to make decisions about the liturgy. Might Sixtus have wanted a member of the fabric of the church, a civic employee rather than a cleric bound by obedience to the bishop to enforce his wishes? We will never know, nonetheless the self-confidence of Sixtus Tucher shines through the lines of the charter that not only seeks to shape the liturgy of his parish but also to secure his eternal memory.

As the location for the performance of his donation, Sixtus selected the “Vierlehrer Altar,” dedicated to the Four Church Fathers, thus choosing the altar already associated with Monica’s son Augustine. This altar no longer exists, but placement is known: It stood here on the south side of the main altar at the fourth pier of the outer wall of the hall choir, a privileged position in the church’s hierarchy of places. Sixtus stipulated that the wings of the altar were to be opened so that the festive panels were visible, a view of the altar that was restricted to only a few days every year. In addition, the charter contains the following passage: “...the altar shall be adorned with the image of a widow.” Sacristans’ manuals including that from St. Lorenz in Nuremberg often remark that on a particular saint’s day the available reliquaries with the remains of that saint were to be displayed on the altar. Some of these reliquaries had the form of a bust or a figure, but this is not what Sixtus had in mind when he wrote the charter.

The illuminator Nikolaus Glodendon depicted a feast day at the Neue Stift in Halle showing what an altar may have looked like when figures of saints were placed in the retable. Albrecht Dürer, who made the sketch used by Glockendon, was familiar with rituals in the Nuremberg parishes and must have used them as a model. Much like the Barbie doll of our time, these figures could take on different roles through their inclusion in varied ritualized settings. Thus, the generic figure of a widow became Saint Monica on her feast day. On other days the figure placed on a different altar could stand for another holy widow. It is even possible that these figures were adapted to the setting through their modulation with characteristic elements, such as removable attributes or even clothing, thus making them even more comparable to the different scenarios to which Barbie has been adjusted by the manufacturers who market accessories, ranging from those of nurses to those of astronauts.

Which role does the feast of Saint Monica play in the Geese Book? It is immediately evident that the feast was not entered in the correct place according to the calendar. Instead, we find it at the end of the sanctorale in the second volume. It is preceded by the mass for the Fifteen Holy Helpers, a group of saints who enjoyed special veneration in the diocese of Bamberg and in the city of Nuremberg on November 14. This feast had only been recently added to the Bamberg Missal. The mass for Saint Monica is followed by a collection of alleluia chants for the Easter cycle. This isolated placement at the very end of the sanctorale might indicate that the mass was not part of the initial layout but was included at a later stage of the production process. On the other hand, the continuous foliation throughout the volume is proof that the formula was not added after the completion of the manuscript through the insertion of additional leaves. Does this placement “on the edge” express that the feast was still considered not fully accepted into the liturgy, or was the late insertion the result of an oversight of the compiler? We must not forget that the mastermind of the Geese Book project, Friedrich Rosendorn, had died after finishing the first volume.

Perhaps the answer is rather simple. If we peruse the oldest portion of the sanctorale of the manuscript St. Lorenz 3 for added cross-references, we note that the mass formulas for Ulrich and Wolfgang were already part of the oldest layer written by Johannes Gredinger. A later hand, probably that of Georg Rayl, inserted rubrics that point to the chants in the added quire. For Saint Ulrich we find cues to the sequence “Udalrici benedicti,” [fol. 41, new foliation], for Saint Jerome the alleluia “Doctor dei eremiae” and the sequence “O qui declaro genere” [fol. 60]. The original sanctorale does not contain a mass for Saint Wolfgang, but a rubric was entered in the lower margin [fol. 62] of the page corresponding to the correct placement in the church year. This rubric refers to the alleluia “O sancte Wolfgange” and the sequence “in Wolfgangi canamus” [on folio 186v]. In addition, it notes that the rest of the formula was to follow the mass for Saint Nicolas [on fol. 16v-17]. If we search for cross-references for Monica in the sanctorale, we find no trace. To sum up: Rubrics added to the margins of the sanctorale telling the singers when to turn to a later section of the manuscript exist for three of the four formulas added by Georg Rayl. Alone the mass for Saint Monica is not cross-referenced.

Looking at the Geese Book we note that the scribe faithfully followed the various links provided by Georg Rayl: The scribe integrated the alleluias and sequences for Wolfgang and Jerome into the existing mass formulas. For Wolfgang an extended formula was generated by combining the alleluia and sequence from the libellus with the proper chants for the feast of Saint Nicolas.

In respect to Monica the following mishap must have occurred: The scribe integrated material as long as the place of insertion was clearly marked in his template. In this rather mechanical approach to copying we miss Rosendorn’s careful planning and collation which we observed in the first volume. It appears that the second scribe was not aware that a formula for Saint Monica existed in another place

while working his way through the sanctorale. He did not realize his mistake until he had completed the entire section. Having reserved no space for the insertion, he was forced to add the mass at the end.

In fact, this observation reveals another scribal error, again corroborating that he had not planned his task properly: The scribe did not realize that the mass for the Fifteen Holy Helpers was placed incorrectly in the manuscript St. Lorenz 3. This feast must have been the first addition to the gradual copied by Gredinger himself at the very end of the sanctorale. The scribe of the Geese Book should have inserted the mass between the feasts of bishops Brice and Othmar. Instead, he maintained the incorrect placement by simply copying it from the older gradual that was his template.

More and more the suspicion is confirmed that the scribe of the second volume of the Geese Book must have been rather inexperienced. Perhaps it was a student of Rosendorn's, a young cleric at St. Lorenz. On the other hand, if we compare the variants of the chants in the two manuscripts we observe that his scribal skills were quite good; the melodies and texts are virtually identical.

Many new mass formulas were not original compositions but were pieced together as a combination from pre-existing material and newly written chants. What are the origins of the mass for Saint Monica? The festive introit *Gaudeamus omnes* with its memorable melody was a pre-existing chant, widely employed for feasts of female saints – such as Agatha, Catherine, Barbara, Martha, Elizabeth – but also for Marian feasts. It was a logical step to resort to this well-known introit for a new feast for a female saint. The same can be said about the communio *Dilexisti iusticiam*, which we also find in many other masses. Whereas introit and communio are part of a widely disseminated standard repertory, the alleluia, sequence, and offertory are clearly not. None of these chants are found in South Germany.

The offertory *Iesu transfixi vulnera* in the fifth mode is written in a late-medieval chant style. The rhymed text of seven stanzas reaches its climax on the fourth stanza that ends with the saint's name. It connects Monica to Christ's sacrifice and attests to the saint's compassion and her determination to influence and improve detrimental behavior:

“Jesus, pierced, your wounds enter within, and while you, Monica, rest by the cross, the rivers of your tears flow over the earth; make us avoid sins and all the evils of the world.”

The formulaic melody with recurring transposed segments reaches its culmination on a melisma on the closing phrase “mundi lubrica” – “evils of the world” – employing a series of descents by fourths and fifths, followed by counter-movement to the octave. This passage symbolizes the dramatic outcry addressed to Monica, which implores the saint for help in order to stay free of all sin. Through his donation, this became the personal plea of Sixtus Tucher in his ongoing quest for the hereafter.

The feast of Saint Monica demonstrates that personal motivations could initiate the inclusion of a new saint into the liturgy of a parish church. It also highlights the complexity of a major book project, such as the Geese Book, that was challenged with a liturgy in constant flux.

Sources

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