

Obituary and Land Register for the Parish Church of Hollain (Hainaut)

Belgium, Hainaut (Hollain), c. 1440 (dated 1437?), with later additions until the 17th c.

In French, with some Latin, decorated manuscript on parchment

68 ff. [numbered 1-66, with 23bis, 42bis, 47bis], probably missing a leaf at the beginning (collation: i⁷ [of 8, missing i], ii⁸⁺⁵ [with 5 additional leaves inserted, some still blank], iii-vii⁸, viii⁷ [8-1, with viii likely a cancelled blank], ix²), written in a Gothic liturgical bookhand, on a variable number of lines (justification: 244 x 164 mm), ruled in ink, some prickings still visible, some quire signatures, rubrics in red with a few in blue, paragraph marks in alternating red and blue, numerous annotations and full additional entries, some contemporary (15th c.), others added in the 16th and 17th centuries (in French and Latin), a number of corrections and erasures. Unbound, with only a small remnant of the original binding on the back (a wooden board) (First two leaves damaged, with loss of text or lack of legibility (likely related to the loss of the upper cover of the binding), some ink faded in certain places, some staining due to continued use throughout the 16th and 17th centuries). Dimensions 350 x 270 mm.

Obituaries for parish churches are scarce. The endowed obits to be celebrated by the priest of the small parish church of Hollain have been copied into this book with the entries organized in a calendar. The name of the founder of each obit is specified, as well as the sum allotted to the priest in exchange for the celebration of the commemorative mass annually. The exact positions of the endowed lands and properties are detailed, mapping out the income and the temporals of the Church. This document is unpublished and certainly merits publication and further study.

PROVENANCE

1. Copied for use in the small parish church of Hollain (Western Hainaut). The parish Church in Hollain was part of the diocese of Tournai. During the Religious Wars, the church of Hollain was sacked by the Iconoclasts in 1556. Hollain (spelled Hollaing in this document) is a town located in modern-day Belgium (Wallonia), a border town with France, historically part of the Hainaut region, more precisely the Tournai region. It is now one of the localities that form the municipality of Brunehaut, ten kilometers south of Tournai. The municipality of Brunehaut was created in 1976 by the merging of the former municipalities of Hollain, Laplaigne, Bléharies, Rongy, Lesdain, Howardries, Wez-Velvain, Guignies and Jollain-Merlin. The new municipality was named after the Brunehaut's Stone (*pierre de Brunehaut*), a monolith located in the village of Hollain.

Located on the river Scheldt, Hollain derives its name from the term which designates "a marshy cavity," referring to the right bank of the river, which was often flooded. In 979, Godefroid le Captif ceded Hollain to the St. Peter abbey in Ghent (which accounts for certain entries and obits that refer to Saint-Peter in Ghent. Expelled by the lord of Mortagne around 1100, the monks reestablished their rule over the village in 1290; a charter states that the Abbot of St-Peter in Ghent had the privilege to

appoint and fire the municipal councilors in Hollain. The abbey was awarded 1/16th of the rights on all the local productions (wine, beer, grain).

2. Numerous additions, corrections and modifications brought by successive administrators to the original entries, testifying to the continued use of this Obituary and Land Register for the parish Church of Hollain. These additions are either in Latin or French, mostly written in variants of cursive script.
3. One finds on f. 65v the names of later "pasteurs" who were likely still concerned by the financial and land claims tied to the celebration of commemorative masses in the Church of Hollain: "Antoine Descamps pasteur de Hollain. 1607"; "Alard Sprien pasteur de Hollain 1647 24 Januarii"; "Pierre Lemari pasteur de Hollain .x. Julii 1669"; "Paul Francois Deschamps pasteur de Hollain le 12 de decembre 1693";
4. A later inscription (19th c.?) in black ink on the top of the first leaf reads "Cartulaire fait en 1477." This refers no doubt to the first paragraph where one must have read (with difficulty granted the badly damaged first leaf): "[...] en chi present cartulaire escript et renouvelé quand...qui fu fais en l'an del incarnation nostre seigneur mil .iiii. lx .xvii..." [1477]. It seems difficult to read this date, and the Roman numerals appear to read rather "mil .iiii.c et .xxxvii." (to be verified, perhaps using ultra-violet light).
5. European Continental Collection

TEXT

ff. 1-1v, Preface and "Table of Obits" (List of Obits and sums owed) (first lines of preface illegible) "[...] present cartulaire escript et renouvelé quand besoin [sera] (?) qui fu fais en l'an de l'incarnation nostre seigneur mil .iiii. [et] [xx]xvii [1437]; "Premiers le table des obits et le nom de ceulz qui les doivent tant pour ceulz del eglise comme pour ceulz des povres et pluseurs aultres persones"; "Li menistre del eglise de hollaing qui cescun an y sont ordonné..."; list of obits, beginning, "Pour le obit Jacquemart Betuise .ii.e de novembre...";

f. 2, blank;

ff. 2v-3, List of sums owed by the "menistre del eglise de Hollaing" [churchwarden?] to the parish priest of the Church of Hollain for obits, "Sensient les obis que doivent li menistre [...] [vil]le de HOLAING audit curé de Hollaing cascun an par composition [...] tant a le somme de chinquante et trois solz tornois...les obis qui sensievent et dont li dessusdit [pourveurs] font [...] a le communauté de le ville de Hollaing cascun an" (part of the heading effaced and illegible); explicit, "[...] Et sunt li dessusdit obit déclaré les noms affinque se aulcune creature ordonnoit nouvel obit..."; before-last distribution: "Item doivent li dessusdit pourveur des povres audit curé pour le obit maistre Henri Pouret .ii.e de may le quel n'est point compris en le somme devant dicte qui vault .ii. solz tournois et .xx. candelles de deux d[eniers] et a cascune candellette .vii. den[iers] tournois" [the "pourveurs de povres" were at the head of confraternities that distributed alms and helped the poor]; explicit, "[...] Et sunt li dessusdit obit déclaré les noms affinque se aulcune creature ordonnoit nouvel obit...";

f. 3v, blank;

ff. 4-9v, List and worth of the obits to be celebrated by the parish priest of Hollain, sums levied on lands owned by the priest in the town of Hollain, heading, "Sensievent les obis que doibt li curés de Hollaing sur les terres ahanables qu'il tient ou terroir de le dicte ville de Hollaing dont mention sera faite chi apres" ["terres ahananna[b]les" are arable, cultivated parcels of lands];

This list works hand in hand with the Obituary as found on ff. 14-47v. For instance on f. 9v, a certain Collard Cailliel owes for the obit of a woman "qui fu le fame Godescal .xv.e de fevrier .xii. d[eniers] parisis." When one turns to the month of February in the Obituary, quite logically one reads facing 15 February: "Obiit le fame qui fu Godescal .xii. d[eniers] parisis au curé de Hollaing sur se maison en le rue des flamens qui a present est Colard Caliel tenant d'un les as .iiii. bonniers de terre de le court Saint Pierre et aboutant au tomboit et a le rue des flamens. Colard Cailliel le tient" (f. 19).

ff. 10-13v, blank;

ff. 14-47bis v, Obituary for the parish church of Hollain, inserted in a perpetual calendar, from January to December, incipit, "Jenvier. Obit Magritte le Faveresse. A laisset au curé de Hollaing ung havot d'avaine sur son manoir et courtil que tient a present Jehane vesve de feu Collard Lotiel tenant au courtil sire Nicole Gouri curé de Hollaing a cause de son heritage et al courtil de le curé tout sur un sens et d'autre les au courtil qui fu Lotard Durgaut qui a present est a le dicte Loticelle aboutant par derriere al courtil et manoir les hoirs sire Martin de Hontaing et par devant a front de rue sur le cauchie de Hollaing et le tient ledicte vesve..."; with ff. 14-17, Month of January; ff. 17v-20v, Month of February (with ff. 20-20v left blank); ff. 21-23bis, Month of March (with f. 23bis-23bis v. left blank); ff. 24-26v, Month of April (with ff. 26-26v left blank); ff. 27-29, Month of May; ff. 30-32v, Month of June; ff. 33-35v, Month of July (*Juingnet*) (with ff. 35-35v left blank); ff. 36-38v, Month of August (with ff. 38-38v left blank); ff. 39-41, Month of September (with ff. 41v left blank); ff. 42-42bis, Month of October (*Octembre*) (with f. 42 bis v left blank); ff. 43-45, Month of November (with ff. 45-45v left blank); ff. 46-47bis, Month of December (with ff. 47-47v left blank); last entries: "viii. Obiit Ealis Soupenvote et Jaques de Bigardes dit Lotard son marit .ii. sols t[ornois] et .ii. deniers t[ornois] sur quatre vings verghes de terre ou environ gisans sur les mares de Hollaing.../ Obiit Pierart Robiert a laisset au curé de Hollaing deux sols tourn[ois] et .vi. d[eniers] au clerc se est assignés li dis obis...";

The name of the parish priest at the time of the redaction of this Obituary is provided in certain entries: "Nicolas Gouri, curé de Hollaing" (f. 14).

ff. 48-64v, Register of land tenure (*terrier*) and rights of the parish priest of Hollaing; "Chi apres sensieuent les terres ahannales appertenans a le curé de Holeng gisans en plusieurs coustures ou lieu de Hollaing en le maniere qui sensieut et sont mises par royes et toutes parties en trois royes ensy que les terres ou elles sunt situées sunt aroyés icelles mesures. Par Jak. Lietart l'an mil .iiii. et .xxxii [1431]"; heading (f. 51v), "Sensieuent les prés appertenans a le curé de Hollaing en le maniere qui s'ensieut"; heading (f. 52v), "Sensieuent aultres drois appertenans a le dict curé de Hollaing a cause des dismes dewes sur terres ahanables seans en le justice et eschevinage de Hollaing..."; heading (f. 57), "Sensieuent aultres rentes dewes a le dicte curé de Hollaing ..."; explicit, "Pruiniers Jaquemars Poures (?) pour son ausnoi et sancon tenant as terres et ausnoi Rolant du Gardin et d'autre les ale terre maistre Absalon Oskin a le runelle du busquet et au policamps del aultre les et le tient a present Olphart Pouret [et a present a Jehan Hazart]";

ff. 65-65v, blank, with the exception of added 17th c. inscriptions on f. 65v: "Antoine Descamps pasteur de Hollain. 1607"; "Alard Sprien pasteur de Hollain 1647 24 Januarii"; "Pierre Lemari pasteur de Hollain .x. Julii 1669"; "Paul Francois Deschamps pasteur de Hollain le 12 de decembre 1693" [the term "pasteur" certainly does not designate a protestant minister, and probably still designates Catholic priests in place in Hollain; this must be verified nonetheless, because all three are said to be "pasteurs"];

The bulk of this manuscript contains a type of necrological document, related to the liturgy of the Dead, to be placed in the category of "obituaries." This is the Obituary for the parish Church of Hollain (in Wallonia, Diocese of Tournai) composed in 1437 [or 1477, likely an erroneous reading?]. It also contains the equivalent of a register of land-tenure (*terrier*) for the same Church of Hollain.

An Obituary is a document which adds to the existing lists of deceased clergy and benefactors recorded in a perpetual calendar (*necrologium*), the endowed memorial services (obits) to be celebrated on the anniversary day of the other deceased who have left instructions and monies to fund masses in their honor. An Obituary is distinguished from a "necrologium" insofar as it records all the endowed obits (funded supposedly for eternity) and not only the obits of the deceased clergy of a given monastery, cathedral or collegial church, whose memory is technically celebrated "for free." Endowed obits (and non-endowed obits) were recorded in Obituaries, registers in which religious communities were accustomed to enter the names of the dead — notably their own deceased members, their associates, and their principal benefactors — with a view to the offering of prayers for their souls. The entries of an Obituary are organized according to a perpetual calendar from January to December and here each beginning "Obit...." These memorial services were endowed and the priest who celebrated each of the endowed obits on the given day received an annual stipend (in cash or in kind) taken from rent-charges levied on endowed lands (on this category of books all related to the liturgy of the Dead, see J.-L. Lemaître, "Terminologie des documents nécrologiques" in *Répertoire des documents nécrologiques français* (1980), pp. 5-35).

The present Obituary is for a parish church (as opposed to a Cathedral, or a Collegial or a monastic foundation), and parish obituaries are relatively more scarce than the majority of the extant obituaries (see Lemaître, *Répertoire...* vol. II, for listings of a few similar documents, for instance in the Province of Reims, Abbeville, "Eglise paroissiale du Saint-Sépulchre" (diocèse d'Amiens), Obituaire, 1480 (no. 2042); or again "Eglise paroissiale de Priez" (diocèse de Soissons), Obituaire, XVe s. (no. 1752)). Lemaître dedicates a part of his *Répertoire* (pp. 811-816) to the obituaries for foundations in the Diocese of Tournai (in which Hollain was situated), but only the modern-day French side of the Diocese, to the exclusion of the towns now incorporated in modern-day Belgium.

The general term of "obituary" is not commonly found in medieval documents (see Lemaître, 1980, p. 9). They can be variously called "martyrologium," "regula," "mortologium," "liber obituum," etc. in the documents. Indeed the present Hollain Obituary is designated by the compiler as "carthulaire" in the heading (f. 1, line 9). However, this is not a "cartulary" in the usually accepted meaning (a volume containing transcriptions of original documents relating to the foundation, privileges, and legal rights of a lay or ecclesiastical establishment, or a collection of original documents bound in one volume). Instead, the term "cartulaire" is used here because the document provides a listing and record of the portion of the rent-charges and land rights perceived on endowed lands in exchange for the celebration of anniversary masses. Because cartularies often contained charters referring to land claims and to land titles, this book was included in this

nomenclature by the scribe because it listed precisely all the lands and rent-charges that served to finance commemorative masses. In the present Obituary for Hollain, facing the date in a perpetual calendar, are specified the name of the endower, the cash value of the annual sum allotted, and the land base (*assiette*, in French) upon which the rents were levied, with the exact geographical position and current tenant of a given endowed land: these elements are typically also found in a cartulary or land register.

The institutional commemoration of the dead, especially the celebration of (paid) commemorative masses (obits), is a defining characteristic of late medieval Catholicism. Commemorative masses could free souls from Purgatory and ensure the memory of the deceased. After the funeral and a commemorative mass a few weeks later, another mass marked the “anniversary” a year after death. But the deceased often prepared for other future anniversary masses to be celebrated in their name, and endowed financially these anniversary masses accordingly. The annual commemoration of the obit essentially reenacted the funeral, without the corpse, and ensured the memory of the deceased. The desire for masses was insatiable. How much it could be satisfied for any given deceased individual depended on resources, forward planning, the reliability of the executors, and the availability of priests. The deceased and their descendants were sure the commemorative masses would be held because they were placed under institutional oversight (here the parish church of Hollain) and because the officiant received retribution, which is always an incentive.

Many obits were funded through real property, rent-charges and the perception of certain rights and taxes on lands left as bases for endowment (in French, “*assiette*” de la fondation). Payments were levied on individual properties through the rent-charges they generated. Keeping track of the sums due – here to the parish priest of Hollain – required administrative and accounting skills. Such a detailed obituary, with not only the sum but also the exact description of the lands endowed helped clergymen (here the priest of Hollain) to keep track of what was owed to them and the commemorative masses on the anniversary of a deceased person they were obligated to perform in order to cash-in on the endowed obits. Indeed changing property values and ownership meant that such income for the clergymen involved in commemorative masses could easily be lost and was frequently devalued. Ownership changed, the value of an endowed obit needed to be reviewed as time passed, hence the importance of keeping track of changing owners and annotating the obituary (as here, with a series of additions and adjustments added in the margins).

If institutions remained, men and women passed. Property changed hands, the value of an endowed obit needed to be adjusted, a commemorative mass could be abandoned as time went by (even though the endower might have willed and planned his endowment as perpetual). The present Obituary is apparently the only known such book for the small parish church of Hollain (there are many documents concerning Hollain that are recorded in the Cartulary of Saint-Peter of Ghent). The manuscript should be studied in parallel with other archives from Hollain, providing they have been preserved. It offers a plethora of onomastical and topographical details for the small town, a glimpse into a fifteenth-century town in Hainaut and the means of existence of a parish priest, paid to pray for deceased souls. The appended register of lands, rights and rent-charges (*terrier*) belonging and owed to the parish priest of Hollain on ff. 48-64v further contributes to our knowledge of the temporals of a small Hainaut parish church. This document certainly merits publication and should be related to other Tournai diocesan documents. Composed in French, it also presents linguistic and philological interest. It offers, for the lands described and the temporal of the Church something of a “freeze frame” shot of the small town of Hollain in the fifteenth century.

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