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**GREGORIUS MAGNUS, *Dialogi* [Dialogues in the Second Middle Dutch Translation]**  
**In Dutch, decorated manuscript on parchment and paper**  
**The Netherlands, Utrecht?, c. 1460**

190 ff. (with f. 190 blank), preceded and followed by a single paper flyleaf, complete (collation: i-xiii<sup>12</sup>, xiv<sup>8</sup>, xv<sup>12</sup>, xvi<sup>14</sup>), on parchment and paper (outer and inner bifolia of the majority of quires in parchment), with watermarks in paper close to Briquet, no. 9178, "Lettre Y": Utrecht, 1460-1461, written in a hybrid gothic bookhand by 3 different hands in brown ink (first hand, ff. 1-158v; second hand, ff. 159-166v; third hand, ff. 167-189), with last two hands later in date (text likely completed in the 16<sup>th</sup> c.), text on 2 columns, ruled in light brown ink (justification 145 x 100 mm), prickings still visible, rubrics and headings in bright red, capitals touched in red throughout, 2-line high initials painted in red, ONE LARGE OPENING PARTI-COLORED INITIAL in blue and red with red, purple and green calligraphic penwork extending well into the margin. Bound in a Dutch late 16<sup>th</sup> blind-stamped binding of calf over wooden boards, back sewn on 4 thongs, paper titlepiece on upper spine, sides divided into successive frames with roll-produced borders, outer and inner frames formed by rolls with floral, leafy and geometrical designs, second frame with roll of repeated human busts, brass and leather fore-edge clasps, brass catches on the upper board, edges stained in blue (Upper hinge cracked, corners a bit worn, but else in its original condition). Dimensions 217 x 147 mm.

One of only five manuscripts offering a complete text of the Second Middle Dutch translation of Gregory's *Dialogi*, one of the classic texts of the Middle Ages. Still unedited, this version of the Dutch translation of the *Dialogi* presents interesting dialectical questions, still to be elucidated, and is probably tied to the Devotio Moderna. Copied in the fifteenth century, the present copy was completed in the later sixteenth century, when it acquired its elegant Dutch roll-stamped binding.

#### PROVENANCE

1. Script, watermarks and linguistic features (Middle Dutch) all confirm Dutch origin for this manuscript, perhaps Utrecht as suggested by watermarks.
2. There is the name of a previous owner in ink on verso of upper flyleaf that reads: "Gerrebrecht Jacobs," likely seventeenth century.

#### TEXT

ff. 1-34, Gregory the Great, *Dialogues* [Second Middle Dutch Translation], Book I, rubric, *Hier beghint dat eerste boec van Sunte Gregorius des paws dyalogus ende dyalogus is twyer menscen kallinge al shier sinte Gregorius des [...] dyakens Peteri. Gregorius*; incipit, "In enen daghe doe ic seer beswaert..."; explicit, "[...] alledinck verclaeren moghen";

ff. 34-67v, Gregory the Great, *Dialogues* [Second Middle Dutch Translation], Book II, heading underlined in red, *Hier beghint dat anderde boec van den leven ende miraculen des heilighen abts Benedictus...*, incipit, "Dar was een man genoemt Benedictus..."; explicit, "[...] miraculen tevertellen";

ff. 67v-124, Gregory the Great, *Dialogues* [Second Middle Dutch Translation], Book III, heading underlined, *Hier eyndet dat anderde boec en begint dat derde boec*; incipit, "Nuic ghedoecht hebbe der..."; explicit, "[...] des vleysches levet";

ff. 124-189, Gregory the Great, *Dialogues* [Second Middle Dutch Translation], Book IV, heading underlined, *Hier beghint dat vierde boeck Gregori*, incipit, "Doe die eerste vader des mensche..."; explicit, "[...] een offerhande warden. Amen. Finis";

ff. 189v-190v, blank.

Gregory I, pope from 590 to 604 and the last of the Latin Fathers of the Western Church, also known as Gregory the Great, was the first monk to be elevated to the papacy. A member of the Benedictine Order, St. Gregory exemplified the ideal that the pope should be the "servant of the servants of God" and he was the first to use this formula. He was a prolific writer, focused primarily on the practical and spiritual sides of Christianity. One of his most famous writings, copied frequently throughout the entire Middle Ages, is his *Moralia in Job*, a commentary on the multiple senses of the scripture. Also well known is his *Liber Regulae Pastoralis* (c. 592) on the duties and role of a bishop. Because Gregory promoted sacred music, "Gregorian chant" erroneously takes its name from him, the legend being that a dove sang in his ear and inspired him to write plain-chant.

This manuscript contains a Middle Dutch translation of Gregory the Great's *Dialogues*, a hagiographical collection that had a profound impact on the literature of the Middle Ages, including vernacular literature. The *Dialogi* constituted an attempt to assemble a collection devoted to the lives and miracles of the early Italian Church Fathers. In his article entitled "Gregory's *Dialogi* in Middle Dutch Literature." Claassens states: "For some time now, two independent translations of the entire text have been known: one from the south of the Low Countries and one from the north [...] The above is by no means an exhaustive overview, but it does show that whereas most other European cultural regions had access at a relatively early date to a vernacular version of the *Dialogi*, the medieval Low Countries had to wait until the late fourteenth century. The tantalizing question here is, of course, why this happened so late" (Claassens, 2001, p. 208). A similar situation is to be found in German-speaking regions, as the first High German translation dates from the middle of the fifteenth century and the Italian translations only appear in the fourteenth century.

The present translation appears to be that of the second Middle Dutch translation of Gregory's *Dialogi* (*Noordnederlandse vertaling* or "Northern Dutch translation"). This translation was studied by Deschamps (who completed a study on the Middle Dutch translation of Gregory's *Dialogi*, in an unpublished MA thesis at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven), 1972, pp. 179-182 and is also discussed in Claassens, 2001, pp. 222-223. Nothing is known of its translator, although it is surmised the text was translated in the north of the Low Countries. It is not unlikely that its origin

is tied to the circles of the *Devotio Moderna*, perhaps linked to the Frenswegen monastery near Nordhorn in the former duchy of Bentheim in Westphalia (see Claassens, 2001, p. 223). A precise dating of this version is not possible although Deschamps suggests that it may have been produced "around 1400" (1972, p. 180). The translation has remained unedited, and is known in only four manuscripts: Strasbourg, Bibliothèque nationale et universitaire, MS L germ. 176; Arnhem, Openbare Bibliotheek, 7; Düsseldorf, Stadt- und Landesbibliothek, B 158; Haarlem, Stadsbibliotheek, MS 187 D 5 (see Stoker and Verbeij, 1997, II, 17-18 [no. 29], 183 [no. 545], 108-109 [no. 301] and 161 [no. 473]). Thus the present copy is the fifth known manuscript of this translation. G. Claassens has proved by comparing an excerpt devoted to the exemplum of "Musa" (in our manuscript, text found ff. 142v-143v) that we are dealing here with an entirely different translation from that of the southern Dutch translation attributed to the "Bible translator of 1360" (see Claassens, 2001, pp. 219-222).

The four books of the *Dialogues* of Saint Gregory the Great, "concerning the life and miracles of the Italian Fathers and the eternity of souls," were written in 593, three years after his elevation to the papacy, at the request of certain monks of his household. The book is partly in dialogue form. Gregory is found by his deacon Peter, sitting "in a solitary place, very fit for a sad and melancholy disposition." The stories which Gregory proceeds to tell, serve to relieve his mind of its weight of thought. Famously, Book II entitled *De vita et miraculis venerabilis Benedicti* is exclusively devoted to St. Benedict of Nursia, a central text for medieval Benedictine monasteries - second only in importance to the Rule of Saint Benedict – as it tells the story of their founder.

The *Dialogues* were translated into Greek by one of Gregory's successors, Pope Zacharias I (741-752) "so that the Grecians might be instructed in the rules of good living." With a similar desire for the edification of the English, an Anglo-Saxon version was made, about 890, by Bishop Werferth of Worcester, at the instigation of Alfred the Great. Considered one of the "great books" of the medieval era, the *Dialogues* were among the most popular readings of the Middle Ages, and translations exist in almost every European language. Hundreds of manuscripts in Latin are extant, although as stated above the Dutch and German translations appeared at a relatively late date (the reasons for this late date are discussed in Claassens, 2001, pp. 225-233). The present manuscript (offering the Northern Dutch translation) should be added to the four known copies of the text, providing the sources for the much-awaited critical edition of both vernacular translations (Northern and Southern), of which there are surprisingly very few extant manuscripts.

## LITERATURE

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Markus, R. A. *Gregory the Great and His World*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997.

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Stooker, K. and T. Verbeij, *Collecties op orde. Middelnederlandse handschriften uit kloosters en semi-religieuze gemeenschappen in de Netherlanden*, Louvain, Peeters, 1997, vol. II.

### ONLINE RESOURCES

English translation of Gregory the Great, *Dialogues*

[http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/gregory\\_01\\_dialogues\\_book1.htm](http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/gregory_01_dialogues_book1.htm)

On Gregory the Great

<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06780a.htm>

<http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/jod/holiness.html>