

Prayerbook (Gebetbuch) of Abbess Barbara Schwerdtführer

In Latin, with some German, decorated manuscript on parchment

Southern Germany, likely Bavaria (Kirchheim am Ries?), c. 1550 (a few added leaves from an earlier late 15th c. prayerbook)

100 ff., preceded by 2 parchment flyleaves, followed by a single parchment flyleaf, apparently complete, in regular quires of 6 (collation: i-xvi6, xvii4), written in a later gothic bookhand, in brown ink, in 13 lines per page (justification 54 x 33 mm.), ruled in pale red ink, prickings clearly visible, rubrics in red, some capitals stroked in red, small initials in red throughout, larger 3-line high initials in red (some with ornamentation), some calligraphic penwork in the margin (mostly lower margins, e.g. ff. 79v-80), ownership inscription in black ink on the first flyleaf, and below two painted heraldic shields. Bound in a German 16th c. binding of brown calf over wooden boards, back sewn on 3 raised bands, with blind-stamped tools, a paper titlepiece pasted on upper spine: "P[eti]tes heures XVe s...", covers divided into two concentric frames traced in blind filets, the outer frame with a repeated floral tool, the central panel with leaf tool and the same floral tool, fleurons at angles of central panel, brass clasps and catchplates, edges yellow, with traces of gilding on upper edge, traces of metal fittings and bosses (now all wanting) (Binding a bit rubbed, spine partly cracked and worn, but still in its original and unrestored condition. Overall in sound condition). Dimensions 78 x 58 mm.

Professionally copied, likely in a Cistercian environment, and hitherto unrecorded, this near-miniature devotional Prayerbook preserves its original blind-stamped binding. The volume belonged to and was perhaps commissioned by the Abbess of the Cistercian convent at Kirchheim am Ries, Barbara Schwerdtführer, who owned 17 other manuscripts and early printed books, now in the Oettingen-Wallersteinsche Bibliothek at the University of Augsburg. The nuns at Kirchheim am Ries housed a substantial library, partially reconstructed by Schromm (2009).

PROVENANCE

1. Likely copied for (and in?) the Cistercian convent at Kirchheim am Ries, located near Nördlingen, Bavaria, in the province of Swabia, founded circa 1267-1274 by the Counts of Oettingen (in particular Count Ludwig III). The relation to the Abbey of Kirchheim am Ries is corroborated by the presence on the first flyleaf of two heraldic shields, with on the left that of the House of Oettingen, directly alluding to the founders of the Convent. The manuscript is near-contemporary with the Abbess of the Convent, Barbara Schwerdtführerin, for whom it was perhaps copied and by whom it was certainly owned.

Barbara Schwerdtführerin (or Schwerdtführer), *Äbtissen* (Abbess) of the Cistercian Nuns of Kirchheim am Ries (1570-1584), as per her ex-libris and motto: "Barbara Schwerdtfurin aptissin zu Kirchaim. *Non omni homini revelas cor tuum*" and added in another hand: "Mortua est 4 junii 1584." There is a 16th century manuscript of the "Rosengart" (Gartenallegorie "Rosengart" (1554), Beuron, Klosterbibliothek, MS

24) that contains the same motto: "*Non omni homini revelas cor tuum*. Barbara Schwertführer, aptissin zu Kirchhaim 1575" (see Engelmann, in *Colligere fragmenta*, 1952, p. 276; A Schromm (1998), pp. 309-310).

In his study and reconstruction of the library of the Cistercian convent at Kirchheim am Ries, Arnold Schromm cites a number of books with her ex-libris, now mostly in the Oettingen-Wallersteinsche Bibliothek housed at the University of Augsburg. He lists a total of 17 manuscripts and imprints having belonged to the Abbess Barbara Schwertführer, all copied or printed in the 16th century (datable from 1509 to 1576), with an exception of one manuscript perhaps late 15th century (a *Psalterium Davidicum*; see Schromm, 1998, pp. 290-291). There are many small Prayerbooks of this type in the collection of codices that composed the former conventual library at Kirchheim am Ries.

2. A later hand has marked in French on the upper pastedown: "Petites heures allemandes du XVeme." This is erroneous as the present manuscript is not a Book of Hours. Pasted on the lower pastedown are the following numbers (shelfmark?) 13/24.
3. European Continental Collection

TEXT

ff. 1-50, Prayers of Praise (Thanksgiving), rubric, *Graciarum actiones post sacram communionem*, incipit, "O amantissime, o dulcissime, o clementissime domine Jhesu Christe ecce ego assumisce..."; rubric (f. 2v), Oratio, incipit, "Gracias tibi ago sancte per omnipotens eterne Deus qui me indignum peccatorem..."; rubric (f. 5), Item unde supra, incipit, "Mane mecum rex angelorum, mane mecum et defende ab insidiis et laqueis"; rubric (f. 5v), Oratio, incipit, "Benevenias princeps nobilitatis..."; rubric (f. 8v), Item unde supra, incipit, "Gratias tibi ago deus, gratias tibi ago vera vita viventium"; rubric (f. 13), Item gratiarum actio etc., incipit, "Gratias tibi ago et laudes tibi refero domine deus; rubric (f.16v), Oratio, incipit, "Hec sunt convivium que tibi placent..." (Chevalier, RH 7643; Gierman & Härtel, *Ebstorf*, p. 73); rubric (f. 19v), Oratio unde supra, incipit, "O sacratissimum corpus et sanguinis domini..." (Gierman & Härtel, *Ebstorf*, p. 26) [continued] Johannis Baptiste et omnium sanctorum deo placentium ut liberares me in dignum famulum tuum *Erasmum [in red]* necnon famulo tuo et famulos tuos N. et N. et omnes parentes meo..."; rubric (f. 26v), Gratiarum actio et cetera, incipit, "Gratias ago immense maiestati ac sempiternae pietati tue domine..."; rubric (f. 30), Gratiarum actio, incipit, "Benedictus es potentissime Ihesu Christe rex eterne glorie promissor..."; rubric (f. 45) Oratio, incipit, "Eya nunc oro dulcissime deus, ut hoc dulcissimum sacramentum sit..." (Leroquais, II, p. 229); rubric (f. 47v), Item unde supra, incipit, "Ineffabilem misericordiam tuam domine Ihesu Christe humiliter exoro..." (Leroquais, II, p. 37, 39, 232);

ff. 50- 86v, Prayers for various feasts (Temporal and Sanctoral), rubric, *In nativitate domini sequentia sequitur*, incipit, "Natus ante secula dei filius invisibilis interminus..." (Chevalier, RH 11903 ; PL 131, col. 1006); rubric (f. 52v), Item de nativitate, incipit, "Grates nunc omnes reddamus domino deo..." (Chevalier, RH 27418); rubric (f. 53), *In epiphania domini. Sequencia*, incipit, "Festa christi omnis christianitas celebret..." (Chevalier, RH 6111); rubric (f. 56), *In purificatione Marie virginis*, incipit, "Concentu parili hic te, Maria, veneratur populus..." (Chevalier, RH 3694); rubric (f. 59v), *In die sancto pasce*, incipit, "Laudes salvatori voce modulemus supplici..." (Chevalier, RH 10417); rubric (f. 64), *In ascensione domini. Summi triumphum regis prosequamur laude...* (Chevalier, RH 19756); rubric (f. 66v), *De spiritu sancto sequentia*, incipit, "Santus spiritus assit nobis gratia..."; rubric (f. 70), *De corpore domini*, incipit, "Lauda Syon salvatorem, lauda ducem et pastorem in hymnis

et canticis..." (Chevalier, RH 10222); rubric (f. 74v), *In visitatione s. Marie virginis*, incipit, "Veni precelsa domina, Maria, tu nos visita, egras mentes..." (Chevalier, RH 21231); rubric (f. 76v), *De sancta Maria Magdalena sequencia*, incipit, "Laus tibi christe qui es creator et redemptor et salvator, celi terre maris angelorum et hominum..." (Chevalier, RH 10551); rubric (f. 80), *In assumptione beate virginis Marie*, incipit, "Congaudent angelorum in chori gloriose virginis..." (Chevalier, RH 3783); rubric (f. 81v), *In nativitate Marie*, incipit, "Stirpe Maria regia procreate, regem generans Ihesum..." (Chevalier, RH 19504); rubric (f. 83), *In festo sancti Michaelis archangeli. Sequentia*, incipit, "Ad celebres rex celice laudes cuncta..." (Chevalier, RH 100);

ff. 86v-88, Prayer for the Dedication of a Church, rubric, *In dedicacione ecclesie*, incipit, "Psallat ecclesia mater illibata et virgo sine ruga honorem..." (Chevalier, RH 15712);

ff. 88v-90, Prayer for All Saints, rubric, *De omnibus sanctis. Sequentia*, incipit, "Omnes sancti seraphin, cherubin, throni quoque dominationesque..." (Chevalier, RH 14061);

ff. 90-94, Prayer for the Conception of the Virgin Mary, rubric, *In conceptione beate Marie virginis*, incipit, "Potestate non natura sit creatura..." (Chevalier, RH 15206);

ff. 94v-95v, Prayer to be said after the Elevation of the Host or after Communion, rubric, *Oratio dicenda post elevationem seu post communionem sanctam trium milium dierum indulgen[tium]*, incipit, "Anima Christi sanctifica me, corpus Christi salva me, sanguis Christi..." (Chevalier, RH 1090);

ff. 95v-98, Prayers in German, probably from an earlier manuscript, likely copied at the end of the fifteenth or very early sixteenth century, rubric, *Item so man das sacrament gaislich Begert zu empfachen so thiis mit diser Begerung*; incipit, "O herr speis und trenck..."; "O herr speis mein sel mit dem brot des lebens..."; "O herr trenk mein gaist..."; added prayer in a different hand, "Es ist mir nach freuden ergangen...";

ff. 99-99v, blank leaf, ruled.

This small Prayerbook (Gebetbuch) is copied in a very regular script, probably by a monastic scribe. The first section contains prayers for thanksgiving (*gratias actiones*) or praise. The second section includes prayers for diverse feasts from the Temporal and Sanctoral. It would seem that the first owner fostered a particular veneration for Erasmus – not the Humanist, rather Saint Erasmus (or Elmo), the Christian martyr, Bishop of Formia (Campania) and "helper saint." There is a prayer in which the name Erasmus has been inserted and rubricated in red (f. 24).

In the sixteenth century, this Prayerbook belonged to Barbara Schwerdtführerin, Abbess of the Cistercian Convent in Kirchheim am Ries, located near Nördlingen, in Swabia (founded circa 1267-1274 by the counts of Oettingen). Whereas the manuscript was owned very early on by the Abbess, and she may have been the original patron, there is no concrete proof that it was copied and bound in the conventual scriptorium (perhaps by a woman scribe?). Schromm does not cite it in his study, although manuscripts for personal devotion such as this one might not have been included in the common library. Further comparison with other similar sixteenth century Prayerbooks securely attributed to the convent in Kirchheim am Ries (of which there are many) might reveal the scribe or similarities in layout and binding.

In his study, Arnold Schromm discusses the history and the contents of the library of the Cistercian nunnery in Kirchheim am Ries, which may have had its origin in a community of beguines. The author argues that Kirchheim was likely typical of southern German nunneries, and may thus be considered representative of them. Schromm was able to reconstruct some 69 per cent of the holdings of the Cistercian library (medieval and early modern): his study provides a catalog of the extant books that can firmly be identified as once part of the conventual library. It is indeed unusual that such a considerable portion of the books and manuscripts which comprised the conventual library at Kirchheim have survived to the present day (217 manuscripts and 158 books out of an estimated total of 1,000 volumes). Most of these became part of the Library of the Counts of Oettingen-Wallerstein, which was later acquired by Augsburg University Library in 1831. Other volumes exist in various southern German libraries and international holdings. The present manuscript is hitherto unrecorded.

In Cyrus's study on female scribes in monastic convents in medieval Germany (2009), the Cistercians nuns of Kirchheim am Ries are included. Among 88 pre-1500 manuscripts from Kirchheim studied by Cyrus, five are attributable to women scribes. Cyrus identified other manuscripts copied for abbesses of Kirchheim am Ries such as Horae for Cistercian use "written at Durgenheim by T. Schwartz parson, during the time of Apollonia Schrottlin as abbess in Kyrchheim." This manuscript was formerly identified as "Cleveland (Ohio) Alf. Mewett Libr. 28 (Horae O. Cist.)" (whereabouts unknown, as quoted in C. Cyrus, 2009, p. 143, note 43, p. 276). The present Prayerbook, small in format and still preserved in its original blind-stamped binding, is a fine and representative example of the type of private devotional book that nuns cherished and used for their daily devotions.

LITERATURE

Chevalier, Ulysse. *Repertorium hymnologicum*, t. I: A-K (n° 1-9935), t. II: L-Z (n° 9936-22256), t. III: A-Z (n° 22257-34827), t. IV: A-Z (n° 34828-42060), 4 vol., Louvain, 1892-1912 [here referred to as RH].

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ONLINE RESOURCES

On the Cistercians:

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cistercians>

<http://www.osb.org/cist/>

On the House of Oettingen:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/House_of_Oettingen

Kirchheim am Ries:

<http://www.kirchheim-am-ries.de/data/stiftung.php>

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