

**Vernacular Psalter**  
**In Dutch, decorated manuscript on parchment**  
**Limburg (Southern Netherlands), c. 1450-1500**

*i+222 folios on parchment, modern foliation in pencil top margin recto on the first and every tenth leaf, collation impossible due to the tight binding, three stubs between ff. 6-7, one stub between ff. 14-15, one stub between ff. 221-222, and two stubs between f. 222 and the back pastedown, in all cases without loss of text, four contemporary leaves pasted onto stubs in order to replace cancelled leaves (ff. 169, 192, 196, 202), ruled in pale brown ink, prickings present on many leaves, (justification 97 x 72 mm.), written in 23-22 long lines (calendar, in 32 lines) by four main hands (with corrections in other hands): hand A, ff. 1-214 in a littera textualis; hand B, ff. 169, 192, 196 and 202 in a littera textualis; hand C, ff. 214v-215v in a littera hybrid; hand D copied the added text on f. 218rv in a littera hybrid, red rubrics, two attractive decorated initials: one 7-line red initial with blue pen-flourishes (f. 88), and one 5-line blue initial with pen-flourishes in red and two tiny flowers in red and green in the eye of the letter (f. 8), numerous red or blue initials: two 6-line litterae duplices (ff. 109, 128v), three 6-line red or blue initials (ff. 7, 35v, 151v), three 4-line red or blue initials (ff. 29v, 132r, 178v), several 3-line red or blue initials, many one- and two-line red or blue initials, in good condition. Contemporary binding of brown calf over wooden boards, ruled with fillets in lozenge patterns and stamped with small stamps: roundels with the IHS monogram, square stamps with a lion rampant, and circular stamps with a daisy-like motif, three raised bands, two metal clasps and catches on leather thongs (partly painted red), vellum flyleaves and pastedowns, well-preserved. Dimensions 139 x 100 mm.*

The tradition of translating the Bible into the vernacular during the Middle Ages was particularly strong in the Netherlands. This attractive manuscript, once belonging to a Franciscan nun in Sint-Catharinadal in Hasselt, Belgium contains a hitherto unknown, carefully corrected copy of the so-called "Hasselt translation of Sint-Catharinadal" of the Psalter in one of the earliest known copies of this version. The blind-stamped binding is contemporary.

### PROVENANCE

1. A contemporary inscription in red in the lower margin of f. 7 states that the manuscript was owned by the Franciscan nuns of the convent Sint-Catharinadal (St. Catherine's Valley) in Hasselt, in the province of Limburg in modern day Belgium: "Dit boeck hoert toe den besloeten susteren te Hasselt te Sancte Katherinen Dael geheiten." The inscription was written by sister Anna Swilden (d. 1513).

The convent Sint-Catharinadal was founded in 1426 and gave domicile then to five religious women, who followed the rule of the Third Order of St. Francis. The Franciscan Tertiaries of Sint-Catharinadal were known as the "Witte Nonnen" (white nuns), because of their white habit, and their convent as the "Witte Nonnenklooster." In the second half of the fifteenth century the number of nuns increased rapidly, and the sisters founded five satellite convents. The convent was closed by the French in 1797.

2. A note in pencil on the verso of the front flyleaf, reading "ex Zerezo de T.," seems to indicate that the manuscript was once in the possession of a member of the Belgian noble family Zerezo de Tejada. In 1848-1849 this family built a castle in Veerle, in the Belgian province of Antwerp, and lived there for many decades.

3. Another note in pencil on the same page indicates that the manuscript was owned by Baron André d'Otreppe de Bouvette (1913-2006) at Cierreux, in the Belgian province of Luxembourg. Baron d'Otreppe de Bouvette was *doyen* (dean) of the Société des Bibliophiles liégeois (the Society of Liège Bibliophiles).

## TEXT

ff. 1-6v, Calendar, use of Rome, with feasts in red and brown, not full, with additions by three hands. The second hand added two feasts in red: "Sint Franciscus ons heilige vader" (St. Francis, our holy father, 4 October) and "Sinte Quintinus merteler patroen" (St. Quintinus, martyr and patron, 31 October). The third hand added feasts of Franciscan saints and saints especially venerated in Flanders in brown ink: "Sint Joest dach confecoer" (St. Judoc, confessor, 11 June), "Sint Loey dach bisscop" (St. Eligius, bishop [of Noyon], 25 June), "Sancta Clara joncvrouwe" (St. Clare, virgin, 12 August), "Sancte Loduwicij episcopi minrebruder" (St. Louis, bishop [of Toulouse] and lesser friar, 19 August), "Sancte Ludowicus coninc" (St. Louis, king [of France], 25 August), "Sancte Remaclus bisscop van Tongeren" (St. Remacle, bishop of Tongeren, 3 September), "Dat Sancte Franciscus di heilige wonden ontfinc" (St. Francis receiving the stigmata, 16 August) and "Sancte Elzearius grave confessor vander derden ordenen" (Saint Elzéar, count [of Ariano] and confessor of the Third Order, 28 September). The fourth hand added general feasts in brown ink: "Sint Josep dach" (St. Joseph's day, 19 March), "opverrynes Jhesu Christi domini" (Resurrection of Christ, 27 March), "Sint Ambrosius" (St. Ambrose, 1 April), "Mergus dach ewangelist" (St. Mark, evangelist, 25 April), "Peternelle dach" (St. Petronilla, 31 May) and "Jhesus Christus bliscap op Monte Tabor" (Transfiguration of Christ on Mount Tabor, 5 July);

ff. 7-198v, *Beatus vir qui non abiit in concilio impiorum et in via peccatorum non stetit: et in cathedra pestilentie non sedit* [Ps. 11]. *Die sententie in tgemeyne*, [Prologue], incipit, "Die prophete in desen salm als in enen prologo. dats voirredene in den hoofde ende inden beghinsele dits boecs spreect vanden ghenen die dat hoeft ende beginsel is alre dinghen ... Maer die nuwe Adam dats Christus die de sonden af ghedeluwet heeft. is allene salich ende onbesmet. Want si en heeft in gheenre deser drie manieren ghesondicht noch seghen [sic] god noch in hen selven noch in sinen enen mensche"; [ff. 8r-198v, Psalms 1-150], *Psalms I*, incipit: "Salich is die man die niet af en ghinc inden raet der ongodliker menschen ... Loiftene in wael ludenden bellen met accorde. Loiftene in cymbalen der volhertiger blijscap. allen gheesten moet loeven den here. Hier neemt de sauter een inde. Deo gracias".

Psalms 1-150, beginning with a prologue.

ff. 199-214, [Canticles], *Hier beghinnen die cantiken. Te mectenen. [sic] Sinte Ambrosius. ende Augustinus. Te deum laudamus*, incipit: "Die god loven wi. die here belien wi Alle eertrike eert di ewige vader ... Ende hi sal weder gelden wrake in hoeren vianden. ende hi sal genedich wesen den lande sijns volcs. Glorie si den vader ende den soen. ende den heyligen gheest Als was inden beginne";

f. 214v, [Prayer to the Holy Sacrament], *Dit es een schoen ghebedeken totten weerdighen heileghen sacramente*, incipit, "Eya du levende vrucht du suete gemme du vrolike paradys appeldes bloeyenden vaderliken herten Du suete denne van cypers inden wijngaert van Engadij ... Soete hemelsche vrucht make huden lustich den dorren mont mijnre zielen met dijnre dierre spijsen ende preciose drancke Amen";

ff. 214v-215v, [Prayer to the Holy Sacrament], *Noch totten heileghen sacramente*, incipit, "O here ic en ben niet werdich dattu onder mijn daec in gaen soldeste mer ic verhope my van aldusdaniger goedertierenheit ende ghenadicheit Ich sieke mensche gae totten medesine des levens ... Coemte ewige mynne ende verenicht u met my Ende ic met u soe dat ghi van my noch ic van u nummermeer ghesceiden en moeten werden Amen";

f. 215v, [Prayer attributed to St. Gregory the Great], *Dit gebet sprac Sunte Gregorius doen hem onse lieve here openbaerde met sinen heiligen wonden*, incipit, "O lieve here Jhesu Christe sencke my in die diepheit alle dijnre wonden Ende vergheeft my alle mijn sonden O here vader drucket my in dijn heilige bloet Ende make my levende in dijn heilige doot ... Ende geeft my aflaet lieve here van alle mynen sonden doer uwen heilegher wond en wille Amen"; [ff. 216-217v, blank but ruled];

f. 218rv, [Prayer to the Virgin], incipit, "O uut vercoren heylge moder ende maghet Maria erke der heylger der dryvoldicheit ende serheyt der vieghen coren der heylger ynghelen ... Maria maghet ende moder Jhesus Christus moder der ontfermherticheit doer alle dese lieflijke beide soe staet mij bij inder heylger porten daer ic mijn vyande spreken moet amen";

f. 218v, [Notes on the places of birth and death of Jesus], incipit, "In Beddelen [= Bethlehem] so waes hij gheboren Ihesus daer mijn troest aen staet"; "Te Jheruselem had Christus die doot vercoren in hem dat mijn leven henen gaet amen"; [ff. 219-222v, blank].

This is a Psalter for devotional use; accompanying the biblical text are a liturgical calendar, the Psalms, arranged in their biblical order 1-150, the biblical Canticles, and a number of prayers, all in Dutch. It was once commonplace to say that it was Martin Luther and the other leaders of the Protestant Reformation that brought the Bible in the vernacular to believers. But modern scholarship has taught us that in fact the Bible was often translated into the vernacular during the Middle Ages. This is certainly true in the Netherlands.

The first Middle Dutch translation of the psalms was probably disseminated in the first half of the fourteenth century from West-Flanders to the Brabant, possibly from a Charterhouse in Bruges. Around the middle of the fifteenth century, the Brabant adaptations underwent further developments, including the translation associated with the tertiary convent of Catharinadal in Hasselt, the "Hasseltse Catharinadal-vertaling" (the Hasselt translation of Saint-Catherine's) (Desplenter, 2012, pp. 45-49). Given the certain or assumed origin of some of these manuscripts, the "Hasselt translation of Sint-Catharinadal" of the Psalter must have been in use in that convent, but it is less likely that the translation originated there; some dialectic forms suggest rather an origin in Brabant than in Limburg. He listed five manuscripts containing this version: Berlin, Staatsbibliothek Preußischer Kulturbesitz, MS germ. oct. 331 (c. 1475); Brussels, Royal Library, MS II 3738 (c. 1530-1560), Ms. II 7238 (c. 1475-1500) and Ms. IV 1280 (c. 1500); and Ghent, University Library, Ms. 1736 (c. 1500). Another manuscript that may be related is Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania, Dutch MS 1 (Biemans, 1984; now their manuscript, Codex 739?). Our manuscript contains one of the earliest copies of this version, and one of only two with this version (the other one is the manuscript now in Berlin, copied by Catharina van der Molen) that can be linked to Sint-Catharinadal with certainty.

The text in this manuscript has been carefully corrected throughout. The scribe made corrections by erasing errors, usually adding a tiny linefiller in brown or red on the erasure, after which (s)he continued copying (e.g. on ff. 48v, 54v, 63, 85v, 152, 166v and 213). The scribe (or someone else) also crossed words with a red line (e.g. on ff. 11v and 23v). At least two correctors added omitted words and phrases in the margins; one of them (probably the scribe) used both brown or red ink (e.g. on ff. 10v, 25, 59, 84v, 145v, 146v, 150v and 183v), the other only used brown ink (e.g. on ff. 70v, 84, 136v and 183v). A third corrector added five-and-a-half lines over an erased text (f. 105rv). Finally, four leaves were cancelled and replaced by single leaves, glued onto the stubs of the cancelled leaves, with text by yet another hand, presumably in order to correct major mistakes in the text on the cancelled leaves (ff. 169, 192, 196 and 202).

The convent of Sint-Catharinadal in Hasselt, Belgium, a house of Third Order Franciscan nuns, was founded in 1426 with only five sisters, growing into an important house in the second half of the fifteenth century. Scholars have identified nineteen manuscripts from their library (Stoker and Verbeij, 1997, nos. 563-581); the present manuscript is the twentieth. Some of the manuscripts were copied by the sisters themselves, probably for their own use. Sint-Catharinadal also owned manuscripts copied elsewhere, such as the vernacular History Bible now in the British Library, Additional MS 15310-15311.

Two scribes from the convent are known by name, Catharina van der Molen (d. 1526), who was sub-prioress, and Anna Swilden (d. 1513). Catharina van der Molen (d. 1526), sub-prioress of the convent, copied a Psalter with canticles (Berlin, Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Ms. germ. oct. 331), as is stated in the colophon and an owner's inscription of the convent. It is Anna, acting in her role as the convent's librarian, who probably wrote the ownership note in red in our manuscript.

Anna Swilden (d. 1513) is known with certainty to have copied a Prayer Book (Hasselt, Provinciaal Museum, unnumbered), again as stated in the colophon. Comparing the script of this Prayer Book with the script in other manuscripts from the convent led Jan Deschamps (Deschamps, 1954, p. 9) to the conclusion that Anna also copied a volume with books from the New Testament (Leiden, University Library, MS LTK 252), a *Meditationes vitae Jesu Christi* by Ludolph of Saxony in Dutch (The Hague, Royal Library, MS 73 E 7, dated 1472), a volume with devotional texts by Humbert of Romans and others (Huissen, Dominican Convent, MS 4), and part of a Prayer Book in Dutch (Brussels, Royal Library, MS 21.953, ff. 37r-72v), and later, a volume with Sermons by St. Bernard in Dutch, dated 1467 (Utrecht, Museum Catharijneconvent, MS BMH Warm h 92 E 9) and a Commentary on the Canticle of Canticles in Dutch (The Hague, Royal Library, MS 76 J 7).

But there is room for doubt whether Anna indeed copied all those manuscripts or not. The only certain fact is that she wrote the owner's inscriptions of the convent in red ink in the four manuscripts, just mentioned, now in Leiden, Utrecht and The Hague, and in a manuscript now in Liège (University Library, MS 2635). She may well have been the librarian of the convent (Deschamps, 1957, pp. 201-202). All five manuscripts have an inscription in a similar place (the lower margin of the page with the beginning of the main text), in the same color and apparently by the same hand as the inscription on f. 7 of our manuscript. Therefore, the inscription on f. 7r must have been written by Anna Swilden; the Psalter text, however, is not.

The manuscript is not listed in the Bibliotheca Neerlandica Manuscripta and Impressa (BNM-I).

## LITERATURE

Biemans, J. A. A. M. *Middelnederlandse Bijbelhandschriften. Codices manuscripti Sacrae Scripturae Neerlandicae, Corpus Sacrae Scriptorum Neerlandicae Medii Aevi, Catalogus*, Leiden, 1984, esp. Chapter X (pp. 291-296).

Deschamps, J. *Tentoonstelling van Middelnederlandse handschriften uit de beide Limburgen. Catalogus*, Hasselt, 1954.

Deschamps, J. "Middelnederlandse bijbelhandschriften uit het klooster Sint-Catharinadal te Hasselt," in *Liber amicorum aangeboden aan Jan Gruyters ter gelegenheid van zijn 70e verjaardag 28 januari 1957*, Hasselt, 1957, pp. 197-211.

Desplenter, Youri. "De geschiedenis van de Middelnederlandse psaltervertalingen herzien. De middeleeuwse overzettingen van het psalmboek uit het zuiden van het Nederlandse taalgebied (ca. 1300-ca. 1550)," *Ons Geestelijk Erf*, 83 (2012), pp. 3-56.

Desplenter, Youri. "Programming women's prayer? Textual and Pictorial Components in Middle Dutch Psalters," in Thérèse de Hemptinne, Veerle Fraeters and Maria Eugenia Gongora, eds. *Speaking to the Eye. Sight and Insight Through Text and Image (1150-1650)*, Medieval Identities: Socio-Cultural Spaces, 2, Turnhout, 2013, pp. 153-172.

Hindman, Sandra. *Text and Image in Fifteenth-century Illustrated Dutch Bibles*, Leiden, 1977.

Lambrechts, Juliaan. *Het oud Sint-Catharina-dal of beknopte geschiedenis van het klooster der Franciskanessen-Penitenten bijgenaamd de Witte-Damen te Hasselt*, Mechelen, 1892.

Luijtelaar, Inge van. "Colofonconventies in middeleeuwse handschriften uit vrouwenkloosters in de Nederlanden," Unpublished Master's thesis, Radboud University. Nijmegen, 2015.

Roggen, H. R. "De Witte Nonnen van Hasselt. De eerste franciscaanse 'stichting' in Hasselt (L.) (1430-1797)," *Franciscana*, 49 (1994), pp. 41-73.

Stoeker, Karl and Theodorus Johannes Verbeij. *Collecties op orde. Middelnederlandse handschriften uit kloosters en semi-religieuze gemeenschappen in de Nederlanden*, I: Studie. II: Repertorium, Miscellanea neerlandica, 15-16, Leuven, 1997.

## ONLINE RESOURCES

Database of Middle Dutch manuscripts and printed books, the Bibliotheca Neerlandica Manuscripta & Impressa (BNM-I): our manuscript not listed in the BNM-I.

<https://bnm-i.huygens.knaw.nl/>

TM 903