

*Leven von Jezus* [Middle-Dutch translation of the PSEUDO-BONAVENTURE-LUDOLPHIAN, *Life of Jesus*]

In Dutch, decorated manuscript on paper

Southern part of the Northern Netherlands (North-Brabant?), c. 1475-1500

*i*+197 + *i* folios on paper, no watermarks discernible, neither foliated nor paginated, mostly in quires of eight leaves, quires numbered from 1 to 25 with pencil at the bottom of the first recto of each quires, complete (collation *i-ix*<sup>s</sup> [ff. 1-72] *x*<sup>s</sup> [lacking 8, ff. 73-79] *xi*<sup>s</sup> [ff. 80-87] *xii*<sup>s</sup> [ff. 88-93] *xiii*<sup>s</sup> [lacking 3, ff. 94-100], *xiv-xxxiii*<sup>s</sup> [ff. 101-180] *xxiv*<sup>s</sup> [+ one leaf, f. 181, before 1, ff. 181-189], *xxv*<sup>s</sup> [+ one leaf, f. 191, after 1 and one leaf, f. 196, after 5, ff. 190-197]), no catchwords or signatures, ruled in blind (justification 98 x 64 mm.), written in a littera hybrida by one hand (apart from a short addition on f. 181 by another hand) in a single column of twenty-three to twenty-one lines, many corrections in the margins, one six-line blue lombard with pen-flourishes in red (f. 1), one four-line littera duplex in red and blue with pen-flourishes in blue and red (f. 182), five three-line red or blue lombards with pen-flourishes in blue, red or brown (ff. 27v, 80, 148, 151, 180v), three two-line red or blue lombards with pen-flourishes in blue, red or brown (ff. 39, 40v, 196v), several three- and two-line red or blue lombards without pen-flourishes, paragraph signs in red, majuscules in text stroked in red, rubrics in red, some underlining in red, simple ornamentation and tiny faces in brown and red at the elongated shafts of letters in the upper margin of nearly every page, a drawing in green and red of a cross on a hill in the lower margin of f. 79v; in good condition, a small tear in the lower edge of f. 32 and in the upper edge of f. 47, unobtrusive stains on ff. 100v–101. Binding from the eighteenth century, plain vellum over pasteboard, gold fillets on the spine, a shield on the spine with gilt lettering reading "LEVEN / VAN / ONS HEREN / MANUSCRIT / 1331", edges speckled in blue. Dimensions 135 x 100 mm.

Neatly written and carefully corrected manuscript of the so-called Pseudo-Bonaventure-Ludolphian *Life of Jesus*, a Middle Dutch translation from a Latin account of the life and passion of Christ that encourages the reader to relive and to identify with these events. This manuscript, written for a woman, reflects the late-medieval need, inspired by the *Devotio Moderna*, for devotional texts in the vernacular as aids for private worship.

## PROVENANCE

1. The manuscript does not contain any traces of ownership, but evidence of script, decoration and language suggests it was copied in the Southern part of the Northern Netherlands (North-Brabant?), c. 1475–1500. Apparently it was made for a woman, given the feminine form "dierne" in "Ic arme sondighe dierne offer di huden dijns een ghebornen uutgerecte armen" (f. 180v).
2. Somebody trying to imitate the hand of the scribe wrote "anno .M.CCC.XXXI." in red on f. 197v, following the end of the text. This date 1331 is false.
3. Loosely inserted is a piece of paper with notes by the Belgian philologist and historian Karel De Flou (1853–1931). He states, among other things, that the manuscript is of Brabant origin, that it dates from the end of the 15th or the beginning of the 16th century, that it is incomplete (which is not true), and that "the language is the beautiful and peculiar language of the 14th and 15th centuries" ("de tale is de schoone en

eigenaardige der XIVe en XVe eeuw"). It is uncertain whether the manuscript was owned by De Flou himself or that it was shown to him by an unknown private owner.

4. The recto of the flyleaf in the front and f. 197v (beneath the false date 1331) bear the number "1481" in pencil by a modern hand. The number may be an assumed date for the manuscript, or refer to an auction number.

## TEXT

ff. 1-10, [Prologue], *Hier beghint die voerreden of prologe vanden leven ons liefs heren Jhesu Xpristi*, incipit, "Du seltste na vervolghen der ordinancien des levens ons liefs heren Jhesu Xpristi alle daghe een deel voernemen. In welken du enen sabbboth der weelden overmids goddiestighen ghedachten onsen here Jhesum Xpristum daghelix feestelic bewysen seltste ... Die statuer sijns lichaems recht ende uutgherecket. Handen ende armen die ghenogelic waren aen te sien. Inder spraken zwaer redelic lutel ende zedelic. Ende daer om is hi mit recht van David gheheten inden psalm Scoen van formen boven alle kinder der menschen";

ff. 10-197v, [Chapter I–XLII], *Wattu denken moghste eer onse heer ontfangen wort van Maria*, incipit, "Als een langhe tijt omtrent vijf dusent jaer ende twe hondert dat menschelike gheslachte onsalichlic neder lach ende die oude doot in allen menschen heerscapie hadde ... Dit seit Jhe[r]onimus. Sich hier hoe dat Jacobus die niet allen hongher en hadde na brode van materien ghemaect mer oec naden ewighen brode hongherde Ende van beyden verdiende te worden ghespijst ende getroest. Nu merc wel alle dese openbaringhen die hier gescreven sijn ende verblide di daer in ende maec daghen der bliscapen ende der devotien. Nota."

The following sections have been marked more prominently:

f. 27v, on the Nativity of Christ, *Opten heylighen kersdach ter eerster missen vander gheboerten ons heren*, incipit, "Als dat eynde van neghen maenden om ghecomen was een ghebot uitginc vanden keyser Augustus dat alle die werelt bescreven soude worden elc in sijn stat ...";

f. 80 (first rubric on f. 79v), on the Sermon on the Mountain, first rubric, *Hier beghint dien berch van Tabor daer onse lieve heer leerde die XII raden der heyligher ewangelien sinen apostolen welc een gheestelic mensche nauwe merken sel ende sijn leven na sel pinen te ordinieren ende te rechten na sijn vermoghen want het is die rechte wech mede te comen toten ewighen leven*, [second rubric], *Hoe onse heer sijn XII apostolen vercoes*, incipit, "Ende als onse here sach die scaren hem na volghen clam hy opten berch van Thabor bi Nasereth op twe mylen. Ende als hi was gheseten riep hi tot hem die hi woudeende vercoes daer tot hem hoerre twaelf die hi apostelen hiete ...";

f. 148 (rubric on f. 147v), on the Last Supper, *Hier beghint dat aventmael ons liefs heren Jhesu Xpristi alsoe alst die IIII ewangelisten conoordieren. Ende daer na die passie ende verrisenis*, incipit, "Des eersten daghes van der joden feest als si dat paesch lam plaghen te eten. Doe quamen die jongheren tot Jhesum ende vraechden hem ende seyden meyster waer wilste dat wy bereyden den paeschen ...";

f. 151, beginning of the Sermon of St. John, *Hier beghint dat sermoen Johannes*, incipit, "Ic segghe u waer mit waerheden die knecht en is niet meerre dan die here. Noch die apostel en is niet meere dan dien hevet ghesent ...";

f. 182, beginning of the Resurrection of Christ, *Hier beghint die concordancie van der verrisenisse ons liefs heren Jhesu Xristi*, incipit, "Maria Magdalena ende Maria Jacobs moeder ende Salome coften duerbaer salve om dat si Jhesum daer mede salven soudent ..."

There is a prayer interpolated between the stories of the Entombment of Christ and His Resurrection: ff. 180v–181, Prayer to God the Father [no rubric], incipit, “O hemelsche vader. Ic arme sondighe dierne offer di huden dijns eengheboren uutgerechte armen. Sijn verdorrede leden. Sijn wide duerbaer wonden. Sijn alre soetste vuchticheyt. Sijn bloedige zweet ... doer dese waerdige duerbaer offerhande willen so wilt mi vergeven alle mijn sonden. Ende dat huden ende alle wegen di een ontfanckelike offerhande moet wesen. Amen” [f. 181v blank].

## ILLUSTRATION

f. 79v, lower margin, drawing in green and red, a cross on a hill, representing either Mount Tabor (mentioned in the rubric above the drawing) or Mount Calvary (the place where Christ was crucified).

Pseudo-Bonaventure-Ludolphian *Life of Jesus*, Prologue and Chapter I–XLII; ed. C. C. de Bruin, *Tleven ons heren Ihesu Cristi. Het Pseudo-Bonaventura-Ludolfiaanse leven van Jesus*, 1980 (available online, [http://www.dbnl.org/tekst/\\_pse001cbru01\\_01](http://www.dbnl.org/tekst/_pse001cbru01_01).)

The text in this manuscript is known as the “Pseudo-Bonaventure-Ludolphian *Life of Jesus*.” It is a Middle Dutch translation from a Latin account of the life and Passion of Christ. The church historian Willem Moll (1812–1879) called it “Bonaventure-Ludolphian” (Moll, 1854, II, pp. 39–40), since he thought the Latin original was a compilation of a text by the Franciscan, St. Bonaventure (1221–1274), the *Meditationes Vitae Christi*, and a text by the German Carthusian monk, Ludolph of Saxony (c.1295–1378), the *Vita Jesu Christi*.

The philologist Cebus Cornelis de Bruin (1905–1988) added “Pseudo” to the name which Moll had given to the text, because newer insights had led to the conclusion that the *Meditationes Vitae Christi* must have been written not by Bonaventure, but by an unknown author, probably a Franciscan monk from Tuscany. Other scholars have argued that this text was by the Franciscan, Johannes de Caulibus, writing for a Franciscan nun. Sarah McNamer suggests that the Latin text is itself an expanded translation of the original version that was written in Italian by a nun for another nun (McNamer, 2010).

According to De Bruin the compilation was made shortly before 1400 (De Bruin, 1964, and *Tleven ons heren Ihesu Cristi*, 1980). This view, however, was challenged by Walter Baier and Karl-Ernst Gaith, who argued that the Latin original had been compiled by Michael of Massa (d. 1337), an Italian Augustinian monk living in Paris (Baier, 1977; Geith, 1987, 1988, 1990). Michael of Massa primarily used the *Meditationes Vitae Christi*; Ludolph of Saxony’s *Vita Jesu Christi* had not yet been written.

The question of the author of this text is still open to debate, but in any event, the Dutch translation of this *Life of Jesus* was very popular. More than forty manuscripts with the complete text or with parts of the text have survived (lists in Deschamps, 1972 and Biemans, 1984; see also the online *Bibliotheca Neerlandica Manuscripta* and the online Schoenberg Database of Manuscripts). Its popularity can be explained by the increasing desire among both religious and lay people in the fifteenth century for devotional and meditative texts in the vernacular to enhance private worship, independent from the formal corporate liturgy. It was a desire which was strongly inspired by the *Devotio Moderna* or Modern Devotion, the religious movement, founded by the Dutch reformer Geert Groote, which revived spiritual life in the Low Countries during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The contents of this vernacular text doubtless appealed especially to women; the strong identification with the life of Christ and His Passion known as affective piety or affective meditation was a form of devotion that had special

importance to women, both lay and religious, and indeed may have been created by nuns (McNamer, 2010).

De Bruin published the text in 1980 after a manuscript dated 1409 (Leiden, University Library, Ms. LTK 1984). He discerned four versions of the text, but only as the result of "preliminary research" ("een voorlopig ingesteld onderzoek"). This may explain why De Bruin did not specify very precisely which features characterize each version. Version I is represented by the text in his edition, and from that it is certain that our manuscript does not contain that version. Versions II, III and IV, however, are not described in a way that allows for easy identification of the version in the present manuscript. It seems likely, however, that it contains Version IV, described by De Bruin as "an independent version; apparently its adaptor has attempted to make the text of Version I more fluent and readable, however without taking the Latin original into account" ("een op zichzelf staande redactie; de bewerker hiervan heeft er kennelijk naar gestreefd de tekst van I vloeiender en meer leesbaar te maken, zonder dat hij evenwel rekening heeft gehouden met de latijnse grondtekst"; *Tleven*, 1980, p. XXII).

## LITERATURE

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[http://www.dbnl.org/tekst/\\_pse001cbru01\\_01](http://www.dbnl.org/tekst/_pse001cbru01_01).

### ONLINE RESOURCES

A fully digitized manuscript with the pseudo-Bonaventure-Ludolphian *Life of Jesus* (Groningen, University Library, MS 217):

<http://facsimile.ub.rug.nl/cdm/ref/collection/manuscripts/id/779>

Database of Middle Dutch manuscripts, the Bibliotheca Neerlandica Manuscripta:

<http://www.library.leiden.edu/special-collections/manuscripts/subcollections-whs-bnm.html>

The Schoenberg Database of Manuscripts:

<http://dla.library.upenn.edu/dla/schoenberg/index.html>

Database of Medieval Manuscripts in Dutch Collections:

<http://www.mmdc.nl>

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