

CODEVERD VAN WEVELE translation of GEERT GROTE, *De duodecim virtutibus*;  
GEERT GROTE, *Epistola de novo monacho*; THOMAS A KEMPIS, *Epistola incitativa ad  
spiritualem profectum* (excerpt); *et alia*  
In Latin, manuscript on paper  
Low Countries or North-West Germany, c. 1500

42 leaves on paper, one pair of watermarks present in the paper stock, two examples of a Gothic letter P surmounted by a quatrefoil, of the basic type Piccard, P, VII 931-961 (in use 1496-1516, with all but one example dated 1496-1506), and near-identical to the pair VII 931 + VII 956 (attested at Xanten, 1504), foliation in pencil, added at the time of the present description, recto, top, right-hand corner, now lacking one quire at the beginning (collation i-iii<sup>s</sup> + iv<sup>10</sup> + v<sup>s</sup>), in quarto, outline of written space ruled in hard point (justification 155 x 100 mm), written in one main hand, a small hybrida libraria in brown ink on 31-35 unruled lines, rubrics added by a second, more formal hand, a hybrida libraria/formata, following instructions left by the primary scribe in the lower margins of the relevant pages, rubrication of majuscules, occasional paraph signs, and a total of 26 two-line initials in red throughout, pen-tests and additional notes in at least two seventeenth-century hands in black inks on ff. 41 and 42v, ff. 37v-42v are blank, save for the pen-test on f. 41. Quires individually sewn and lightly tacketed into an originally temporary parchment cover. Paper in good condition, now somewhat worn around the edges; parchment cover of low quality and now much darkened and mottled. Dimensions (parchment cover) c. 197-200 x c. 140-44 mm.; (book block) 217 x 147 mm.

The *De duodecim virtutibus* of Godeverd van Wevele (d. 1396) in the rare Latin translation by Geert Grote (d. 1384), unedited and known in only nine complete copies, is brought together here with shorter texts and excerpts, all aimed at encouraging the young novice to retain the ardour of his first entrance into the monastery. It is a manuscript redolent of the spirit of the Modern Devotion. It is also extremely interesting with many indications of the process of production, because it was evidently halted part-way through its fabrication.

## PROVENANCE

1. The medieval provenance of this manuscript is unknown. The set of texts assembled here points with certainty to the milieu of the *Devotio Moderna*, and their Latin language to a male convent. The hand is typical of the kind found in books produced in the Low Countries or the adjoining regions of Germany around the turn of the fifteenth century. Beyond this, it is not possible to know whether a house of Brethren of the Common Life, an Augustinian canonry of the Windesheim Congregation, or a Carthusian monastery was the point of origin. The fact that the manuscript subsequently belonged to the Charterhouse at Buxheim might just suggest an earlier Carthusian provenance, although this is by no means certain.

The manuscript consists of the last five of an original six quires, which formed a single production unit, lightly tacketed into a temporary parchment cover prior to being bound alongside other units of the same size in order to form a complete book. For whatever reason, perhaps just because of the increasing availability of printed books in the early the sixteenth century, that projected manuscript book was never made. The book block, as a consequence, was never trimmed for binding, and so inscriptions entered by the primary hand, which provide instructions to the rubricator and to the binder, can still be

seen at the very foot of certain pages and in the far lower right-hand corners. These would have been trimmed away during binding. The extant quires are labelled b-f in this way, which means that just one quire (a) has been lost. This would have contained at least one other text as well as the start of the treatise *De duodecim virtutibus*, which now begins mid-way through the first of its twelve chapters. This kind of book production, in which individual units of several quires were copied by different scribes, with each marked up for later augmentation by the rubricator and the binder, persons not identical with the primary scribe, points to the involvement of a number of individuals in the production of the one book, and thus to a monastic scriptorium. It is a system neatly described for the Carthusians at Herne in the fourteenth century by Erik Kwakkel (Kwakkel, 2002, pp. 97-128). What we have here, therefore, is a manuscript frozen part way through its production: still kept in the temporary parchment cover with which its scribe equipped it prior to a binding that never took place, the pages untrimmed, with the scribe's notes for the rubricator and the binder preserved in the outermost margins.

The subsequent provenance is similarly unclear. A list of scriptural phrases (in Latin) and their locations in the Bible on f. 42v points to continued ownership in an ecclesiastical context, and the pen-tests on ff. 41 and 42v in German, of which the latter practises the start of a letter to Count Wolfgang von Mansfeld (1575-1638), a senior military commander initially in Saxon and then in imperial service during the Thirty Years' War, provide evidence that the book was in Germany, perhaps already in Buxheim, by c. 1600. The note on the front cover, now only properly visible under ultra-violet light, proves to be merely a further pen-test in one of the hands found on f. 42v.

2. Buxheim, Germany, Charterhouse. The famous library of the Carthusian house at Buxheim, just east of Memmingen in upper Swabia, and now right on the border between the modern states of Baden-Württemberg and Bavaria, was secularized in 1803. The library was transferred into the ownership of the counts of Ostein, and inherited by the counts of Waldbott-Bassenheim in 1810; whence the ink stamp "G. W. B. D." in the lower right-hand corner of f. 1 (for *Gräfllich von Waldbott-Bassenheim'sche Domanielverwaltung*). The entry in black ink in the lower margin of f. 1, "N. 92", is a typical shelfmark for a Buxheim manuscript (consisting of the letter N., for "Nummer", followed by an Arabic numeral). To judge by the script, it postdates the introduction of this system at Buxheim at the start of the sixteenth century; but we must remember that the original first quire of the manuscript, on which the shelfmark and an ownership inscription would initially have been entered, has been lost; that the shelfmark must have been re-entered onto what became the first recto after this loss; and that in the seventeenth century, the existing shelfmarks on labels on the manuscripts' spines were systematically entered onto the first recto leaves of their respective volumes. For the Buxheim library, see Honemann, 1995, especially pp. 167-76; for the Buxheim shelfmarks, see Sexauer, 1978, pp. 84-85.
3. The subsequent provenance is unknown. The manuscript does not seem to have been part of the sale of a large part of the Buxheim collection by Carl Förster at auction in Munich in 1883, in which 451 manuscripts were offered. It may have been sold earlier, but more likely entered the possession of the Munich bookdealers Ludwig and Nathan Rosenthal, who acquired the remaining stock of the Buxheim library and began to offer items for sale from 1884 onwards. For this data, see Honemann, 1995, pp. 173-74; cf. the *Catalog der Bibliothek des ehem. Carthäuserklosters Buxheim*, 1883, nos. 2364-2815 (manuscripts).

## TEXT

ff. 1-31, incipit, (f. 1) “//habere omnem saporem et leticiam. quos omnes superbi vnquam habuerunt. sapor tamen ille paruus foret. respectu saporis quem verus sentit humilis. vbi seipsum abnegat ante diuinam dignitatem...”, rubric (f. 3), *De obedientia. Capitulum secundum*, incipit c. 2, “Q[u]oniam obedientia prima humilitatis est filia. conueniens est vt super hoc fundamentum humilitatis edificium obedientie construamus...”, rubric (f. 6), *De dimissione proprie voluntatis. capitulum iij*, incipit c. 3, “ECiam est sciendum quod ex obedientia venit dimissio proprie voluntatis et iudicij. Nullus enim potest propriam relinquere voluntatem...”, rubric (f. 9v), *De pacientia. Capitulum quartum*, incipit c. 4, “Q[U]oniam ex abnegatione proprie voluntatis venit patientia. et quia de patientia aliquid scribere intendimus. necesse est...”, rubric (f. 12v), *De vita abstracta. Capitulum quintum*, incipit c. 5, “QVicumque abstractam voluerit habere vitam oportet ipsum commorari in ciuitate iherusalem. que est ciuitas pacis...”, rubric (f. 17v), *Qualiter quis in omnibus visis et auditis et sibi accidentibus suum faciat profectum. capitulum vi.*, incipit c. 6, “Qvidam inueniuntur homines qui ad hoc peruenire poterunt si seriose ad hoc conari voluerint...”, rubric (f. 19), *Quod inclinationes ad vicia absque consensu non fiunt. Aut non sunt sine magno profectu capitulum septimum*, incipit c. 7, “SCire debetis. quod impulsus seu impugnationes viciorum numquam sunt in bono homine...”, rubric (f. 20), *Quomodo voluntas omnia potest capitulum viii*, incipit c. 8, “HOmo non debet ex quacumque re nimis pauere. quamdiu se inuenit in bona voluntate. Neque nimis contristari debet...”, rubric (f. 24), *Qualiter homo se habeat post lapsum in peccata. capitulum nonum*, incipit c. 9, “IN veritate homo non debet velle peccare seu peccata committere pro omni eo quod accidere posset in tempore...”, rubric (f. 25v), *De duplici contritione peccatorum. sive. carnali et diuina. ca[pitulum] x.*, incipit c. 10, “DVplex est contritio peccatorum seu de peccatis. Vna bestialis sensualis siue carnalis. Altera vero diuina et supernaturalis...”, rubric (f. 27), *De penitencia. Capitulum xi.*, incipit c. 11, “MVltis videtur quod tunc magnam faciant penitentiam cum magna opera operantur ad extra. vt sunt ieiunia. vigilie...”, rubric (f. 29v), *Quod homo se teneat in pace si non fuerit vocatus ad vitam duriozem. Capitulum xii.*, incipit c. 12, “HOmines pauere possunt et horrere ex hoc quod vita domini nostri ihesu xpi domini nostri dilecti et sanctorum eius...”, explicit (f. 31), “...Quanto enim homo humilior fuerit magisque obediens. tanto plura poterit sustinere. ac xpm melius imitari. Numquam enim quisquam humilior extitit, ac magis obediens. quam carissimus dominus noster ihesus cristus. qui sit in secula benedictus. Amen”;

Godeverd van Wevele, translated by Geert Grote, *De duodecim virtutibus*. The Dutch treatise *Vanden twaalf dogheden*, “On the Twelve Virtues,” was quite widely circulated in the later Middle Ages under the name of Jan van Ruusbroec, but is now understood as a work composed by Ruusbroec’s associate Godeverd van Wevele (d. 1396). In 1382, shortly after Ruusbroec’s death, Godeverd was sent out from their canonry at Groenendaal in the Sonian forest south of Brussels, to enter the new foundation at Eemsteyn just south of Dordrecht, where he had been appointed as master of novices. It is normally held that this treatise may have been written in response to his new duties at Eemsteyn, given its general “direction” as a work for the incipient in the religious life. The Latin translation is thought to have been produced by Geert Grote (d. 1384), originator of the *Devotio Moderna*. He had had close contacts with Ruusbroec and his circle at Groenendaal during his short period of intensive public activity after leaving the Charterhouse at Monnikhuizen near Arnhem in 1378, and certainly translated two of Ruusbroec’s own works into Latin.

The Latin translation was much less widely circulated than the Dutch original, and is known to survive in just nine manuscripts with the full text and two with excerpts. The scholarly debate on the authorship of the work and its translation is summarized by van Dijk, 2003, pp. 579-83, with a full list of the known transmission of the Latin version; see also Epiney-Burgard, 1970, pp. 96-

103. The Dutch original was edited under Ruusbroec's name by van Mierlo, 1932, pp. 225-308, but Grote's Latin translation has never been edited.

The *Vanden twaalf dogheden – De duodecim virtutibus* is a work that has scarcely been studied, either in Dutch or in Latin translation – perhaps only because of prejudice against it as an apocryphon amongst Ruusbroec's oeuvre, rather than for any more substantive grounds. The twelve virtues are not at all those that one would expect, but a very unusual, indeed quite radical set, including the subjection of the will (c. 3), suffering (c. 4), and spiritual detachment, *afgescheidenheit*, rendered into Latin as the *vita abstracta* (c. 5). This reflects Godeverd's use of sources: the first four chapters rely most heavily on Ruusbroec's *Geestelike brulocht*, and chapters five through twelve on Meister Eckhart's *Erfurter Reden* (or *Rede der unterscheidung*). This is very surprising, given Ruusbroec's sharp criticism of Eckhart and the low reputation in which his works were held at Groenendaal, although Godeverd did intervene in Eckhart's text to modify and 'weaken' some of the more controversial positions. What he produced was a guide for *incipientes* in the contemplative life, through which the reader was helped to grasp the tenets of the religious life as it was understood in a very modern fashion – and a guide that simultaneously brought Eckhart's teaching firmly into the reading programme of the *incipientes*. For this see Ruh, 1999, pp. 118-23, with all further bibliography.

f. 31, rubric, *De hijs que nouicijs sunt necessaria. Capitulum primum, incipit, "[I]n primo. quod cum magno feruore assumant iugum domini tollere scilicet abnegare semetipsos. et tollere crucem suam...*";

The opening of a short text offering fundamental instruction to novices, broken off after just seven lines, and begun again on the verso, albeit with a different rubric.

ff. 31v-33, rubric, *Breuis informatio nouiciorum. Capitulum primum., incipit, "HEc sunt nouicijs necessaria. In primo quod cum magno feruore assumant iugum domini tollere. scilicet abnegare semetipsos et tollere crucem suam. in hoc sequendo eum qui exinaniuit semetipsum. factus obediens usque ad mortem..."*, explicit (f. 33), "...sic nouicius nisi studuerit habere deuotionem et lachrimas. vel deficit vel parum proficit. Non enim scit se flectere ad veras virtutes qui non mollificat cor per compunctionis lachrimas. Deo gratia. Telos";

This short, as yet unidentified treatise, presented in this manuscript without auctorial ascription, offers a brief exhortation to the novice in twelve short "chapters," some no more than six or seven lines. It begins with two lengthier chapters, first inciting the novice to maintain his ardour for the humility and subjection of the monastic life, then encouraging him to absolute humility and obedience towards his brethren and superiors, quoting John Climacus and Bernard of Clairvaux. These are followed by much shorter injunctions to modesty, silence, and so forth. In the eleventh chapter, which provides a basic rule of conduct in quite general terms, the reader is directed for more detailed advice to the pseudo-Bernard of Clairvaux, *Speculum monachorum*, now insecurely ascribed to Arnulfus de Boeriis, O. Cist. This work enjoyed a particular renaissance in the milieu of the Modern Devout (see Palmer, 2004, and Breitenstein, 2009, especially pp. 122-25 on its late medieval reception in the Low Countries, and with a new edition at pp. 147-49). The treatise concludes with a peroration on striving to achieve tears of contrition.

ff. 33v-35v, rubric, *Epistola notabilis de informatione nouiciorum, incipit, "NOuus monachus debet humiliter esse obediens suis superioribus. et suo sensui non inniti. nec sue discretioni. nec sue deuotioni vel exercitio spirituali. Sed ea deuotione et exercitio vti. quam vel quod sui superiores suadent. quia hoc est securum et humile..."*, explicit (f. 35v), "...Si in ordine perseuerare te

contingat. nunquam ad aliquam dignitatem anheles vel ad aliquod officium. nisi rogaris ex ordine. et tunc obedias. nec pertinaciter resistas. nec de rebus et consilijs conuentus te intermittas. nec conferas nisi vocatus et iussus et quasi ex obedientia”;

Geert Grote, *Epistola de novo monacho* (Letter 16). This letter, written by Grote in early 1381 to an unidentified Carthusian novice, belongs to that small number of Grote’s letters that enjoyed a wide manuscript circulation, on account of their content and treatise-like style: on this phenomenon see Van Engen, 2004, pp. 347-53. 41 manuscripts of this letter survive, listed together with a discussion of the potential addressee and all further bibliographical references by van Dijk, 2003, pp. 493-95. It was edited by Mulder, 1933, pp. 52-57 (no. 16). Whilst we may presume that the letter was sent to a specific individual confronted by issues personal to him in the first year of his novitiate, the tenor of the letter is quite general. It begins with an opening statement on the importance of obedience in the monastic life, especially to one’s superiors, followed by a theoretical justification of that position and the treatment of pragmatic issues of obedience in conventual life. Grote turns next to the difficulty of coping with the demands of the novitiate, and to the kinds of temptation that novices experience, explaining the positive role of temptation and the spiritual reward to be secured by withstanding it. His third and final theme is a warning against judging others based on external observations of their appearance and behaviour, which he dismisses as arrogant presumption.

f. 35v, rubric, *Sequitur epistola de eodem quo supra, incipit, “Uide qualis primo die fueris. et sic semper viue. hoc est. considera statum voluntatis tue in prima die qua religionem intrare disposuisti...”, explicit, “...secundum hanc formam semper postmodum stude viuere. ne aliter in scola religionis dediscere et retrocedere magisquam proficere videaris”;*

David von Augsburg, *De exterioris et interioris hominis compositione*, lib. 2, c. 1, § 1 (extract). This short text here is not, contrary to the statement in the rubric, a letter, but an extract from one of the most famous and widely read medieval treatises on the religious life, the *De compositione* of the Franciscan novice master David von Augsburg (d. 1272). This work survives in several hundred manuscript copies, in Latin and all the major vernacular languages, and in dozens of incunable editions and early prints. The short passage excerpted here is taken from the first chapter of the second book, in which the novice is reminded of those things to which he must pay especial attention in order to progress from the first to the second of the three states of spiritual development (*incipiens – proficiens – perfectus*) in the contemplative life. The excerpt instructs the novice to remember his mindset on entering the novitiate, and to call this to mind regularly in order that his ardour for the monastic life should not wane, nor the moral condition of his life diminish. The extract corresponds to the critical edition of *De compositione*, 1899, at pp. 66-67; the text is also accessible in Peltier’s edition of the works of Bonaventure, vol. 12, 1868, pp. 292-442 (the *Formula novitiorum* is the first book, and the *De profectu religiosorum* the second and third books of the *De compositione*), with this excerpt at pp. 328-29.

ff. 35v-37, incipit, “MEmentote egressionis vestre ex egipto. Dies ille memoriale nobis domini in eternum recordetur. Nulli dubium quin manus domini vobiscum erat. alioquin in seculo remansissetis vbi est ergo ille spiritus...”, explicit, “...sed totum deo pure tribues qui astitit a dextris pauperis. eciam quantum vales hominibus absconde et nichil aliud quam infirmum et inopem te confitere Per dominum. Telos”; [ff. 37v-42v, blank].

Thomas a Kempis (Thomas van Kempen), *Epistola incitativa ad spiritualem profectum* (extract). The extract here from this letter corresponds to 452,16-457,9 of the text as ed. Pohl, 1918, pp. 449-61. The complete text of the letter is known to survive in 15 manuscripts, with a further two

containing excerpts, neither identical with that in the present manuscript: see Bodemann-Kornhaas, 2002, pp. 137-38 (her Letter I). The addressee is enjoined first in this extract to remember his initial departure from the world into the monastic life, and to recall his spiritual ardour at that point. The journey of spiritual progress is understood allegorically as the departure of the children of Israel from Egypt and their crossing of the desert: but many, laments Thomas, fail to reach the promised land. Instead they lose their spiritual ardour underway, become slack and succumb to temptations. The excerpt concludes with an exhortation to fight instead, secure in the knowledge that the Lord will join that fight, and come to the young monk's assistance.

## LITERATURE

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## ONLINE RESOURCES

ALCUIN database on Godeverd van Wevele OESA

[http://www-app.uni-regensburg.de/Fakultaeten/PKGG/Philosophie/Gesch\\_Phil/alcuin/philosopher.php?id=860](http://www-app.uni-regensburg.de/Fakultaeten/PKGG/Philosophie/Gesch_Phil/alcuin/philosopher.php?id=860)

Buxheim and its Library

<http://archive.cls.yale.edu/buxheim/>

David von Augsburg, at the *Franciscan Authors* site

[http://users.bart.nl/~roestb/franciscan/franautd.htm#\\_Toc427589038](http://users.bart.nl/~roestb/franciscan/franautd.htm#_Toc427589038)

Ongoing Project to edit Geert Grote's work by the Titus Brandsma Institute (the work in this manuscript not yet included)

[http://www.titusbrandsmainstituut.nl/ned/uitgaven/geert\\_grote.htm](http://www.titusbrandsmainstituut.nl/ned/uitgaven/geert_grote.htm)

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