

Passio sancti Viti martyris; Historia translationis sancti Viti martyris

In Latin, decorated manuscript on parchment and paper

Germany, North Rhine-Westphalia (Gladbach or possibly Corvey?), c. 1400-1450 and 1777

i (modern paper) + 17 (parchment) + 47 (paper) + *i* (modern paper) folios on parchment and paper (with watermark similar to Heawood no. 3149, Lion, England, 1753 and no. 3151, Lion, Amsterdam, c. 1769), modern foliation of the parchment leaves, top outer recto, 1-17, contemporary pagination of paper leaves, top outer recto and verso, 1-26, with one unpaginated leaf preceding and thirty-two blank, unpaginated leaves following, complete (collation, I. ff. 1-17v, i⁸ [-1, a stub remains before f. 1, cancelled with no loss of text]; II, pp. 1-26 and unpaginated leaves, i⁸ [stub remains before p. 1 where a leaf was cancelled and another leaf, unpaginated, has been tipped in in its place] ii-v⁸ vi⁸ [-8, stub remains cancelled with no loss of text]), layout varies, I. ff. 1-17v, ruled in pale brown ink with the top and bottom horizontal rules full across, single full-length vertical bounding lines, prickings lower and outer margins (justification 138-139 x 102-103 mm.), written in dark brown ink in two calligraphic German Gothic hands in eighteen long lines, the first hand, f. 1-16v, with some cursive features, red rubrics, capitals touched in red, one- to two-line plain red initials, five-line red and blue parted initial with red and blue pen decorations, some marginal annotations faintly visible, with slight rubbing and staining, particularly on ff. 1 and 17v, and some worming on ff. 15-17v, all with no loss of text, significant patching of the margins of ff. 10-12, otherwise in very fine condition, II. pp. 1-26 and unpaginated leaves, no visible ruling, some prickings visible in the lower margin (justification, 185-190 x 123-125 mm.), written in dark brown ink in slanted cursive script, slight staining to p. 26 and the following unpaginated leaf, but with no loss of text. Bound in eighteenth-century brown leather over beveled wooden boards, blind-stamped with foliate decoration along the perimeter of both boards, two fore-edge clasps spine with five raised bands, gilt stamped, "PASSIO / S. VITI / M. / MANU / SCRIPTA," some cracking and losses to the leather along the upper hinge and the edges of the boards, edges tinted red, eighteenth-century inscription on front pastedown. Dimensions 206-207 x 146-150 mm.

This handsome composite manuscript includes two texts discussing the martyrdom of St. Vitus, the Early Christian saint of Sicily and patron saint of dancing, and the movement of his relics. It was likely copied in part (and possibly in its entirety) at the Benedictine abbey of Gladbach, dedicated to St. Vitus, and it attests to the abbey's efforts to preserve these narratives that were integral to its own history. These texts – one of which is a rare copy of the earliest narrative history of the Benedictine abbey of Corvey – are valuable historical sources.

PROVENANCE

1. The core of this manuscript, an account of the Passion of St. Vitus, was produced in Germany during the fifteenth century, most likely at the Benedictine abbey of Gladbach or of Corvey, both of which venerated the saint.

Comparison with a fifteenth-century Breviary that belonged to Gladbach and may have been copied there, Mönchengladbach, Münsterarchiv, Hs 10, reveals similarities in script, ruling, and the style of parted and flourished initials (see Kottje, ed., 1998, pt. 2, plates 247-249). The monastery at Gladbach, in the town now called Mönchengladbach, near Cologne, was founded in 974 and dedicated to St. Vitus. According to its foundation legend, Gladbach's founder, Archbishop Gero of Cologne, identified the site for the house when he discovered the relics of St. Vitus hidden within a hollow stone.

The first monastery in the region to house the relics of St. Vitus and the source of the saint's veneration in the region, however, was Corvey. Given Corvey's connection with the saint, it does at first seem possible that the manuscript was made there. Gladbach almost certainly obtained its relics of St. Vitus from Corvey, and might have obtained this manuscript from there as well. (There is some question as to when these relics might have arrived [Holtschoppen, 2008, pp. 25-27]; Gladbach legend to the contrary, there is evidence to suggest that Gladbach followed Corvey in its dedication to St. Vitus.)

This fifteenth-century manuscript was almost certainly at Gladbach by 1777, when it was supplemented with an account of the translation of St. Vitus's relics copied from an old manuscript. An inscription on the front pastedown details the contents of this composite manuscript and the source of the eighteenth-century addition: "Historia Manuscripta Passionis S. Viti M. in honorem ejusdem, cum adjuncta, & ex vetere manuscripto excerpta Historia Translationis, necnon brevi enarratione de 2da fundatione & inventione Reliquiarum S. Viti & a librum sanctorum in Gladbach Renovata 1777" (Hand-written History of the passion of St. Vitus, martyr, in honor of the same, with an added History of the Translation, extracted from an old manuscript, and indeed with a brief recounting of the second foundation and discovery of the relics of St. Vitus and from a book of saints in Gladbach, renewed in 1777). Curiously, the inscription appears to refer to a third text, possibly the sermon on the discovery of the relics of St. Vitus at Gladbach, which is not found in this manuscript; perhaps there were plans to copy this third text in the blank pages following the account of the translation. In that case, the "librum sanctorum" might refer to a *Legendary* formerly in Gladbach's library, now Brussels, *Bibliothèque de Bollandistes*, MS 72, which contains this sermon (ff. 163-167). Though our manuscript's actual contents could indicate that it was copied for Gladbach or Corvey, the reference here to the *discovery* of St. Vitus's relics resonates with Gladbach's foundation legend and suggests that this was more probably copied for Gladbach.

Over fifty manuscripts from Gladbach's library survive, mostly in Mönchengladbach and Cologne (see Kottje, ed., 1998 and Krämer, 1989, pp. 293-295). The monastery was suppressed in 1802 and its contents dispersed, with many passing into the hands of collectors like Franz Ferdinand Wallraf in Cologne, Baron Hüpsch, and Leander van Ess.

TEXT

ff. 1-17v, *PASSIO SANCTI VITI MARTYRIS*, incipit, "Tempore quo ualerianus preses sub diocletiano et maximiano imperatoribus ... cum patre et spiritu sancto saluatore cunctorum per cuncta secula seculorum; Amen";

The Passion of St. Vitus; no. 8711 in *Bibliotheca hagiographica latina* (1898-1901). The Bollandists' catalogues list thirty-one manuscripts containing this text, ranging in date from the ninth century to the late fifteenth century (see *Bibliotheca hagiographica latina manuscripta* in Online Resources).

First unpaginated leaf, recto to verso, and pp. 1-26, *Prologus in Historiam Translationis Sancti Viti Martyris*, incipit, "Scripturus aliquid juxta modum possibilitatis nostræ de virtutibus quas

misericordia Conditoris nostri modernis temporibus dignata est ... qui fecit nos per infinita secula. Amen"; p. 1, *Historia Translationis Sancti Viti Martyris*, incipit, "Post Salvatoris igitur Domini nostri passionem et resurrectionem ... ut nullum signum fracturæ appareret"; [remaining unpaginated leaves, blank].

An account of the translation of the relics of St. Vitus from Saint-Denis to Corvey; no. 8718 in *Bibliotheca hagiographica latina* (1898-1901). There is a critical edition of this text (Schmale-Ott, ed., 1979), and it is also printed in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* (1829), albeit without the prologue. Schmale-Ott identifies six manuscripts in which a whole or partial copy of the text survives, but for all that they reflect a medieval tradition, nearly all of them date to the seventeenth century; the earliest survival, in a twelfth-century manuscript, Brussels, Bibliothèque royale de Belgique, MS 98-100, is fragmentary. Though the text of the present manuscript also represents a late copy of what was presumably a significantly older text, it contributes a valuable textual witness to a tradition with relatively few survivals, and it warrants examination in particular alongside the three surviving manuscripts of what Schmale-Ott terms the Gladbach tradition, which includes the Brussels fragment and two seventeenth-century copies (1979, pp. 1-3).

This manuscript was produced in the eighteenth century, when two manuscripts related to St. Vitus were bound together: an eighteenth-century copy of an account of the translation of St. Vitus's relics and a fifteenth-century account of his Passion.

Early martyrologies identify St. Vitus as a martyr and miracle worker. According to the legend of his martyrdom that served as the basis for the Passion narrative in this manuscript, Vitus professed Christianity as a boy, and resisted the efforts of his father, a pagan senator, to cajole or torment him into rejecting his Christian faith. He eventually fled to Rome, where he drove out a demon possessing the son of the Roman emperor Diocletian (ruled 284-305). Diocletian nonetheless punished him for his faith with torture. An angel spirited him away, whereupon he died under the angel's protection.

Veneration of St. Vitus spread from southern Italy, where he was thought to have lived and died, and appeared early in Rome. His relics were said to have been brought to the Benedictine monastery of Saint-Denis, near Paris, by Abbot Fulrad in the eighth century. The account of their translation in this manuscript tells of their subsequent transfer from Saint-Denis to Corvey in 836, which in turn triggered the spread of veneration of St. Vitus throughout Westphalia and eastern and northern Germany to houses like Gladbach.

Medieval narratives concerned with saints' lives and with their miracles, cults, and relics offer myriad insights into diverse facets of medieval culture. Saints could be appropriated as potent political symbols or as means of defining regional identities, and their depictions, narrative or visual, can tell us a great deal about such appropriations. The acquisition and presentation of relics had significant economic implications for religious houses, as saints' relics and the legends surrounding them could potentially increase a house's reputation or turn it into a popular destination for pilgrimage. Accounts of the translation of relics offer rich troves of historical information as well, revealing early histories of specific monasteries. The account here, for example, contains the earliest known narrative history of Corvey and situates this abbey within a network of associated monastic houses.

This manuscript's particular configuration of texts – and the probable milieu in which they were assembled – may not only shed light on the institutional history of Corvey and prehistory of Gladbach, but also on the way that Gladbach historians sought to construct (or reconstruct) that history. The seventeenth century saw a growing interest in Gladbach's institutional history and in the earlier sources that preserved it (see Bayer, 1991). Our manuscript may be the compilation of a monastic antiquarian working in a similar vein a century later, possibly from an earlier model. Records from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries attest to the existence of a manuscript compiled no earlier than 1583, belonging to the Gladbach Abbey Library (and subsequently to the Münsterarchiv in Mönchengladbach), lost since 1939, that contained the same two texts present in this manuscript, along with several other texts concerned with the abbey's foundation and subsequent history (see Bayer, 1991, pp. 111-116; Kottje, ed., 1998, pp. 201-203; and Tille, 1899, p. 46). It is possible that the eighteenth-century compiler of the present manuscript was emulating this earlier book. In this case, the blank pages at the rear of the volume may have been intended to contain foundational texts like those in the lost manuscript.

LITERATURE

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