

An illuminated fifteenth-century Milanese manuscript of the ‘Meditationes Vitae Christi’

Study of an overlooked fifteenth-century manuscript of the ‘Meditationes Vitae Christi’ demonstrates that its illustrations were adapted to the needs of its first owner, the Milanese innkeeper Cristoforo da Cassano. It is an example of the way in which the images accompanying this popular devotional text were reshaped to appeal to a new lay urban audience.

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WITH FORTY-FIVE DELICATE illuminations unfolding across forty-nine parchment leaves, Biblioteca Trivulziana, Milan, MS 543 is a hitherto little-studied fifteenth-century manuscript of a devotional manual, the *Meditationes Vitae Christi* (*Meditations on the Life of Christ*, hereafter *MVC*). Its illuminations rival in quality the four illustrated copies of this popular medieval text that are well known and have received sustained scholarly attention.¹ It is one of three illuminated manuscripts of the *MVC* that have recently come to light in Italian libraries; the other two will be briefly referred to in the course of the present article.

Although displayed in several local exhibitions, catalogued under the title *Meditazioni della vita di Cristo* and also identified as such in

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1 The four manuscripts are: Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, MS Ital.115; Corpus Christi College, Oxford, MS 410; Sntie Museum of Art, Notre Dame IN, MS Acc.1985.025; and Antiquariat Heribert Tenschert, Ramsen; see H. Flora: *The Devout Belief of the Imagination: The Paris Meditationes Vitae Christi and Female Franciscan Spirituality in Trecento Italy*, Turnhout 2009, pp.49–60.

2 See C. Santoro, ed.: exh. cat. *Codici miniati del Rinascimento italiano a cura di Caterina Santoro*, Milan 1952, pp.19–20, no.11; G. Bologna: exh. cat. *Dal fulgore delle pagine miniate al colore-luce delle vetrate*, Milan (Biblioteca Trivulziana) 1988, unpaginated [p.34]; and M. Pontone: exh. cat. *Renaissance Splendors of the*

Northern Italian Court, Milan (Castello Sforzesco) 2015, unpaginated [p.3], cat. no.ii. It is catalogued in M. Pontone: ‘Milano, Archivio storico civico e Biblioteca Trivulziana, Trivulzio, Triv.543’, *Manus Online* (2011), available at https://manus.iccu.sbn.it/opac_SchedaScheda.php?ID=196937, accessed 20th January 2021.

For a description of the illuminations, see C. Santoro: *I codici miniati della Biblioteca Trivulziana*, Milan 1958, pp.12–14, no.7, pls.viii–ix.

3 C. Fischer: ‘Die “Meditationes Vitae Christi”: ihre handschriftliche Überlieferung und die Verfasserfrage’, *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum* 25 (1932), pp.3–35, 175–209, 305–48 and 449–83. It does not appear in the additions to this census by A. Vaccari: ‘Le “Meditazioni della Vita di Christo” in volgare’, in A. Vaccari: *Scritti di erudizione e di filologia*, I, Rome 1952, pp.341–78.

It is absent from the list of illuminated *MVC* manuscripts, see I. Ragusa and R.B. Green: *Meditations on the Life of Christ: An Illustrated Manuscript of the Fourteenth Century*. Paris, Bibliothèque

1. *The Intersession of the Angels, from Meditationes Vitae Christi*. Milan, c.1450. Tempera on parchment, c.30.7 by 22.3 cm. (Biblioteca Trivulziana, Milan, MS 543, fol.1r; © Comune di Milano).

Manus, a 2009 census of manuscripts in Italian libraries, the Trivulziana manuscript has not been studied in depth.² It does not appear in the 1932 census of *MVC* manuscripts and remains absent from its subsequent revisions and additions.³ It has been cited in several studies of Milanese illumination and was remarked upon by Francesca Manzari in her investigation of the ‘migration’ of images between illustrated Books of Hours and other Italian devotional books.⁴ The present article has been written at a time of intense scholarly interest in the *MVC*.⁵ Debates about its authorship, date and the composition of the original text have been reignited by newly discovered documentary evidence and the recent publication of an annotated edition of a short Italian version of the text.⁶

Nazionale, Ms. Ital., 115, Princeton 1961, p.xxiii, note 5, and from its revision by Flora, *op. cit.* (note 1), p.50, note 2. The manuscript is known to Dávid Falvai, Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, who directs a research group on the subject and is preparing a monograph on the Italian textual tradition of the *MVC*.

4 For a bibliography, see Pontone 2011, *op. cit.* (note 2). F. Manzari: ‘Migration de textes et d’images entre livres d’heures et livres de dévotion en Italie (XIIIe–XVe siècles)’, in C. Raynaud, ed.: *Des heures pour prier: les livres d’heures en Europe méridionale du Moyen Age à la Renaissance*, Paris 2014, pp.269–99, esp. p.278 and p.293, fig.8.

5 For the latest publications focusing on the *MVC* illuminations with references to previous literature, see R. Bartal: ‘Lost and found in the “Vitae Christi”’, in L. Cleaver, A. Bovey and L. Donkin, eds: *Illuminating the Middle Ages: Tributes to Prof. John Lowden*, Leiden 2020, pp.291–308; and R. Bartal: ‘Text, textile, blood: Mary under the cross in an illuminated

“Meditationes Vitae Christi” (Oxford, Corpus Christi College, MS 410)’, *Studies in Iconography* 41 (2020), pp.131–64.

6 See S. McNamer: *Meditations on the Life of Christ: The Short Italian Text*, Notre Dame IN 2017, which includes an edition of Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Canon. Ital.174. For contrasting theories about the authorship and composition of the original text, see P. Tóth and D. Falvai: ‘New light on the date and authorship of the “Meditationes vitae Christi”’, in S. Kelly and R. Perry, eds: *Devotional Culture in Late Medieval England and Europe: Diverse Imaginations of Christ’s Life*, Turnhout 2014, pp.17–105; and S. McNamer: ‘The debate on the origins of the “Meditationes vitae Christi”’: recent arguments and prospects for future research’, *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum* 111, nos.1–2 (2018), pp.65–112. New evidence and analysis will be presented in H. Flora and P. Tóth, eds: *The Meditationes Vitae Christi Reconsidered: New Perspectives on Text and Image*, Turnhout (forthcoming). I thank the editors for sharing this forthcoming publication.



QUANTO COSA CHE PER molto grande tempo
 oltra spatio de cinque milia anni miseramente graiessse
 la humana generatione prostrata & abiectuta dallo in
 ghanno & dalle fallacie delli demonij. Et nuuno per lo
 peccato del primo huomo possca mai peruenire alla celeste
 patrie. Et beattissimi spiriti cioe i sancti angeli au
 ando compassione di tanta ruina della sua restauratione i
 furano indocati. Auengnadio che tuati fiata anoi labbiano. Venendo il co
 pimento del tempo come piacque adio. sollecitamente & deuotamente in
 questo modo. Dio padre pregarono inginocchiandosi humilmente denanzi
 al suo cospecto misericordemente & dissero. Messere piacque alla uostra maie
 stade & grandezza di fare la creatura nobile & ragionevole cioe huomo so
 lamente per la uostra bonta che la loro salute fosse con la nostra & anoi di
 quella ruina fosse in quella patrie grande restauratione. Ma messere cioe di
 tuati perissero & nuuno come uedemo qua su & mostri nuncia molto senalle

An illuminated manuscript of the 'Meditationes Vitae Christi'

This article seeks to integrate the Trivulziana manuscript into the wider context of MVC scholarship. As one of the first fifteenth-century illuminated copies of this Italian text to come to light, the Trivulziana manuscript reveals the manual's continued popularity a century and a half after its composition and its subsequent reshaping to appeal to new urban audiences.⁷

The MVC is regarded as one of the most influential medieval devotional texts. Written in central Italy, it was attributed to the Franciscan theologian Bonaventure of Bagnoregio (d.1274) and later to the friar Johannes de Caulibus. Scholarly opinion is currently divided as to the identity of the author. Most agree that the text was probably written by a Franciscan friar for a Franciscan nun of the order of St Clare. Dávid Falvy and Péter Tóth proposed Jacobus de Sancto Gimignano, a Spiritual Franciscan, whereas Sarah McNamer, more controversially, attributed it to a Clarissan nun.⁸ Opinion currently agrees on a date of authorship in the beginning of the fourteenth century.⁹ The text circulated widely among monastic and lay audiences and exists in a number of different versions;¹⁰ in particular, a long Latin text of about one hundred chapters, a long vernacular Italian text of roughly the same length, and shorter variations in each of the two languages of around forty chapters, traditionally believed to be an abridgement of a longer original, now lost.¹¹ Early copies in Latin and Italian were translated into every major European vernacular language, including French, English, Spanish and German, attesting to the text's widespread circulation and appeal.¹² Its popularity is rooted in its richly coloured narrative, which enlivens and embellishes the New Testament scenes with moving dialogues and stories, inviting the reader to empathise with the Biblical characters. The narrative, which centres on the life of Christ, opens with celestial events preceding his birth. It continues by retelling the stories of Christ's Incarnation, Nativity, Infancy, Ministry, Passion, Death and Resurrection, concluding with the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles at Pentecost. The author appeals to readers to imaginatively participate in the Biblical drama by 'place[ing] yourself in the presence of whatever is related [. . .] as if you were hearing it with your own ears and seeing it with your own eyes'.¹³

The composition of the text coincided with a period of artistic innovation during which such artists as Giotto, Pietro Lorenzetti and Duccio introduced new subjects to painting and showed new interest in emotional expressivity. Art historians have long debated the role of the MVC in these developments. Emile Mâle's view that the text was a fount of new scenes and modes of representation for fourteenth-century Italian art has proved influential.¹⁴ More recently, scholars have argued that the relationship between the text and trecento art is more complex and that influence is not strictly unidirectional; the topic continues to be debated.¹⁵ Illuminated manuscripts are particularly valuable in investigating such questions as their pages contain both text and image in close interaction. Despite the MVC's vivid descriptions, surprisingly only a limited number of illuminated manuscripts of the text survive. Until recently, out of more than two hundred late-medieval copies, nearly half of which were produced in Italy, only four Italian manuscripts have been known to contain extensive pictorial cycles and these have attracted intense scholarly scrutiny.¹⁶ The existence of the Trivulziana codex, along with another manuscript of the MVC highlighted by Manzari (Biblioteca Vallicelliana, Rome, MS A.43), and of a third copy (Biblioteca Apostolica, Vatican City, MS Reg. Lat.478) that was brought to light by the present author, suggests that the pictorial tradition of this text was wider and more important than initially recognised.¹⁷ The Trivulziana manuscript, therefore, represents an important addition to this growing, albeit still limited, corpus of illuminated versions of the MVC.

As indicated by a note at the end of the text, '*Iste liber est mei [Christo]fori de cassano*' (fol.49r), the Trivulziana manuscript first belonged to Cristoforo da Cassano, who was an innkeeper of the prestigious Milanese establishment, the Albergo del Pozzo (Inn of the Well), near the Porta Ticinese, the city's south-western medieval gate. His name appears on the list of the wealthiest citizens of Milan who lent money to Duke Francesco Sforza in 1451.¹⁸ The Trivulziana copy can be dated to c.1450, based on its stylistic affinity with a manuscript of Fazio degli Uberti's *Il Dittamondo* (Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, hereafter BnF, MS Ital.81), illustrated for Cristoforo by the same artist in 1447.¹⁹ The volume passed to the male monastery of S. Carlo

7 For a fuller study of this manuscript within the wider tradition of illuminated copies of the MVC, see L. Costiner: 'The Italian illuminated manuscripts of the "Meditationes Vitae Christi": new discoveries and a reassessment of the illuminated corpus', forthcoming.

8 Tóth and Falvy, *op. cit.* (note 6). This position is supported by recent documentary evidence that will be presented in D. Cooper: 'Fra Jacopo in the archives: San Gimignano as a context for the "Meditations on the Life of Christ"', in Flora and Tóth, eds, *op. cit.* (note 6), forthcoming. For a contrasting proposal arguing for female authorship, see McNamer 2017, *op. cit.* (note 6).

9 Tóth and Falvy, *op. cit.* (note 6), pp.52-60 and 93; McNamer 2017, *op. cit.* (note 6), pp.cxxvii-cxxvi.

10 For an overview of the different versions of the text and their relationship, see P. Ertl *et al.*: 'The Italian variants of the *Meditationes Vitae Christi*: A preliminary structural collation', *Italogramma* 6 (2013), pp.1-160, esp. pp.2-5; D. Falvy: 'The Italian manuscripts of the "Meditationes vitae Christi"', *Repository of the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences*

(2016), available at <http://real.mtak.hu/id/eprint/41333>, accessed 10th May 2020; and *idem*: 'The Italian text of the Paris manuscript of the *Meditationes*: historiographic remarks and new perspectives', in Flora and Tóth, eds, *op. cit.* (note 6), forthcoming. For a diagram of proposed models of textual transmission, see McNamer 2017, *op. cit.* (note 6), pp.xxxvi-xxxvii.

11 The terms given to the various categories of texts vary between authors. Fischer, *op. cit.* (note 3), titled the longer Latin version the *grosse Text* and the shorter one the *kleine Text*; Alberto Vaccari calls the longer Italian version '*testo integrale*' and the shorter '*testo dimezzato*', whereas Sarah McNamer uses *testo maggiore* and *testo minore*; see Falvy 2016, *op. cit.* (note 10), unpaginated, paragraph 16.

12 Fischer, *op. cit.* (note 3).

13 For an English translation of the critical edition, J. de Caulibus: *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, ed. and transl. F.T. Taney, A. Miller and M. Stallings-Taney, Asheville NC, 2000, p.4. For the critical edition of the long Latin version of the text, see I. de Caulibus: *Meditationes vite Christi: olim S. Bonaventura attributae*, ed. M.

Stallings-Taney, Turnhout 1997.

14 E. Mâle: *L'art religieux de la fin du Moyen Age en France: étude sur l'iconographie du Moyen Age et sur ses sources des d'inspiration*, Paris 1908, pp.10-20.

15 For a recent contribution arguing for the direct influence of the text on art, see J. Polzer: 'Concerning the origin of the "Meditations on the Life of Christ" and its early influence on art', *Franciscan Studies* 74 (2016), pp.307-51, republished with a few changes in *Studi di storia dell'arte* 27 (2016), pp.43-64. A more nuanced approach and a review of debates is offered in Flora, *op. cit.* (note 1), pp.33-40. For a new proposal arguing that art may have inspired the author of the text, see J. Cannon: 'The writer as viewer: recollecting art in the text of the "Meditationes Vitae Christi"', in Flora and Tóth, eds, *op. cit.* (note 6), forthcoming.

16 See note 1 above.

17 See L. Costiner: 'A newly-discovered illuminated manuscript of the "Meditationes Vitae Christi" produced in fifteenth-century Veneto (Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica, MS Reg. Lat.478)', in Flora and Tóth, eds, *op. cit.* (note 6), forthcoming.

18 Also recorded as Cristoforo del

Pozzo; see M.N. Covini: 'Pro impetrandis pecuniis. Nove liste di prestatori milanesi del 1451', *Studi di Storia Medioevale e di Diplomatica* NS 1 (2017), pp.147-232, esp. pp.151 and 188 with references.

19 The colophon of MS Ital.81, at fol.238v, records the text's transcription in 1447 for Cristoforo da Cassano. For a catalogue description and full digitisation, see <https://archivesetmanuscrits.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cc96102>, accessed 20th January 2021. The relationship between the manuscripts was discussed in A. Melograni: 'Appunti di miniatura lombarda. Ricerche sul "Maestro delle Vitae-Imperatorum"', *Storia dell'Arte* 70 (1990), pp.273-314, esp. p.284.

20 Also known as the Convento di S. Carlo dei Carmelitani Scalzi. The stamp is inscribed, 'Bibliotheca Patrum Carmelitanorum Discalceatorum Mediolanensium'.

21 C. Pasini: 'Dalla biblioteca della famiglia Trivulzio al Fondo Trovati dell'Ambrosiana (e "l'inventario di divisione" Ambr. H 150 Suss. compilato da Pietro Mazzuchelli)', *Aevum* 67, no.3 (1993), pp.647-85, esp. p.648.

22 On the verso of the front cover are inscribed 'No 724' and 'P.A 724',

of the Barefoot Carmelites in Milan, as evidenced by an institutional stamp on the book's opening page, which bears the convent's name and coat of arms.²⁰ Possibly after this monastery's suppression in 1804, the manuscript was acquired by the Milanese noble family, Trivulzio, since, in 1816, it appeared in an inventory of their books made when the collection was split between the brothers Gerolamo and Gian Giacomo, following their father's death.²¹ The MVC passed to Gian Giacomo (1774–1831), a bibliophile and art lover.²² It remained in his family until 1935, when a large part of his private collection was sold to the city of Milan, forming the Biblioteca Trivulziana.

The codex measures 30.7 by 22.3 centimetres and, probably in the sixteenth century, it was bound in paper boards, covered in tanned leather that had been tooled in blind with small vegetal patterns and closed by two straps.²³ The forty-nine finely burnished parchment folios are decorated with delicate pen drawings, which are tinted with colour. Despite being catalogued as imperfect, the book has sustained only minor losses – only one leaf is missing and a bifolium is misbound.²⁴ The text

2. *Christ before Pilate (above) and Christ before Herod (below)*, from *Meditationes Vitae Christi*. Perugia (?), early fourteenth century. Tempera on parchment, c.21.7 by 15 cm. (Corpus Christi College, Oxford, MS 410, fol.130r; by permission of the President and Fellows of Corpus Christi College, Oxford).



is laid out in a single column of approximately thirty-nine lines per page. The chapters are not rubricated, which is to say that they are not introduced by a title in red ink, but are distinguished by large, decorated initials enclosed in blue and violet boxes. The script has been catalogued as Humanistic, although it could be better described as Gothico-Antiqua (or Gothico-Humanistica), as it combines features of both the older medieval Gothic and the newer Humanistic script that originated in early fifteenth-century Italy.²⁵ A hired scribe may have copied both the text and the inscription, but the fact that the note of ownership is in the same hand as the main text could suggest that Cristoforo da Cassano, the manuscript's first owner, undertook the transcription himself. The practice of copying books in the home was common in pre-printing press Italy, a time when both noblemen and artisans created personal copies for pleasure, didactic use or spiritual penance.²⁶ If the text was copied by Cristoforo, it attests to the personal engagement of fifteenth-century lay owners with the replication and dissemination of the MVC, as well as the importance that these copyists attributed to the narrative.

The manuscript contains a single text, the shorter Italian version (*testo minore*) of the MVC. Popular among the laity, this was the most widely circulated version of the MVC in late-medieval Italy, with seventy-seven surviving copies.²⁷ At a time when books were bespoke productions, copies of the *testo minore* varied.²⁸ The version found in the Trivulziana manuscript has not been studied previously. It includes the approximately forty chapters of the *testo minore* but omits its prologue, which served as an exposition on meditating upon the Gospels; at the same time, some sections from the longer version are added, such as the episode of the healing of a paralytic man after he was lowered through the roof of Jesus's residence at Capernaum (Mark 2: 1–12).²⁹ When accounting for the loss of one page, this version of the text may have comprised as many as forty-nine chapters. The fact that the Trivulziana version omits the prologue is unusual but it adheres to the overall editorial strategy that governed *testo minore* copies. This strategy privileged narrative chapters and tended to remove longer, didactic tracts originally aimed at monastic readership, such as a discussion between Mary and Martha on the active and contemplative life.³⁰ This reveals the appeal to lay audiences of

which are the previous Trivulzio collection shelfmarks of the manuscript, catalogued by Pietro Mazzuchelli in Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Milan, MS H.150 Suss., 'Piede A'; see Pasini, *op. cit.* (note 21), p.673.

²³ The parchment gatherings are sewn on five sewing supports. I thank Anna Gialdini for assistance with this description.

²⁴ The collation is I (8), 2 fols, II (6), III (8), IV (7), V (8), VI (8), VII (2). One folio is missing between folios 24 and 25 (beginning of quire IV). The bifolium containing folios 9 and 10 is misbound. Originally, it formed the centre of quire II, originally a quire of eight, with leaves in the order 11, 12, 13, 9, 10, 14, 15, 16.

²⁵ It is catalogued as 'umanistica' in Pontone 2011, *op. cit.* (note 2). Humanistic features include long ascenders and descenders, and the half-Uncial d and g, while Gothic features comprise the single-compartment semitextualis 'a', the angular 'e', and the Gothic 'r'; see A. Derolez: *The Palaeography of Gothic Manuscript Books: From the Twelfth to the Early Sixteenth Century*, Cambridge 2003, pp.176–80, pl.158. It can also be classified as *Humanistica Semitextualis* as defined

in A. Derolez: 'The nomenclature of Humanistic Scripts', *Quaerendo* 41 (2011), pp.162–71.

²⁶ V. Branca: 'Copisti per passione, tradizione caratterizzante, tradizione di memoria', *Studi e problemi di critica testuale: convegno di study di filologi italiana nel centenario della commissione per i testi di lingua, 4–9 aprile 1960*, Bologna 1961, pp.69–83; and C. Bec: 'I mercanti scrittori', in A.A. Rosa, ed.: *Letteratura italiana*, Turin 1983, II, pp.269–97.

²⁷ Falvey 2016, *op. cit.* (note 10), unpaginated, paragraph 13.

²⁸ C.M. Stallings-Taney: 'The pseudo-Bonaventure "Meditationes vite Christi: Opus Integrum"', *Franciscan Studies* 55 (1998), pp.253–80, esp. p.256, note 19.

²⁹ This chapter corresponds to chapter 23 of De Caulibus 2000, *op. cit.* (note 13), pp.92–93. As a missing folio precedes this section, other chapters from the Ministry of Christ may have been inserted into the text of the Trivulziana manuscript from the long textual version. For a comparison of the contents of different textual variants, see Ertl *et al.*, *op. cit.* (note 10).

³⁰ De Caulibus 2000, *op. cit.* (note 13), chapters 45–58, pp.156–201.



3. *The Betrayal*, from *Meditationes Vitae Christi*. Padua (?), after 1305. Tempera on parchment, c.13.5 by 10 cm. (Heribert Tenschert Antiquariat Bibermuehle, Ramsen, fol.36v).

narrative storytelling with its rich visual and emotional content and speaks of the ways in which the text was reshaped to suit popular tastes and devotional needs.³¹

The figures in the miniatures at the beginning of each chapter, with their delicate features, cascading locks and flowing drapery, were identified by Caterina Santoro as being the work of the Master of the *Vitae Imperatorum*, a prominent book illuminator operating in Milan

in the second quarter of the fourteenth century.³² This otherwise anonymous artist derives his name from his most famous illuminated manuscript, an Italian translation of Suetonius's *Life of the Caesars*, made c.1431 as a gift for the ruler of Milan, Duke Filippo Maria Visconti.³³ The style of this illuminator, marked by graceful elongated figures, also shares features with that of the Master Olivetano, identified as Fra Girolamo da Milano, a monk of the Olivetan order, documented in Lombardy from 1429 to 1449, who may have been a collaborator.³⁴ The Master of the *Vitae Imperatorum* was regularly employed by important personalities of the day, including the Duke of Milan, Filippo Maria Visconti, his secretaries, Gian Matteo Bottigella and Tommaso Tebaldi,³⁵ and the Duke's associates, one of whom was Cristoforo de Cassano, the owner of the Trivulziana manuscript.³⁶

The Trivulziana manuscript's forty-five miniatures are inserted in rectangular frames at the beginning of each chapter of the text. Whereas the first illumination is executed on prepared ground in bold, saturated colours, the subsequent images are painted directly on unprimed parchment. This produces muted hues, giving the illustrations a delicacy and softness comparable to watercolours. The book opens with a page framed by a foliate border (Fig.1), which includes a large, half-page illumination showing the Intercession of the Angels, featuring God enthroned and surrounded by a crowd of kneeling angels. This scene, which is rare in Western art, was inspired by the first chapter of the *MVC*, which describes how, prior to the Incarnation, the angels beseeched God to save humanity. Following the opening page, illustrations are placed interlinearly at the start of each textual division, their imagery capturing the action of the entire chapter rather than simply illustrating the opening lines. This layout may have served to visually prime the viewer's response to the content that followed as well as to guide the reader through the text.

A comparison of the Trivulziana manuscript with the other illuminated Italian manuscripts of the *MVC* reveals different strategies for illuminating the text, which vary in terms of format and materials depending on the intended audience. A copy of the long version of the text in Italian (BnF, MS Ital.115), dating from c.1340–50, which may have been created for the community of Poor Clares at S. Chiara Novella in S. Martino, Pisa, uses illustrations to introduce distinct narrative moments, encouraging the reader to pause on the image and to contemplate particular passages.³⁷ This medium-sized book is made of inexpensive paper and illustrated by 193 pen-and-ink drawings that form part of a larger, unfinished programme of illustrations intended to encompass 297 images. Captions labelling figures and scenes suggest that this manuscript may have been aimed at nuns of

31 For an analysis of this trend in devotional French texts, see M.B.M. Boulton: *Sacred Fictions of Medieval France: Narrative Theology in the Lives of Christ and the Virgin, 1150–1500*, Cambridge 2015.

32 Santoro 1958, *op. cit.* (note 2), p.14.

33 BnF, Paris, MS Ital.131. F. Lollini: 'Maestro delle "Vitae Imperatorum"', in M. Bollati, ed.: *Dizionario Biografico dei miniatori italiani, secoli IX–XVI*, Milan 2004, pp.587–89. Known also as the Maestro delle *Vitae Imperatorum* or Magister *Vitae Imperatorum*. The title was first coined in P. Toesca: *La pittura e la miniatura nella Lombardia dai più antichi monumenti alla metà del Quattrocento*, Milan 1912, pp.528–32.

34 Lollini, *op. cit.* (note 33), p.588; and Melograni, *op. cit.* (note 19), esp. p.284 and note 80 for the Trivulziana manuscript.

35 The manuscripts the master painted for Filippo Maria Visconti are BnF, Paris, MS Ital.118 and MS Ital.2017; for Gian Matteo Bottigella, Bibliothèque Royale, Brussels, MS 14638; and for Tommaso Tebaldi, Free Library, Philadelphia, MS Lewis E.54.

36 Lollini, *op. cit.* (note 33), pp.588–89. For a document attesting to the services Cristoforo rendered to the Duke of Milan, see G.P. Boggetti: 'Per la storia dello Stato visconteo. Un Registro di Decreti, della Cancelleria di Filippo Maria Visconti, e un trattato segreto con Alfonso d'Aragona', *Archivio Storico Lombardo* 54 (1927), pp.237–357, esp. p.347, with a record dating from 7th October 1444.

37 For a translation of the text with images, see Ragusa and Green, *op. cit.* (note 3). The manuscript is available at <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/>

btv1b10527648k, accessed 20th January 2021. For an analysis of the manuscript, see Flora, *op. cit.* (note 1); and J. Dalarun and M. Besseyre: "'La meditatione de la vita del nostro Signore Yhesu Christo' dans le ms. It.115 de la Bibliothèque nationale de France', *Rivista di storia della miniatura* 13 (2009), pp.73–96. A revised edition of the text by Diego Dotto, Dávid Falvay and Antonio Montefusco, with an art historical analysis by Holly Flora, is forthcoming.

38 Catalogued in J.J.G. Alexander and E. Temple: *Illuminated Manuscripts in Oxford College Libraries, the University Archives and the Taylor Institution*, Oxford 1985, p.94. no.908. For the latest contributions on the subject, referencing previous bibliography, see Bartal, *op. cit.* (note 5); and *idem*: 'Reading the "Meditationes

Vitae Christi" on the Mount of Light, Perugia', in Flora and Tóth, eds, *op. cit.* (note 6), forthcoming.

39 R. Bartal: 'Repetition, opposition, and invention in an illuminated "Meditationes vitae Christi": Oxford, Corpus Christi College, MS 410', *Gesta* 53, no.2 (2014), pp.155–74.

40 Catalogued in E. König and H. Tenschert: *Unterwegs zur Renaissance: fünfzig italienische und spanische illuminierte Manuskripte des 13.–18. Jahrhunderts*, Ramsen 2011, pp.82–108, no.7. Tenschert locates its production in Padua after 1305, based on affinity with the Arena Chapel frescoes. Phillips and Flora believe it to be a provincial production dating from the end of the fourteenth century; Flora, *op. cit.* (note 1), p.51, note 10; and D.T. Phillips: 'The illustration of the "Meditationes on the Life of Christ": a study of an illuminated

various literacies, to be used in private and communal readings. Its illustrations reveal the concerns of cloistered nuns, emphasising, for example, aspects of communal living, such as the sharing of meals and worship (Fig.8).

An early fourteenth-century copy of the long Latin version of the text (Corpus Christi College, Oxford, MS 410) was produced for a Franciscan nun depicted on the opening page who may have belonged to the convent of S. Maria di Monteluca, Perugia.³⁸ This book's 154 illustrations, painted on parchment using expensive pigments, employ yet another strategy for illustration. Repeated compositions serve to imprint images onto the viewer's mind and to encourage visual analogies and associations between different scenes, a strategy typical of monastic reading.³⁹ This can be seen in the images of Christ before Pontius Pilate and Christ before Herod, which replicate the same arrangement of figures (Fig.2).

A copy of the short Latin version interleaved with a text on the virtues and vices with twenty-seven images on parchment (Fig.3), was produced between 1305 and the end of the fourteenth century for a man entering religious orders.⁴⁰ Its Betrayal scene, with Judas enveloping Christ in his cloak, is reminiscent of Giotto's Arena Chapel frescos in Padua, suggesting that it was produced in that city. In this book, illustrations typically extend across half a page and at times do not match the adjoining text, an arrangement that suggests a meditative rather than an illustrative function.

Another illuminated copy (Snite Museum of Art, Notre Dame IN, MS Acc.1985.025), in this case of the short text in Italian, is pocketbook-sized and on parchment, decorated with forty-eight miniatures. It was illustrated c.1350 by the Azzi workshop in Bologna, ostensibly for the wealthy, educated layman and his wife depicted kneeling before Christ on the opening page.⁴¹ Its images accord a prominent place to Jesus's earthly father, Joseph. They depict him in contemporary fourteenth-century dress and insert him in scenes, such as the Visitation, in which he is not described in the text (Fig.4). Such illustrations would have appealed directly to the book's initial owner and would have facilitated the imaginative participation in the biblical events encouraged by the narrative.

To the corpus of these four well-studied examples it is now possible to add the Trivulziana and the two other manuscripts mentioned above. The first of these is a palm-sized parchment manuscript of the short textual version in Italian decorated with forty-two small miniatures (Biblioteca Vallicelliana, Rome, MS A.43); possibly of Florentine origin, it was probably produced in the fifteenth century.⁴² The second is also a fifteenth-century parchment book, created in the Veneto, probably

fourteenth-century Italian manuscript at the University of Notre Dame (Snite Museum of Art, Acc. No.85.25), unpublished PhD diss. (Yale University, 2016), p.27.

41 See D. Gura: *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts of the University of Notre Dame and Saint Mary's College*, Notre Dame IN, 2016, pp.537-39. For an analysis of the illuminations, see Flora, *op. cit.* (note 1), pp.51-53; C. Balbarini: 'Le "Meditationes Vitae Christi" della Notre Dame University. Uno studio iconografico e un'aggiunta al catalogo di Stefano degli Azzi', *Rivista di storia della miniatura* 20 (2016), pp.103-14; Phillips, *op. cit.* (note 40); and D.T. Phillips: 'Meditations for a married man: the Snite MVC and the elite urban male reader', in Flora and Tóth, eds, *op. cit.* (note 6), forthcoming.

42 It is catalogued as a fifteenth-century production, see G. Cavallo, A. Manodori and B. Tellini Santoni, eds: *exh. cat. Pregare nel segreto: libri d'ore e testi di spiritualità nella tradizione cristiana*, Rome (Biblioteca Vallicelliana) 1994, pp.67-68, no.58; and C. Leonardi and A. Degl' Innocenti, eds: *exh. cat. Maria Vergine Madre Regina: Le Miniature Medievali e Rinascimentali*, Rome (Biblioteca Vallicelliana) 2001, pp.212-15, no.6. Manzari believes it have been produced in early fourteenth-century Florence, see Manzari, *op. cit.* (note 4), pp.279.

43 Costiner, *op. cit.* (note 17).

44 Flora, *op. cit.* (note 1), p.51.

45 Costiner, *op. cit.* (note 7).

46 For the standard iconography, see G. Schiller: *Iconography of Christian Art*, transl. J. Seligman, New York 1971.

Padua, in 1455 (Biblioteca Apostolica, Vatican City, MS Reg. Lat.478). This short version of the text in Italian is decorated with forty-four historiated initials.⁴³ What is notable about the fourteenth-century copies, discussed above, is that they do not share a common pictorial programme; this variety has been explained by the books being customised to the individual patron, as was not unusual for illuminated medieval books.⁴⁴ The functions of the fifteenth-century copies are only now beginning to be researched.⁴⁵ Although the Trivulziana images are not innovative in their iconography, since they follow standard medieval models, details in the representation of characters and settings within scenes appear, at times, to have been tailored to the concerns of the wealthy urban reader who was its original owner.⁴⁶

4. *The Visitation*, from *Meditationes Vitae Christi*. Bologna, c.1350. Tempera and gold leaf on parchment, c.18 by 12.5 cm. (Snite Museum of Art, University of Notre Dame IN, MS Acc. 1985.025, fol.10v.).



An illuminated manuscript of the 'Meditationes Vitae Christi'



5. Detail of the *Birth of John the Baptist*, from *Meditationes Vitae Christi*. Milan, c.1450. Tempera on parchment, page c.30.7 by 22.3 cm. (Biblioteca Trivulziana, Milan, MS 543, fol.5v; © Comune di Milano).

6. Detail of the *Circumcision*, from *Meditationes Vitae Christi*. Milan, c.1450. Tempera on parchment, page c.30.7 by 22.3 cm. (Biblioteca Trivulziana, Milan, MS 543, fol.11r; © Comune di Milano).

7. *Christ turning away from gossiping and quarrelling townspeople*, from *Meditationes Vitae Christi*. Milan, c.1450. Tempera on parchment, c.30.7 by 22.3 cm. (Biblioteca Trivulziana, Milan, MS 543, fol.18r; © Comune di Milano).



sona che tratta per amore didio. Empercio che xpo disse che gliera bisogno dinter-
 Decce uolopere del suo padre. remutatosi del proponimento. et seguito la uolunta della
 madre. et uicino con loro. et seconuifesi alla loro uolunta. ¶ Empercio ti puo-
 ta molto marauigliare della sua humilita di questa che noi auemo dicta. et che
 seguitaremo in questo capitolo che seguita: ~

Retornato il nostro signore ihu xpo dal tempo di uelini con lamadre et con ioseph in nacareth. ¶ Et esso stete da questo tempo in fino al prin-
 cipio di xxx. anni. non si troua che facesse operatione marauigliosa. Adunque che possemo meditare che
 facesse tanto tempo. saci che non stete otioso. che non facesse alcuna cosa in tutto pare grande audire. Ma non ben cura qui Impercio che palesemente il potrai uedere. Anoi pu-
 re che non facesse niente. ma esso fece grandissime cose. et niente ste-
 ete otioso. ¶ Anima nota qui. cosi conera uirtuoso il suo parlare. el suo opare. cosi era uirtuoso il suo tacere. el suo posare. per che esso si ritraueua di tutte le opere che appartenessero a ypocresia per nostro ammaestramento. che ne guardiamo da essa. de non operarla. ¶ Et homo maestro alcuna uolta ammaestrua delle uirtu et della uia dandare alla uita disopra. Et comincio dalla sua giuinezza affare opere uirtuose et marauigliose. ma erano nascoste. ¶ In queste cose chio o die te inanta. e in opere pareua senza modo. che si tenea stulto nel rispetto della gente. et inutile. quasi come semplice mostraua desiere. ¶ Ma non e cosi che in questo tempo formo quella ismifurata uirtu. cio e lumilita. senza laquale nuna perso nati puo saluare. Et con questa poca operatione. laquale io confermo si e per la auctorita della sancta chiesa. Adunque si sottrabua della compagnia. et della con uersatione delle persone. ¶ Anima cosi si vuole fare. chi uole idio non usare quasi senon con poche persone alle solitudin. et usa con alcuna persona che uada secondo idio. Andaua alla sinagoga. cio e alla chiesa. staua molto adoratione. et nel piu uile luogo si ponea. tornaua a casa. et staua con lamadre. et alcuna uolta aucaua il suo nutritio. cio e ioseph. a quello che gli bisognaua. passaua fra lagente. andaua. et uenia. Et essi tuer. si marauigliuano uedendo si bellissimo

Since the MVC is one of two surviving illuminated parchment books belonging to Cristoforo, he may have owned a private library. Louis I, Duke of Savoy, was so impressed by a manuscript in Cristoforo's collection, that he sent a letter on 17th September 1461 to the Duke of Milan, Francesco Sforza, asking to borrow it for copying.⁴⁷ Louis I's ambassador, Andrea Maletta, is recorded as having stayed at the inn in 1457, during which time he may have encountered the desired book.⁴⁸ This manuscript can be identified as Fazio degli Uberti's *Il Dittamondo* (BnF, MS Ital.81), comprising 250 fine parchment leaves and dozens of illustrations, illuminated, like the MVC, by the Master of the *Vitae Imperatorum*; the text is an allegorical-didactic poem guiding the reader on a journey through the known world.⁴⁹ A note at the conclusion of the text (fol.238v) records the date of 1447 and attributes ownership to Cristoforo. The Duke of Savoy's familiarity with this manuscript indicates that Cristoforo displayed and shared his collection with the inn's pre-eminent guests. More broadly, it reveals that this private library was part of a wider network of social,

47 G. D'Adda, ed.: *Indagini Storiche, artistiche e bibliografiche sulla Libreria Visconteo-Sforzesca del Castello di Pavia*, Milan 1879, appendix to part I, p.48, first remarked upon in Melograni, *op. cit.* (note 19), p.305, note 80.
 48 E. Motta: 'Albergatori milanesi nei secoli XIV e XV', *Archivio storico lombardo* 25, no.1 (1898), pp.366-77, esp. p.373.

49 F. degli Uberti: *Il Dittamondo e le Rime*, G. Corsi, ed., Bari 1952. For a catalogue description and references, see note 19.
 50 D'Adda, ed., *op. cit.* (note 47), appendix to part I records correspondences that attest to the rich network of book exchange between Italian courts.

cultural and artistic exchange between Italian duchies, in which books played a central role.⁵⁰ The Trivulziana manuscript, with its fine parchment, expensive pigments and gold foil may well have served as such a bibliographical trophy, a piece for conversation and display at Cristoforo's elite gatherings. At the same time, the possible engagement of the innkeeper in the task of personally copying the text, a painstaking undertaking for a wealthy individual who could afford the services of a professional scribe, also suggests that the contents held personal and devotional significance for him.

Running the Albergo del Pozzo, Cristoforo was at the forefront of Milan's social and diplomatic activities. Courtiers, diplomats, barons and ambassadors all regularly congregated in its rooms.⁵¹ The inn even played host to the signing of a treaty, as one chronicle records, in which Cristoforo served as a witness.⁵² The illuminator of the Trivulziana manuscript seems to have alluded to such a setting, staging much of the biblical action in domestic interiors featuring colourful patterned walls, arches and decorated ceilings (Figs.5 and 6). The illustration of the Circumcision is one such example, marking a departure from the fourteenth-century illuminated copies, which depict the episode unfolding outdoors (Fig.6).⁵³ Similar interiors feature in another illuminated manuscript of the Life of the Virgin and of Christ (Biblioteca Reale, Turin, MS Varia 124), created in 1476 in Milan for Duke Galeazzo Maria Sforza and his wife Bona of Savoy. These illuminations also depict rooms with brightly coloured walls punctuated by repeated patterns, reflecting aristocratic tastes in Milan in the third quarter of the fifteenth century.⁵⁴ This particular emphasis on interior settings is not seen in any other illuminated manuscript of the MVC. Neither is this a device typically employed by the artist in other manuscripts attributed to him, suggesting a deliberate adaptation of the images to Cristoforo's occupational concerns.

Another illustration that alludes to Cristoforo's interests is that of chapter 14 of the manuscript, which describes Christ's early adulthood, from the age of twelve to thirty, a period not covered in Scripture. The narrative recounts how during this time Christ shied away from earthly achievements and social recognition to focus on his inner virtues, in particular, humility and patience.⁵⁵ The illustration of the text emphasises this by depicting Christ turning away from gossiping and quarrelling townspeople, with his head bowed in contemplation (Fig.7). This call to spiritual withdrawal from what must have been ubiquitous in busy cosmopolitan life will probably have spoken directly to tensions inherent in Cristoforo's professional ambition and his spiritual interests. The image for this chapter stands in contrast to that accompanying the same passage in the copy of the MVC in the BnF (MS Ital.115) in which Jesus is shown taking refuge in a church. Illustrations of later passages describing his simple life and household activities depict him eating with his family, or praying in the bedroom (Fig.8). These scenes emphasise monastic aspects of communal life and worship, fittingly for a convent, for which that book was destined. These radically disparate approaches to illustrating the same chapter emphasise artists' sensitivity to the concerns of their viewers and, in particular, the ways in which the Trivulziana volume would have reminded Cristoforo of the need to focus on inner virtues in the midst of his worldly commitments.

51 'Appunti e Notizie, Vecchio Albergo Milanese Scomparso', *Archivio Storico Lombardo* 4, series V, fasc.18 (1918), pp.339-40.
52 B. da San Giorgio: *Cronica del Monferrato*, Turin 1780, pp.345-46.
53 Corpus Christi College, Oxford, MS 410, fol.16v; BnF, MS Ital. 115, fol.24v; and Snite Museum of Art, MS Acc.1985.025,

fol.18r. For illustrations, see Costiner, *op. cit.* (note 17). The Tenschart manuscript does not illustrate the scene.
54 For a facsimile and commentary, see A. Vitale-Brovarone, ed.: *Il Codice varia 124 della Biblioteca reale di Torino, miniato da Cristoforo De Predis (Milano, 1476)*, Turin 1987. For a study of the 'realistic' depiction



8. Christ and his family eating at the table (top); and Christ and Mary praying in the bedroom (bottom), from *Meditationes Vitae Christi*. Pisa (?), c.1350. Pen and coloured ink on paper, approx. 30.5 by 21 cm. (Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, MS Ital. 115, fol.57v).

Although the complex ways in which this manuscript engages the audience both through its text and its image have only begun to be explored, it is clear that the integration of this book in the corpus of illuminated Italian MVCs deepens understanding of the appeal and visual customisation of the text at the dawn of the Renaissance.⁵⁶ As one of the few fifteenth-century Italian illuminated copies of the MVC to have come to light, and the only one whose original owner is recorded, this volume provides a rare glimpse of the ways in which this text continued to inspire readers more than a century and a half after its composition, and how it was decorated, experienced and used by its new urban audience, in private devotion as well as in public displays of wealth and sophistication.

of furnishings in this codex, see C. Copes: 'La rappresentazione degli interni domestici lombardi nel Leggendario Sforza-Savoia di Cristoforo de Predis', *Rivista di storia della miniatura* 21 (2017), pp.123-38.
55 An English translation of this chapter as it appears in the long Latin version of this text can be found in

De Caulibus 2000, *op. cit.* (note 13), chapter 15, pp.56-61.
56 A fuller discussion of the manuscript will be included in Costiner, *op. cit.* (note 7) and a book by the present author that will examine the illumination of late medieval vernacular Italian texts of the life of the Virgin and of Christ, both forthcoming.