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SIR JOHN MANDEVILLE, *Travels*, translated by Michel Velser, and DIETRICH VON APOLDA, *Leben der heiligen Elisabeth von Thuringen*

In High German, manuscript on paper
[Germany, Nuremberg, dated 1431-32]

177 folios, on paper, watermarks close to Briquet no. 14752 (*tête de bœuf*: Wurzburg, 1429; Ratisbonne, 1429--1435) and Briquet no. 15609 (*tête humaine*: Nuremberg, 1430--1432), complete (ff. 172, 174v, and 175-77 blank, in quires of 12 [folio 13 loose but no text lacking] (collation i¹², ii¹², iii¹², iv¹², v¹², vi¹², vii¹², viii¹², ix¹², x¹¹ [12-1; last folio of quire cancelled, end of first text], xi¹² [beginning of second text], xii¹², xiii¹², xiv¹⁰ [12-2], xv¹² [last 3 ff. of quire left blank])), written in a cursive script in at least three different hands in dark brown ink on between 20-25 long lines (written space: f. 1, c. 130 x 105 mm.; throughout c. 150 x 105 mm.), some capitals touched in red, rubrics in red, 2-line high initials painted in red, some passages underlined in red, some added vernacular marginal annotations. BOUND IN A CONTEMPORARY CALF BINDING over wooden boards, with remnants of two clasps and brass central and corner pieces, on the upper cover a hand-written title label on parchment covered by a horn plate, "Von dem heiligen Land cetera vide", on the rear cover, brass bosses (some rubbing to covers, scuffed leather, spine reinforced with a band of later light brown calf). Dimensions: 195 x 135 mm.

Signed in code, dated, and localized by an unrecorded scribe working in Nuremberg, then proofread by a second named scribe, the manuscript is also noteworthy for the inclusion of two important vernacular texts, one of which is secular and the other of which is unedited, and for its contemporary binding which still preserves the medieval horn plate placed over the title written on a piece of parchment.

PROVENANCE

1. Written in Nuremberg in 1431 by an unrecorded scribe who signs in code on f. 119v and corrected in 1432 probably in the same monastery by Brother Bartholomeus, as follows: "Explicit iste liber 3a feria prius oculi anno .xxxxi. [1431] per me hbnsfn nfkdyng [hansen nekeyig?] in Nurmberg"; [and beneath the colophon, in red] "rot und swarz altag"; [beneath the rubric] "Anno etc. .3ii. [1432] circa festum sancti Mathie, ego frater Bartholomeus ad sanctum Egidium perlegi totum librum et in nomine domini sit benedictum iste [...]" (In 1432,

Brother Bartholomeus would thus be the “proofreader” of the present manuscript copied in 1431). The first scribe signed his name in code by replacing every other letter with the vowel before the letter.

2. Private Collection, Europe.

TEXT

I.

f. 1r, John of Mandeville, *Travels*: rubric: *Wie die vorred lautet und was sie bedeutet das merdert hie, incipit, Do ich von heim auss fure in dem mut das ichwolt farn uber mer zu dem heiligen grab und zu dem gesegenten ertrich das man in latein heisst terram promissionis und ez pillich heist daz gesegent ertrich und daz heilig lant Wann es gesegent und gebeiligt ist mit dem heiligen und kosporn, plut unsers hern Jhesu Christ; f. 2v, Ich Jobans von Mandevilla ritter wy wol ich sein nit wirdig sei geporn und erzogen in engellant in einem dorff daz heist Santalon fur uber mer do man zalt von Christi gepurt Tausent dreuhundert jar und dornoch zweiundzweinezig jar an sant Michels morgen und dornoch pin ich gewesen liber mer manig jar und zeit und pin umb gefarn manig jar und hab gesehen manig winderlich lant manig winderlich insel;*

Jean de Mandeville’s (1300--1372) travel report counts among the most popular late medieval works on the subject of travel. The text exists in nearly 300 manuscripts and many printed editions in Latin, French, German, Dutch, and other languages. Originally composed around 1356 in French, without an original title, the work is structured in two parts. The first, shorter part, gives an account of a number of pilgrimage itineraries to Jerusalem and the Near East. The second part gives a geographical report on places in Africa, the Middle East, the islands in the Indian Ocean, China, and the territory of the priest John. The text of the first part can still be described as recounting the pilgrimage route to the Holy Land, even though the narrative deviates from the traditional structural pattern of an account of pilgrimage. With its descriptive travel reports of Africa and Asia, the second part becomes a journey of discovery, in which curious and monstrous elements are represented. The travel report relies on a multitude of literary sources that only a large library could have provided.

According to his own statement (prologue and epilogue of his text), Mandeville was a knight, born in England, and he immigrated to the continent in 1332. He began to write his work in 1356. Later versions name Liege as the text’s place of origin and claim that Jean de Bourgogne dit à la Barbe (also Jean de Bourdeaux), a physician from Liege, encouraged Mandeville to write down his travel book. It is now commonly assumed, however, that Mandeville was identical with Jean de Bourgogne.

Most probably Liege was the place of origin of the original French version. The two German translations by the two translators Michel Velsler and Otto von Diemeringen were created in the last quarter of the fourteenth century.

Velser presumably belonged to the southern Tyrolean family of the nobles of Vels. He worked for noble families residing in the vicinity of Bardassano/ Piedmont, where he had access to a Mandeville text in French at the Milanese court of the Visconti. The version Velser completed exists in 38 manuscripts and was first printed in 1480 by Anton Sorg in Augsburg. Further editions followed in 1481, 1482, etc. Eric Morral's modern edition published in 1974 does not include the present manuscript.

II.

ff. 120r-177v, Dietrich von Apolda, *Leben der heiligen Elisabeth von Thuringen*, in a High German translation, incipit, *Do ich an hube zu vorschen und dem leben und von den siten und von dem tod sant elspeten do ward mir geantwort von der schrift der vier meid sant elspeten Daz meister Cunrat von Marpurk hat geschriben und ez dem popst Gregorio den Neunden sant dar inne von irrem leben und zeichen und von irem tod werlichen und redlichen stude geschriben*

Dietrich von Apolda was a thirteenth-century Dominican monk, who entered the monastery of Erfurt in 1247. He became the most prolific and successful medieval biographer of Saint Elizabeth and Saint Dominic. Little is known about his person and his life; it can be ascertained, though, that he was born in circa 1228/29. He is supposed to have died around the turn of the fourteenth century soon after the completion of his two works on the lives of Saint Elizabeth and Saint Dominic. The *Vita* of St. Elizabeth in Latin must have been created between 1289 and 1297. The work is structured in 8 books each containing 10 chapters and focuses on a treatment of the legend that is close to the original sources.

Born in 1207, Saint Elizabeth was the daughter of King Andrew II of Hungary. As a child she was engaged to Ludwig of Thuringia. They married in 1220, but her husband died in 1227 while participating in a crusade initiated by Frederick II. His brother then ruled the country and banished Elizabeth, who fled from the Wartburg to Eisenach. She died in 1231 in Marburg and was canonized in 1235. In 1236, the famous Church of Elizabeth was built in Marburg in commemoration of her piety and dedication to the poor. Her legend tells the story of a humble saint, who devoted her life to the poor, nursed the sick, founded hospitals and dedicated her entire life to Franciscan piety.

The present German translation by an unknown translator working in the region of Upper German exists in only seven manuscripts and is hitherto unpublished. It must have been created in the convent of the nuns of St. Clare in Nuremberg around the mid-fourteenth century.

LITERATURE

Dietrich von Apolda. *Leben und Legenden der heiligen Elisabeth*, trans. R. Kossling, Frankfurt, Insel, 1997.

Fromm, Hans. "Eine mittelhochdeutsche Übersetzung von Dietrich von Apoldas lateinischer Vita der Elsbeth von Thuringen," *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie* 86 (1967), pp. 20-45, especially pp. 25-31 (see 2VL, II, 1980, pp. 103-110).

Mandeville, John. *Sir John Mandevilles Reisebeschreibung in deutscher Übersetzung von Michel Velser nach der Stuttgarter Papierhandschrift Cod. HB V 86*, ed. Eric John Morral (Deutsche Texte des Mittelalters, 66), Berlin 1974 (see VL, vol. V, 1985, columns 1201-1214)

Stannat, Werner. *Das Leben der heiligen Elisabeth in drei mittelniederdeutschen Handschriften aus Wolfenbüttel und Hannover*, Neumünster, K. Wachholtz, 1959.

ONLINE RESOURCES

E-text in English of The Travels of Sir John Mandeville

<http://www.romanization.com/books/mandeville/>

Project Gutenberg e-text of The Travels of Sir John Mandeville

<http://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/webbin/gutbook/lookup?num=782>