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***Liber Ordinarius* of the Chapter of St.-Gertrude's, Nivelles
In Latin and French, decorated manuscript on parchment
Belgium, Nivelles, c. 1293-1298**

103 folios on parchment, early modern foliation in ink, top, outer corner, recto (collation, i-xii⁸ xiii⁸ [-8, following f. 103, cancelled with no loss of text]), horizontal catchwords in most quires, quire four, the third quire of the text, discounting the calendar, is signed with a roman numeral,, no other leaf or quire signatures, calendar ruled in ink, remaining folios ruled very lightly in lead, prickings, top and bottom margins, and on some folios, inner margin, single full-length vertical bounding lines (justification 233-222 x 167-160 mm.), written below the top line by at least three scribes in gothic bookhands in two columns of thirty-eight to thirty-three lines, majuscules within text touched with red, text scored through with red in place of the usual red rubrics, red and blue paragraph marks, numerous one-line initials within the text, alternately red and blue, three- to two-line initials on every page, alternately red and blue with contrasting pen decoration in very dark blue, almost black, or red, fourteen six- to three-line parted red and blue initials with very fine pen decoration of varying complexity, some decoration extending into full-length borders and ending in oak leaves, two birds, and a rabbit (see especially ff. 9 and 57), and on f. 87v, with a red and blue cascade ending with a fleur-de-lis: ff. 9 (two initials), 27, 51, 52, 57 (two initials), 60, 61, 63v, 64, 78v, 81v, and 87v, similar initials followed by red and blue lombardic capitals, ff. 54 and 90v, in excellent condition apart from some cockling and soiling. Bound in a fifteenth-century binding of blind-tooled dark brown leather over very massive boards, quite worn but possibly with stamps of eagles, mottos, and floral sprays, four corner and one central decorative heavy metal bosses on the upper and lower boards, and two large leather straps which fasten to metal pegs on the upper board, holes on lower board, possibly for a hasp used to attach a chain, sewn on six single leather thongs, although this binding is fifteenth-century, it is possible that the original wooden boards were reused, since holes from an earlier binding are visible along the spine, now pegged, spine exposed with only traces of its leather covering remaining, a section of the leather cover is missing, lower board, both covers now very worn. Dimensions 303 x 223 mm.

St.-Gertrude's in Nivelles was an important foundation in Belgium from the seventh century until 1798. However, very few of its books and charters are extant dating before the sixteenth century. This is likely a unique example of a thirteenth-century manuscript from the Chapter at Nivelles. It preserves a vivid and extraordinarily detailed account of the Chapter's liturgy, as well as other records of importance to its history in the thirteenth century. Previously unpublished, it emerges an important source of information for liturgical historians as well as for social historians studying the religious life of women in the high Middle Ages.

PROVENANCE

1. This manuscript was written at the Benedictine Chapter of St.-Gertrude in Nivelles as indicated by numerous passages in its text (cf. f. 9) and the feasts included in the calendar;

it can be dated after 1293, and probably before 1298; note that although both the "Visio" of St. Gertrude (the opening of her tomb) in 1293 (the year accepted by modern scholars, although it is listed in this manuscript as 1292), and the Saint's translation in 1298 into her new shrine are added in the calendar, the text of the Sanctorale includes the feast of the "Visio" (see f. 74), but lacks any mention of the translation (see f. 70). The Chapter's charters and other texts included in the manuscript date from 1273-1293, mostly during the reign of Elizabeth of Bierbais, who was abbess of Nivelles from 1277 until her death in 1293. The evidence of the binding suggests that the book was kept chained in the library or possibly the Church. The Chapter was suppressed in 1789, and its library was dispersed or destroyed.

2. Acquired by a private family at the time of the Chapter's suppression, and remained in private hands until 2008; handwritten notes about Nivelles in a nineteenth-century hand, pasted in, f. 1.

TEXT

f. 1, blank, ff. 1v-7, calendar in red and black, with entries for every day of the month, including the Elevation of St. Gertrude, 10 February, in red, nine lessons, full and solemn office with procession; translation of Gertrude, 17 March, in red, full office with Mass; Benedict, 21 March, nine lessons; Dedication of the Church of St.-Gertrude, 4 May, in red, solemn office with Mass; added note alongside Petronilla, 30 May, records the Translation of the body of blessed Gertrude in 1298; Peter and Paul, 29 June, in red, nine lessons, full office with Mass; Begga, 7 July; Killian, and added entry for the "Visio sanctissimi corporis beate Gertrudis," here dated 1292, 8 July; translation of Benedict, 11 July; Margaret, 12 July, nine lessons; Dedication of the Altar of St. Gertrude, 24 July, in red, nine lessons, full and solemn office with procession; Anne, mother of Mary, 26 July, nine lessons; Commemoration of St. Gertrude, 4 August, procession; Lambert, 17 September, in red, nine lessons; Dedication of the Oratory of St. Michael, 29 September, in red, nine lessons; Consecration of blessed Gertrude, 2 December, in red, nine lessons, full and solemn office; and Begga, 17 December; ff. 7v-8, tables; f. 8v, blank;

ff. 9-54, Temporale, incipit, "In nomine domini Amen. Incipit liber ordinarius ostendens qualiter legatur et cantetur per totum anni circulum in Ecclesia niuellensis tam de tempore quam de festis sanctorum in nocturnis officiis et diurnis. Et sciendum est quod aduentus domini semper aduenit in dominica que est propinquior siue uicinior festo beati andree, Dominica prima aduentus domini ad primas uesperas anth. Benedictus. . . .";

Detailed summary of liturgy of each day with cues for each proper text, describing the Divine Office, as well as the Mass and Processions; begins with the first Sunday in Advent, continues through Lent, Holy Week (in great detail), Easter, Rogation, Ascension, Pentecost, then seasons after Pentecost, first going through the Office readings, and then the Gospel readings, concluding with Dominica xxv, f. 51, followed by Processions, and concluding with Corpus Christi, which was a relatively new feast, observed by the whole Church only in 1264, which accounts for the fact that it is original to this manuscript but copied out of order at the end of the Temporale.

f. 54v and f. 56rv, *Cbi apres ensua <i> sont le statut et les debites de la Consterrie de le Eglise me dame sainte Giertruth de Nivelle . . .*, incipit, "Promiers est assauoir q[ue] li mortise del Apport est le coustre. . . [Text begins on f. 54v, ending abruptly, and then continues ff. 56rv, ending] . . . Et doit encor li coustres le chandelle me dame le jour de la chandleur";

f. 55v, Incipit, "A le pasque doit li coustres i cirge de xl heures et iii Roelles pour les iii Maries . . ."; "Anno domini M. CC. lxx tercio infra sexta post misericordiam domini recordatum fuit per Capitulum Niuellensis iudicando quod domina Abbatisa Niuellensis . . ."; [Concludes with a note directing the reader to the end of the volume; this text continues on f. 93v];

ff. 57-90v, Sanctorale, incipit, "Tertio kalendas natale sanctorum saturini, . . ."; text includes the feasts as listed in the calendar at the beginning of the volume;

ff. 90v-93, Common of saints;

f. 93v-95, *Cest chou q[ue] me dame li Abbese doit le jour dou blanc dioes deuant mangier*, incipit, "A chascune Cannonesse soit en scolle ou defors, lau de grasse des mors, les prouendes le Roi et le duch . . . , f. 95, Teile dois iestre li scuelle ke me dame li Abbese de Niuelle doit a ses dames le jour dou blanc dioeus. . . . Item une pieche de samon dont li largere et logere est chi signie de vermillon . . . ;

f. 95rv [record of the opening of the tomb of St. Gertrude; here dated 1292, but assigned to 1293 by modern historians], incipit, "Feria quarta ante diuisionem apostolorum scilicet in die kyliani et sociorum eius, Respexerunt reliquias beate Gertrudis in feretro ad preceptum et ordinationem Capitula Niuellensis domina Elyzabeth de Birbato Abbatisa . . . et totum corpus per ossa uirginis. Actum anno domini millesimo cc nongaesimo secundo feria quarto ante diuisionem apostolorum . . . ;

ff. 95v-103v, Copies of documents from the Chapter of St. Gertrude, including documents relevant to the dispute between the Abbess, Elizabeth of Bierbais and the Chapter of St. Gertrude, including three documents detailing the resolution of the dispute, f. 96v, *Chest li pais des Abbeses*, incipit, "In nomine domine Amen. Cum controuersia verteretur inter capitulum ecclesie niuellensis ex una parte et venerabilem dominam Elyzabeth de birbaco . . .," dated 1282, and followed by two further agreements in French; and ff. 100-102, an account of the death of Elizabeth of Bierbais, and the election of the new Abbess, Yolande de Stein in 1293, incipit, "Vacante Abbatisa per mortem. Alicuius Abbatisse habet quicquid euenerit quousque fuerit sepulta . . ."

This manuscript is an Ordinal, also known as a *Liber ordinarius*, or *Ordinarium*, and as such contains detailed directions for the liturgy of the Chapter of St. Gertrude's in Nivelles, Belgium. Like most medieval liturgical manuscripts, the year is divided into the Temporale (the feasts celebrating the life of Christ, revolving around the moveable feast of Easter), the Sanctorale, which includes the fixed feasts of the saints, and the Common of saints. Ordinals do not include the actual text of the Divine Office or the Mass, but rather include instructions as to how the daily liturgy is to be observed.

The Abbey of Nivelles was founded sometime between 647 and 650 by Itta of Aquitaine, the widow of Pepin of Landen, who was mayor of the palace for the Merovingian king, Dagobert I. St. Amand, bishop of Tongres consecrated the foundation. Itta and Pepin's daughter, Gertrude (d. 659)—who was to become St. Gertrude—was the first abbess. St.-Gertrude's was originally a double monastery of both monks and nuns. The foundation evolved into a chapter of secular canons and canonesses, and by the thirteenth century, the rules of the chapter required the canonesses to be of noble birth (this requirement did not extend to the Canons). Their duties included attending the Divine Office and Mass, and probably also teaching young girls of noble birth. The canonesses were not bound by vows of poverty and chastity, and they were allowed to leave to be married.

The liturgical practices at St.-Gertrude's were thus particularly complex, and this manuscript describes in detail the varying roles of the canonesses and the canons. Of particular interest are the descriptions of the processions on major feast days. On Palm Sunday, f. 27, the procession included not only the canonesses, but also youths ("*infantes*") carrying the candles. Mention is often made of the role of the students studying at the Chapter, and some feasts mention preaching to the towns people (cf. f. 29). The rogation procession, f. 35v, traditionally observed with a procession following the parish boundaries, describes visits to the various churches in Nivelles in detail. This type of information is only found in Ordinals, and is of inestimable value to historians of the liturgy.

One of the most dramatic events during the abbacy of Elizabeth of Bierbais (1277-1293) was the viewing of the relics of St. Gertrude. The new shrine for St. Gertrude, commissioned in 1272, is a renowned example of thirteenth-century metalwork, despite the damage it suffered during the bombing of Nivelles in 1940. As this manuscript recounts, on July 8, 1292 the tomb of the Saint was opened, and the body of the Saint was found intact except for three teeth (modern historians reckon the year as 1293). The account preserved here on ff. 95rv may be the earliest record of this event. Elizabeth died within months of the ceremony, and some believed that her death was a direct result of disturbing the relics of the saint. The relics were placed in the new shrine in 1298, and they were not disturbed again until the nineteenth century.

The manuscript also contains a number of other documents relating to the duties of the Abbess, including the food the Abbess was obliged to provide for the canonesses on "*le jour dou blanc dioes*,"; on f. 95 two red bars are drawn which were to be used to measure the length and width of the portion of salmon the Abbess was to give to the canonesses. Other documents detail the disputes between Elizabeth of Bierbais and the Chapter, including documents recording the resolution of the conflict (see Hoebanx, 1964, p. 289 for an account of these events). These documents, together with the wealth of detail about its liturgical practices, which often include mention of the interaction between the town and the Chapter, make this manuscript an important source, not only for historians of the liturgy, but also for scholars studying the social and economic history of the Low Countries, as well as those interested in the religious life of women in the Middle Ages.

The manuscripts from St.-Gertrude's must have been dispersed when the Chapter was suppressed in 1798. Although a number of liturgical manuscripts survive from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and parts of the archives survive, this manuscript is possibly a unique example of a surviving thirteenth-century manuscript from the Chapter's library. The greatest concentration of

materials from the library and archives of the Chapter are found today in the Bibliothèque Royale de Belgique, section des manuscrits, and the Archives Générales du Royaume à Belgique, Fonds des Archives Ecclésiastiques. Although a few charters date from earlier centuries, the surviving manuscripts from the Chapter all seem to date from the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries (see Felix, Hoop and Willame, cited below).

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