

JOHANNES NIDER, *Sermones de tempore* and *Sermones de sanctis*  
In Latin, decorated manuscript on paper  
Western Germany, c. 1445-1450?

*i* + 453 folios on paper (with watermarks similar to Briquet no. 15201, "Tête de Bœuf": Eekloo, 1431, Silly, 1433, Holland, 1435, Orléans, 1437, Oberlabnstein, 1443; Briquet no. 4639, "Couronne": Düsseldorf, 1438; Briquet no. 4640, "Couronne": Colmar, 1441; Briquet no. 3857, "Deux clefs": Braunschweig, 1440), contemporary foliation in brown ink in Arabic numerals, upper outer rectos, 3-448 (foliation of ff. 1 and 2 likely faded or cropped), with five unfoliated leaves between ff. 304 and 305, modern pagination in pencil beginning on f. 2, upper outer rectos and versos, 1-908, complete (collation  $i-ix^{12} x^{12} [+7 \text{ and } 8, \text{ inserted bifolium ff. } 114-115] xi-xxv^{12} xxvi^{10} [-6, \text{ canceled with no loss of text}] xxvii^{10} xxxviii-xxxviii^{12}$ ), quire numeration 1-38 still visible on first rectos, lower inner corner, of quires *i-xv*, *xxi-xxii*, *xxv-xxxviii*, horizontal catchwords, lower inner corners, visible on quires *i-xi*, *xvi*, *xviii-xx*, *xxii-xxiii*, *xxvii-xxx*, *xxxiii-xxxvii* (many highlighted with red), parchment reinforcements pasted in the innermost bifolia, parchment reinforcements pasted along the outer bifolia of quires *i-ii*, *vi*, *x*, *xv*, *xxi*, *xxv*, *xxx*, *xxxvii-xxxviii* and linking the outer bifolia of quires *xv-xvi* and *xvi-xvii*, ruled in brown ink with full-length vertical and horizontal bounding lines, some prickings visible in upper, outer, and lower margins (justification, 146-152 x 90-92 mm.), written in dark brown ink in four hands: (1) ff. 2-139, 274-304v, in Gothic hybrida on thirty to thirty-two long lines, (2) ff. 139v-162v, in Gothic cursive libraria on twenty-seven long lines, (3) ff. 162v-274, in a more rapid Gothic cursive on twenty-six long lines, and (4) ff. 305-448, in a compact Gothic cursive on thirty long lines, guide letters for initials, first thirty-five sermons numbered 1-25, 27-36 in Arabic numerals in the margin and in running headings (written in red), sermons subdivided using letters of the alphabet written in the margin, capitals and marginal letters and numbers highlighted in red, biblical citations and references to sources underlined in red, one-line red paraps, red rubrics, two- to three-line red initials, initials on ff. 242v and 261v filled with pen decoration in dark brown ink, one four-line initial on f. 305 at the beginning of the *Sermones de sanctis*, blank space left on f. 94 following conclusion of the sermon numbered 25 and the sermon numbered 27, which begins at the top of f. 94v, some contemporary corrections and annotations, including a pointing hand on f. 349v, some worming and crumbling at outer lower edge of f. *i* and f. 1, some waterstaining visible in upper inner corners and gutters and upper outer edges of many leaves but with no loss of legibility, slight tears in the margins of ff. 134 and 171, with no damage to the text, otherwise in fine condition. Sewn on four double bands, lacking binding but with stitching and headbands intact, as well as some fragments of brown leather remaining on the spine, traces of paper label on spine that reads "Sermones Jo. / ...", parchment binding reinforcements cut from older manuscripts, many with text still legible in Latin or German, in modern case. Dimensions 211 x 144 mm.

Preserved fully intact in this substantial volume is a popular, influential sermon collection, the work of an important fifteenth-century theologian, reformer, and pioneer in business ethics. Only one other copy of these sermons has been on the market in the last century. The codex also contains a range of medieval manuscript fragments, including one written in German, cut into narrow reinforcement strips. These and other remnants of the book's original binding make this an interesting object for study of the history of the book.

## PROVENANCE

1. Evidence of script, orthography ("y" for "ii," "w" for "u" and for "v"), and decoration all indicate this manuscript's origin in Germany. Watermark evidence suggests that it may have been produced in Western Germany around the middle of the fifteenth century, c. 1445-1450. It is therefore very likely that these sermons were copied shortly after the

death of their author, Johannes Nider, perhaps in the vicinity of Colmar, where he died, or further north.

This is a very carefully produced copy of Nider's sermons, with corrections added neatly throughout and with a systematic organization. Sermons are all labeled by the rubricators and neatly subdivided according to a consistent system, using sequential letters of the alphabet.

2. Though cut very narrowly to serve as binding reinforcements, many of the numerous parchment fragments reused in the present manuscript remain legible as fragments from earlier manuscripts. The inclusion of at least one fragment from a German-language manuscript (visible between ff. 6v and 7) points to the present volume having been bound in Germany. Further examination of these fragments may shed more light on the book's origins.

## TEXT

ff. 2-304v [preceded by two blank leaves, one unfoliated and one numbered f. 1], *Incipiunt sermones de tempore Reuerendi patris frater iohannis Nyder Sacre theologie professoris ordinis predicatorum, Prologus, incipit, "CVm predicationes plurimas modo exclamauiſsem volgari Rogatus sum ... Multis enim curis et officys grauatus Alys cogebam crebro in sudare laboribus"*; f. 2, *Dominica Prima in aduentu domini Sermo primus, incipit, "ECce rex tuus venit tibi mansuetus Zach 9 [Zacharias 9:9] et Mt 21 [Matthew 21:5] Tria sunt decenda principaliter de Christi aduentu ... et eiusdem ymago est eciam lignum quodcumque ad modum crucis formatum. Et sic est finis"*; [followed by one unfoliated leaf, blank but ruled, and four completely blank unfoliated leaves];

Seventy-one of Johannes Nider's *Sermones de tempore*, ranging chronologically from the first Sunday in Advent to the twenty-fifth Sunday after Pentecost. These are followed by three more of Nider's sermons, one for the dedication of a church, one on sudden death, and one on relics. These seventy-four sermons correspond to Schneyer nos. 1-8, 10-73, 180, and 182 (*Repertorium*, 2001). The first thirty-five are numbered 1-25, 27-36, and there is a space of less than a page left blank between sermons 25 and 27, but, checked alongside the *Repertorium*, there does not appear to be a sermon missing. The sermon on ff. 114-115v appears to have been added by the scribe after he had copied another sermon continuously from f. 113v to f. 116 (a note on f. 113v directs the reader to the resumption of the text at the top of f. 116).

ff. 305-448, *Incipiunt sermones de sanctis, de sancto Andrea, incipit, "Uenite post me faciam vos fieri piscatores hominum Mt 4 [Matthew 4:19] Tria principaliter sunt dicenda ... Obyt autem tandem beatus Anthonius anno vite sue centesimoquinto. [...?] de illis sermonibus"*; [f. 448v, ruled but blank].

Johannes Nider's *Sermones de sanctis* comprises thirty-seven sermons for saints' feast days, from that of Saint Andrew to that of Saint Anthony. They correspond to Schneyer nos. 143-149, 151-179, 150 (*Repertorium*, 2001).

The Dominican friar, Johannes Nider (b. 1380 in Swabia; d. 1438 at Colmar) was well-known in his day as a theologian and a reformer. He was sent to the Councils of Constance (1414-18) and Basel (1431-49), the latter as an intermediary between the Church and the Hussites, whom he made several attempts to reform. Between these Councils, he taught at the University of

Vienna and served as prior of the Dominican convent at Nuremberg. Nider's writings are significant for their themes of reform, and he was in the forefront of the theological issues of his day: heresy, lay spirituality, convent reform, witchcraft, and even the relationship between commerce and religious life. He is best known for two works: *Formicarius* (The Ant Hill), written in 1437, is often cited for the light it throws on methods of persecuting witches, while *De Contractibus Mercatorum* (On the Contracts of Merchants) is considered the earliest work on modern business ethics. Also noteworthy is his *Vierundzwanzig goldenen Harfen*, a text in German on how to adapt the ideals of a monastic life to lay spirituality.

Nider was one of the most popular preachers of the fifteenth century. Along with scattered untitled Latin and German sermons (including a collection of German sermons surviving only in Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, MS Germ. qu. 1593) and his *Harfen*, derived from sermons delivered in Nuremberg, the Latin sermons here, known collectively as the *Sermones aurei*, make up his surviving homiletic corpus. Nider's sermons all urge a practical, rather than a mystical, approach to Christianity and a common indebtedness to earlier Dominican doctors and preachers, like Thomas Aquinas and Jacobus de Voragine, as well as patristic authorities. Unlike the German *Harfen*, the *Sermones aurei* were not written for a lay audience, but for the use of other preachers. Early manuscript and print circulation attest to the popularity of these sermons, which survive in at least twenty-six manuscripts (see Kaeppli, 1975, no. 2548) and in at least ten incunable editions (Hain 11797-11805; GW M26953-4, M26958, M26960-1, M26963, M26966-8, M26971). Nider's *Sermones* influenced the sermons of later fifteenth-century preachers, like Johann Geiler von Kaisersberg, and they were included in a list of recommended works for preachers in Johann Ulrich Surgant's 1503 *Manuale curatorum* (see Dahmus, 1983, p. 67, n. 60).

## LITERATURE

Dahmus, John. "A Medieval Preacher and His Sources: Johannes Nider's Use of Jacobus de Voragine," *Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum* 58 (1988), pp. 121-176.

Dahmus, John. "Preaching to the Laity in Fifteenth-Century Germany: Johannes Nider's *Harps*," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 34 (1983), pp. 55-68.

Kaeppli, Thomas. *Scriptores Ordinis Praedicatorum Medii Aevi*, vol. 2, Rome, 1975.

*Repertorium der lateinischen Sermones des Mittelalters für die Zeit von 1350-1500*, ed. Ludwig Hödl and W. Knoch, with preparatory work by Johannes-Baptist Schneyer, Münster, Ruhr-Universität Bochum, 2001 [CD-ROM].

## ONLINE RESOURCES

Smith, Ignatius. "John Nider," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 11, New York, 1911  
<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11072b.htm>

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