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THOMAS A KEMPIS, *Imitatio christi*; JEAN GERSON, *De meditatio cordis*; ANONYMOUS, *Ad sanctissimas Eucharistie Communiones*.

**In Latin and Low German, printed and manuscript text on paper
Nuremberg, Anton Koberger, 1492 (with contemporary manuscript additions)**

187 folios, incomplete, (collation i⁶ + ii⁸ + iii⁶ + iv⁸ + v⁸ + vi⁸ + vii⁸ + viii⁸ + ix⁸ + x⁸ + xi⁸ xii⁸ + xiii⁸ + xiv⁸ + xv⁸ + xvi⁸ + xvii⁸ + xviii⁷ + xix⁸ + xx⁸ + xxi⁸ + xxii⁸ + xxiii⁸ + xxiv⁸), paper size (135 x 100 mm), two identified watermarks (Briquet 6368, "Fleur à cinque pétals," Treviso, 1489; Briquet 2966, "cercle à diamètre horizontal courbé), two unidentified watermarks cropped in gutter, contemporary printed foliation in Arabic numerals 1-182 (= original ff. 9-190), printed signatures pi⁸ + a-z⁸, modern pencil foliation in Arabic numerals on f. 166, printed running headers used throughout except for table of contents, printed in black ink using three types (Haebler 72 primary text; Haebler 99 chapter divisions and colophon; Haebler 18 headers and chapter incipits), manuscript written in a gothic cursive book hand script with bâtarde tendencies in brown ink, printing space (80 x 50 mm), single column printed text, 22 printed lines per page, manuscript writing space (102 x 63 mm), single column manuscript text, 20-22 manuscript lines per page, initial space with guide letters in printed text, manuscript title rubricated on f. 186v, rubricated highlights in manuscript text to sentence initials on ff. 185v-187v, one rubricated paragraph on f. 186v, one two line rubricated initial extending with flourishes into left and upper margin on f. 185v, one seven line rubricated initial in margin on f. 186v, a few marginal notations in a sixteenth-century humanist cursive hand in brown ink, contains original blank ff. 190v-192v of the printed book now used for the manuscript treatise, original title page lacking (= sig. pi¹), original f. 8 blank lacking (= sig. pi⁸), leaves for the original foliation of ff. 15-16 and 134 lacking, original foliation for ff. 18, 31, and 166 mis-foliated (18 as 28; 31 as 3; 166 as 169), signature kⁱⁱⁱ repeated on ff. 74-75, signatures nⁱⁱⁱⁱ and zⁱⁱ not printed, modern pencil foliation correction on f. 166r, leaves torn in gutter and separating from binding on ff. 129-134, slight damp staining to a few folios on fore edge margin, slight worming to ff. 157-187 sometimes affecting letters of text, catalogue and provenance information in sixteenth-century cursive script in brown ink on f. 1r (see below), light browning and soiling to ff. 185v-186v, otherwise a very clean and bright copy. Bound in original fifteenth-century dark brown leather over wood boards, front and rear covers with elaborate blind-stamp decoration (see below), blind stamp decoration on lower spine, two raised bands on spine, original brass catch-plates on front and rear covers, brass clasp missing, double front pastedowns in contemporary paper, single rear pastedown in contemporary paper, moderate worming to front and rear covers, slight chipping to leather on spine, slight separation at head and tail of spine, slight worming to front and rear pastedowns, parchment cuttings of a fifteenth-century manuscript with two visible letters in a gothic script in black ink used as binding supports, author identification "Thomas à Kempis" in late sixteenth- or early seventeenth-century cursive script in brown ink on inside front cover, modern catalogue information in pencil on front and rear inside covers (see below). Dimensions 145 x 104 mm.

A wonderful hybrid manuscript and early printed book combining the only Anton Koberger printed edition of the *Imitatio Christi* by Thomàs a Kempis and the *De meditatione cordis* by Jean Gerson, with an unknown anonymous Low German treatise on the Eucharist representative of the *Devotio Moderna*. With an original monastic provenance, the present book is bound in a fine original fifteenth-century blind stamped binding. This volume stands out as an excellent example of the late medieval use of religious primers in both printed and manuscript form.

PROVENANCE

1. The Carthusian Monastery at Ittlingen (near Heidelberg). Notation of ownership, "Cartusiae Ittingensis," and author identification ("Thomas de Kempis") in early sixteenth-century cursive script in brown ink found on. f. 1r.

2. Unknown modern catalogue information written in French. These notes are found on front and rear pastedowns in modern pencil using a cursive script: Front paste down: "imitation J. Chr. A° 1492 i12 - 184 f. 2 derriere blanch y sont. n°169VBS9312ek, + + +" and "RI. Rel. veau estampe d'epoque. m folie | | 8, 15, 16, 134, + 5 | p 2 ms a'main; Rear paste down: "A 2061" and "8063?"

TEXT

[Printed Text]

ff. 1r-6v, [Table of Contents], incipit, "Tabule capitulorum in libros sequentes. Capitula libri i. De imitatione christe et de contemptu mundi omnium vanitatum mundi."; explicit, "Tractatus de meditatione co[r]dis folio. Clxxii. Finis Tabule. Deo gratias."

ff. 7r-174v (= printed foliation 1r-171v) Thomas à Kempis, *De imitatione christi*, incipit, "Tractatus aureus et perutilis de perfecta ymitatione cristi et vero mundi contemptu. Capitulum primum. Qui sequitur me non ambulat in tenebris, sed habebit lumen vite dicit Dominus. Hec sunt verba xristi quibus admonemur quatenus vitam eius et mores imitemur."; explicit, "Si talia essent opera Dei vt facile ab humana ratione caperentur non essent mirabilia nec ineffabilia dicenda. Explicit liber quartus de sacramentum altaris."

ff. 175r-185r (= printed foliation 172r-182r) Jean Gerson, *De meditatione cordis*, incipit, "Incipit tractatus de meditatione cordis Iohannis Gerson. Capitulum primum. Meditatio cordis mei in conspectu tuo semper."; explicit, "Qualis egent amplius fomento sacratis quod monitione sapientis."

f. 185r, Colophon, "Tractatus aureus et perutilis de perfecta ymitatione xristi et vero mundi contemptu. Cum de meditatione cordis finiunt feliciter Anno domini. M.cccc.lxxxij."

[Manuscript Text]

ff. 185v-187v. Anonymous, *Ad sanctissimas eucharistie communionem*, incipit, "Zu dem tisch diner tofpelichesten wirtschafft aller guetigister herr ihesu criste vermysse vnd vnderstand ich mich..."; explicit, "trost der verssen ellenden gesungen selen amen."

This fascinating joint incunabulum and manuscript book possess two of the most important authors and one anonymous treatise of the *Devotio Moderna* movement. The first of the two authors is

Thomas à Kempis (c. 1379-1471), who was born in Kempen, Germany to John and Gertrude Haemerken. Thomas formed part of the second generation of the *Devotio Moderna* after Geert Groote, the founder of the religious movement. He grew up in the midst of this spiritual movement, having studied in a school of the Brothers of the Common Life in Groote's native Deventer, Holland. Thomas became a canon at Mount Saint Agnes, near Zwolle, a priory of the Congregation of Windesheim, where his brother John served as prior. He became a novice in 1406 and received ordination in 1413. He held several offices at Saint Agnes, becoming subprior from 1429 to 1432 and 1448 to 1471. During this time he wrote several devotional tracts, as well as the *Chronicle of Agnetenberg*. His fame resides in his authorship of the devotional work included in this incunabulum: the *Imitatio christi* or *Imitation of Christ*, first issued anonymously in 1418. It is one of the most popular devotional manuals of all time, surviving in over 200 manuscripts and 70 pre-1500 printed books. The work's popularity led to it being translated into several European vernaculars during the fifteenth century, including French, German, Dutch, Middle English, Castilian, Catalan, Italian, and Portuguese among others. As it was issued anonymously, it was variously ascribed to St. Bernard, St. Bonaventure, Innocent III, and most commonly Jean Charlier de Gerson. This led to a disputed authorship, which was not fully resolved until the finding of the autography copy of the original manuscript by Thomas à Kempis and the critical study verifying his authorship by L.M.J. Delaissé.

The second author is Jean Charlier Gerson (1363-1429). He was born at the village of Gerson near Reims. He entered the famous College of Navarre at the age of fourteen, obtaining the degree of Licentiate of Arts, and began his theological studies under two highly celebrated teachers, Gilles des Champs (Aegidius Campensis) and Pierre d'Ailly (Petrus de Alliaco). Gerson graduated bachelor of theology in 1384, and in 1392 obtained his Doctorate in Theology. In 1395, when Pierre d'Ailly was made bishop of Puy. Gerson, at age thirty-two, was elected Chancellor of the University of Paris, becoming a canon of Notre Dame. He became one of the primary legal authorities at the Council of Constance, which ended the Great Schism. Ultimately, the Council of Constance was Gerson's downfall because of his support for Conciliarism versus papal absolutism, which triumphed in the end with the election of Martin V. His failure at the council led to a temporary exile from the Kingdom of France to the Duchy of Burgundy, which supported his cause. He died at Lyon on the 12 July 1429 in the Celestine monastery governed by his brother. His principal works can be divided into three categories: legal tracts to unite the church and end the western schism through a general council, practical works of theology to instruct the laity and other religious in improving their spiritual life, and mystical treatises to lead Christians to a closer relationship with God. The modern edition of his works by Glorieux comprises ten volumes. Despite his great Latin education, he also wrote in the vernacular and defended the vernacular as a suitable language for theological treatises (a characteristic he shared with Thomas à Kempis and with Geert Groote). His extensive writings on many moral and religious topics led him to be one of the most widely copied and published theologians in the first fifty years of the printing press.

Alongside the incunabulum, an anonymous scribe has written an unidentified treatise entitled *Ad sanctissimas eucharistie communionem*. Written in Low German, it demonstrates the importance of the vernacular to the *Devotio Moderna*, even within religious communities like the Carthusian Monastery at Ittlingen where this book was kept. The work focuses on the preparation of one's internal

disposition by meditation in order to remove troubling thoughts associated with the seven vices as a necessary condition spiritual purity before taking the Eucharist.

The choice of the printed and manuscript texts in this book reflects the spiritual interests of the *Devotio Moderna* as founded and articulated by Geert Groote. Groote stressed a return to the purity of the early Church, to the ideas of Jerome, Augustine, and others of the Church Fathers. Thomas's *Imitatio christi* emphasizes the role of meditating on the passion of Christ, which was central to the spirituality of the movement. These meditations were normally varied in time according to the Divine Office or times set aside for reflection during the day, following the patterns of the monastic diurnal. The meditations were mostly through the practice of "lectio divina" derived from these texts and the Scriptures. The idea was to recall Christ's life and passions in order to conform one's life to Christ's and purify oneself from the affects of sin. Jean Gerson's work *De meditatio cordis*, as a process of meditation to achieve purity of heart, goes hand-in-hand with the *Imitation of Christ*. The *De meditatio cordis* offers practical spiritual exercises to prepare oneself for contemplation. Gerson's treatise incorporates the use of biblical imagery as the foundation of these meditations and uses the Church fathers as the authority behind the practices. As such, the anonymous treatise at the end of the incunabulum forms the logical conclusion of these works.

The printer of this edition, Anton Koberger (1445-1513), originally published the work with the title *Tractatus de ymitatione Christi. Cum tractatulo de meditatione cordis*. Koberger established the first press at Nuremberg in 1469. By 1500 he had become the most prolific printer in Germany, publishing over 200 books prior to his death. By 1489, Koberger owned twenty-four printing presses and employed approximately a hundred operatives and had several agencies in cities such as Basel, Strassburg, Lyon, and Paris. In addition to these operations, he produced his own paper and employed several illuminators to decorate his books. Koberger's press produced several famous works. The most famous included *The Nuremberg Chronicle* in 1493, his Latin Bibles, the first printed German Bible in 1483, and the *Schatzbehalter*. Koberger was noted for his elegant and expressive Black Letter typefaces, which are apparent in this edition. This 1492 Koberger edition of Thomas à Kempis's and Gerson's treatises is the only edition of the *Imitatio* and *De meditatione cordis* produced by his press.

BINDING

The binder who completed this simple but elegant fifteenth-century binding is not known. However, from its style it certainly comes from Germany at the end of the fifteenth century. It is comparable to the EBDB workshop Evangelisten, found in British Library IB 5592: a 1476 printing of Rodericus Zamorensis's *Speculum vitae humane* by Günther Zainer. The binding in IB 5592 shows a similar use of blind stamp to a panel design, which incorporates a single tool scroll with lettering and a diamond-shaped tool patterning within the central panels. Another very comparable binding can also be found in British Library IB 1388, a Cistercian Missal published in Strasburg in 1489 and bound by Master W.

Our binding is completed in luxurious dark brown leather over wooden boards, which are blind stamped to a panel design. Both the front and rear cover display the same blind stamp design using single tools within a block stamped panel frame with double bands to separate the compartments. There are three upper and lower panels, two side panels, and one central panel. The upper and

lower panels are divided into three compartments. The left spine edge and fore edge compartments contain a single diamond shaped tool depicting a delicate rose flower within foliage surrounding the flower. The central compartment of the upper and lower panels contains four single tool stampings of a scroll, within which is placed the name "maria." Both the spine edge and fore edge side panels contain eight separate stamping of the "maria" scroll tool. The central panel uses the same diamond-shaped tool for the upper and lower panels to compose a pattern of two columns and four rows. Each of the four rows of diamond shape stamps is separated by an interspersed row of three fleur d'lis stamps made from a single tool, for a total of fifteen fleur d'lis. There is one well-burnished original brass clasp, with the brass catch-plates on front and rear covers, though the brass clasp is missing. Both the front and rear /cover edges are beveled, adding to the patterns of the binding. The spine has two raised bands and three compartments. A single tool showing two four-petal flowers joined by their stems appear in the lower compartment on the spine. This is a wonderful and rare example of a fully decorated late medieval German binding.

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ONLINE RESOURCES

British Library Database of Bookbindings

<http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/bookbindings/results.asp>

Latin version of the *Imitatio christi*

<http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/kempis.html>

English version of the *Imitatio christi*

<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/kempis/imitation.toc.html>

On the *Devotio Moderna*

<http://www.etss.edu/hts/MAPM/info3.htm>

On the history of early printed books

<http://www.ndl.go.jp/incunabula/e/index.html>