

EKBERT OF SCHÖNAU, *Stimulus amoris*; THOMAS A KEMPIS, *Imitatio Christi*; PS.-  
AUGUSTINE [PATRICK OF DUBLIN?], *De triplici habitaculo*  
In Latin, decorated manuscript on parchment  
Southern France (?), c. 1440-1480

i (paper) + 89 + i (paper) folios on parchment, modern foliation in pencil top outer corner, complete (collation, i-viii<sup>o</sup> ix<sup>o</sup> [-10, cancelled with no loss of text]), no catchwords or signatures, ruled in lead with single full-length bounding lines, (justification, 111-110 x 90-87 mm.), written below the top line in a southern gothic bookhand in two columns of thirty lines, majuscules within text touched with red, red rubrics, two- to five-line red initials, lower margin, f. 1, excised, inscription in red on last page erased, rodent damage to lower, outer margin, with some loss of text, ff. 4-17 (usually a few letters in the bottom five or six lines) and more extensive damage to ff. 76-77, ink flaking on some folios. Bound in vellum over thin pasteboard in the seventeenth or eighteenth century, title, "Gersonis," and shelfmark, "2[?]3," written on spine in ink, two holes front and back covers from ties (now missing), some damage to the parchment covering the spine, but overall in good condition. Dimensions 166 x 123 mm.

The *Imitation of Christ's* call to follow the life of Christ as told in the Gospels may explain why it is still widely read today; hundreds of surviving manuscript copies witness its popularity during the later Middle Ages. Here it is accompanied by two texts that reflect other sides of medieval religious life – the extreme devotion to the Passion and the Cross of Ekbert of Schönau's *Stimulus amoris*, and speculation on heaven, hell, and earth, found in *De triplici habitaculo*. This manuscript evidences the dissemination of the spirituality of the Modern Devotion into Southern France.

## PROVENANCE

1. The manuscript offers few clues as to its date and place of origin; the type of parchment, ink, and the overall character of the script certainly suggest that it was copied in southern Europe in the fifteenth century; more careful examination leads us to suggest that it may have been copied in Southern France in the middle years of the century, c. 1440-80. Details of the script and the style of the initials do not seem to support an origin in Italy (crossed tironian-7 to abbreviate "and," "qui" abbreviated both as was common in Italy with a horizontal stroke through the descender of the "q" and with a superscript "i," general appearance of a round script, but many individual letters copied with sharp breaks, and so forth). Further study is needed.

Frequent nota marks, marginal brackets, and pointing hands; a few corrections and marginal notes (f. 24, "delectat," f. 36, addition of omitted word), and a note at the end of the text in a sixteenth-century (?) hand, "Deus auribus nostris audivimus patres nostris annuncia."

Possibly once included an ownership note f. 1, now excised; the note in red erased on f. 89v may also have included information on its ownership. By the seventeenth or eighteenth century it was part of a library, as evidenced by the shelfmark written on the spine.

2. Belonged to Dr André Rooryck (1923-2010) of Belgium, who devoted his retirement to collecting manuscripts, incunabula and coins; his MS 20; sold at Sotheby's, 5 July 2005, lot 65.
3. Belonged to Joost R. Ritman (b. 1941), Amsterdam, the Dutch businessman and distinguished collector of art and books, who acquired it from Sothebys in 2005; Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica MS 212 ("Philosophica Hermetica," bookplate inside front cover; pencil note inside back cover); briefly described in Medieval Manuscripts in Dutch Collections (Online Resources).
4. Inside back cover, in pencil, notes from owners or dealers, "14105/GFEL," and "34XVR."

## TEXT

ff. 1-10, *Meditationes Anselmi de passione domini*, incipit, "Iesu nazarenum a iudeis innocenter condemnatum a gentibus cruci affixum . . . in nomine eius omne genu flectantur caelestium terrestrium et infernorum. Ubi est ergo gloriatio tua Christiane . . . post exitum vero anime a corpore veniam consequi et vitam eternam concedas per eum et tecum et spiritu sancto vivit et regnat deus per omnia secula seculorum. Amen." *Expliciunt meditationes Anselmi archiepiscopi de passione domini nostri Iesu Christi*;

Eckbert of Schönau, *Stimulus amoris*, a popular treatise on Christ's Passion; printed Migne, *Patrologia latina* 158:748C-761B, and in Roth, 1884, pp. 293-303; also printed in Migne, *Patrologia latina* 184:953D-966, with a slightly different ending. Circulated during the Middle Ages in numerous manuscripts under a number of different names, including Anselm of Canterbury (as here, and in PL 158), Bernard of Clairvaux, as well as Ekbert of Schönau, who is now generally accepted as the author; see Wilmart, 1932, p. 194 (Meditatio IX), Glorieux, 1952, no. 72; Distelbrink, 1975, no. 212, Köster, (1980) vol. 2, col. 436-440, and Bestul, 1996, p. 188.

ff. 10-85, *Incipit liber de imitatione Christi et contemptu omnium vanitatum. Capitulum primum*, incipit, Qui sequitur me non ambulat in tenebris dicit dominus. Hec verba sunt Christi quibus admonitionem . . ."; [Book two] ff. 34v-57v, *De interna consolatione christi ad animam fidelem. Anima siue de [sic]*, incipit, "Audiam quid loquitur in me dominus deus . . ."; [Book three] ff. 57v-71, *Tertius tractatus de imitatione christi. De contemptu omnis temporalis honoris*, incipit, "Fili noli tibi attrahere si videas alios . . ."; ff. 71-85, *Quartus tractatus de imitatione christi*, incipit, "Venite ad me omnes qui laborantis . . . non essent ineffabilia nec mirabilis dicenda. Qui et benedictus sit in secula seculorum. Amen. *Expliciunt tractatus de imitatione christi*;

Thomas a Kempis, *Imitatio christi*, ed. Pohl, 1904, and Lupo, 1982; Delaissé, 1956, is a diplomatic edition of Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale, MS 5855-61, copied by Thomas a Kempis in 1441, which includes the *Imitatio christi*, as well as other texts by Thomas. The text in many manuscript of the *Imitatio* differs in the number of books included and their order. The earliest dated copy of Bbook one was copied in 1424; all four books can be found in a dated manuscript from 1427, but there was certainly considerable variability, especially in the early manuscripts, and in different regions (English copies, for example, often include only Books 1-3. Compared with the usual printed texts including Pohl's edition, the Brussels autograph of 1441 includes four books, arranged Book 1, 2, 4, 3.

The text in this manuscript is divided into four books, but the division into books differs from the usual divisions found in the printed editions; Book one in the manuscript includes Book one and two together; Book two in the manuscript is equivalent to the first part of Book three of the edition, chapters 1-40; Book three in the manuscript consists of the remaining chapters of Book three (chapters 41-59); Book four in the manuscript and the printed editions are equivalent.

Axters, 1971, assembled a lengthy inventory of the surviving manuscripts. Since then, the estimate of the number of surviving manuscripts and printed editions of the *Imitatio* has increased steadily. Van Engen, 1988, p. 8, suggested there were 750 manuscripts, and that the text was printed in more than 3,000 editions from the first edition in 1472 down to the last century, fifty of which date before 1500; Van Engen, 2008, p. 9, mentions 900 fifteenth-century manuscripts and one hundred early printed editions; Von Habsburg, 2011, suggests there are 800 manuscripts, and more than 740 printed editions from its composition up to 1650, making it the most frequently printed book in the sixteenth century apart from Bible, with over 100 editions before 1500. During the fifteenth century it was translated into French, German, Dutch, Middle English, Castilian, Catalan, Italian, and Portuguese among other languages.

ff. 85-89v, *Incipit tractatus beati augustini de tribus habitaculis*, incipit, "Tria sunt sub omnipotentis dei manu habitacula summum imum medium, summum regnum dei vel regnum celorum dei . . . et sine fastidio clamore cordis laudabunt deum omnipotentem benignum et misericordem cui honor et Gloria nunc et semper per Omnia secula seculorum. Amen," *Explicit tractatus beati augustini de tribus habitaculis*."

Pseudo-Augustine, *De triplici habitaculo*; although the text circulated as Augustine's during the Middle Ages, modern scholars do not accept it as authentic, nor can it be attributed to St. Patrick (d. 461); it may have been written by the eleventh-century bishop, Patrick of Dublin, bishop from 1074-1084; printed in Migne, *Patrologia latina* 40:991-998, and in 53:831-838, and Gwynn, 1955, p. 106-24. See Bieler, 1942, pp. 8-16, Dekkers, 1961, no.1106; Bloomfield, 1979, nr. 6082; questions of the author and manuscripts discussed in Delius, 1937-8.

This manuscript includes three spiritual treatises, the *Imitation of Christ*, which is still widely read today, and two shorter texts, less known to modern readers, but also extremely popular during the Middle Ages. This manuscript is evidence of the dissemination of the ideals of the Modern Devotion as expressed in the *Imitation* well beyond its birthplace in towns along the Ijssel River in Holland into southern Europe. The Gospel-inspired faith expressed in the *Imitation* is here linked with the devotion to the Cross and Passion of the *Stimulus amoris*, and the meditation on heaven, earth, and hell found in *De triplici habitaculo*.

The treatise known in some manuscripts as the *Stimulus amoris* (the "Simulus of love"), circulated under a number of names during the Middle Ages, and into the early modern period, as is not unusual – Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109), Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153), and Ekbert of Schönau, who is now most often now accepted as the author. Ekbert (d. 1184), was a Benedictine monk, and Abbot of Schönau, now known as the brother of the mystic, Elizabeth of Schönau, and for his sermons against the Cathars. The *Stimulus amoris* reached a wide audience and is found in numerous manuscripts; it describes devotion to the cross in florid terms and has also been associated with the growth of anti-Semitism in the Rhineland in the twelfth century. It influenced later authors, including St. Bonaventure in his *Lignum vitae*, John Peckham and Ludolf of Saxony. The author compares the breadth, length and depth of the Cross to love,

eternity and wisdom, and calls on Christ "to fix my hands and feet to it, and impose the entire form of Your Passion on your servant . . . ."

The *De triplici habituaculo* ("On the three dwelling-places") that is hell, the world, and paradise), was also widely popular, and during the Middle Ages was usually attributed to St. Augustine (354-430). One copy of the text begins with a rubric, "*de gaudio electorum, et de supplicio dampnatorum . . .*," ("on the joy of the elect, and the supplication of the damned") which is an apt summary of its contents. Modern scholars have suggested that it may be by the eleventh-century Bishop Patrick of Dublin, bishop from 1074-1084.

The *Imitatio Christi* ("The Imitation of Christ") has been called "the most influential devotional book in Western Christian History" (Van Engen, 1988, p. 8), and it has been the subject of countless scholarly works, many of which have been concerned with the lively and enduring debate about the identity of its author. It has been ascribed to a very long list of authors including, among many others, Augustine, Bernard, Bonaventure, Jean Gerson, Chancellor of Paris (d. 1429), and to a presumed Italian Abbot, "John Gersen," and to Geert Grote (1340-1384) himself. Delaissé's critical study, published in 1956, of the Brussels manuscript (MS 5855-61) that was signed and dated by Thomas a Kempis in 1441, was key to convincing most scholars that it was by Thomas, and he is widely accepted as the author today.

Thomas a Kempis (1379/80-1471), or Thomas of Kempen, born in Kempen, Germany, was part of the second generation of the *Devotio Moderna* after Geert Grote, the founder of this religious movement. He was educated in a school of the Brothers of the Common Life in Grote's native Deventer, Holland, and then became a canon at the Agnietenberg Priory (Mount Saint Agnes), near Zwolle, a priory of the Congregation of Windesheim, where his brother John served as prior. He made his profession there in 1406, and was ordained in 1413. He was a prolific author, composing numerous devotional tracts, as well as a Chronicle of the priory.

The *Imitation* is a collection of hundreds of spiritual sayings, inspired by the practice encouraged by Groote and his followers of recording notable sayings in commonplace books, or *rapiaria*, to serve as a focus for spiritual reflection. Each of its four books originally circulated as independent booklets ("Useful Reminders for the Spiritual Life," "Suggestions Drawing One toward the Inward Life," "On Inner Solace," and "The Book of the Sacrament" [that is, Holy Communion]), and as noted above, manuscript copies of the *Imitation* often vary in the number of books they include, and in their order. There are at least thirty early copies dating c.1424-1441, many with only one of its four books. The oldest copy with all four books dates from 1427 (Brussels, Royal Library, MS 22084).

In this work, Thomas encapsulated the spirituality of the *Devotio moderna*, or the New Devout, especially their emphatic emphasis on Christ, the importance of the Bible, the recommendation of the use of the vernacular for religious writings, and their focus on the interior life and a calm withdrawal from the world. The importance of the Bible, especially the Gospels, is found throughout the *Imitation*, since hearing and reading the Bible in the right spirit is central to a desire to follow Christ (Book one, chapter five). The degree to which Thomas himself internalized the Bible is found in the astounding number of scriptural citations found throughout the work; Becker, 2002, lists 3,815 scriptural sources in the *Imitation*.

## LITERATURE

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#### ONLINE RESOURCES

The Ritman Library (Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica)

<http://www.ritmanlibrary.com/collection/collection-profile/>

Medieval Manuscripts in Dutch Collections (as Amsterdam, BPH MS 212)

<http://www.mmdc.nl/static/site/index.html>

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>

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