

OTTO VON PASSAU, *Die Vierundzwanzig Alten* (The Twenty-four Elders)

In German, manuscript on paper

Southern Germany, [Dated], September 3, 1429

186 folios on paper, 19th century(?) foliation sporadic in top recto outer margin, modern foliation throughout in top recto outer margin, watermark, ox's head similar to Piccard 64622 (München 1398) and Piccard 64624 (Tegernsee 1399), complete (collation i¹⁴ ii-v¹² vi¹²⁺¹ (+1 half folio) vii-xiii¹² xiv¹⁴⁺¹ (+15 added at end)], catchwords at the end of gatherings, ruled in ink, (justification 208 x 149 mm.), written in a neat German Gothic cursive in two columns of 37 lines, chapter and sub-chapter headings written in a blocky Gothic textualis, f. 70 replaced at a later date and written in a 17th-century cursive script, 8-line decorated initial in red ink at f. 58, 4-or-5-line decorated initials at ff. 1, 2v, 21v, 111v, 117v, 125, 130v, and 159, rubricated initials throughout for nomina sacra and the beginning of sentences, initials on the top line are often decorated, ff. 1-5 detached with some loss of text, ff. 52-54 repaired at the bottom with leaves from a nearly contemporary manuscript, f. 63 half folio with single column of text repaired with sewn thread, tearing at the bottom margins on ff. 57-61, 68-69 (tear sewn and repaired at f. 69), 100-101, 112, 121-122, and 125, f. 186 loose with minimal loss of text, otherwise good condition. CONTEMPORARY BINDING, calf over wooden boards, leather peeling in some places, spine papered in 17th century with shelfmark "Gotüsch von dem H. Gebett N. 121" and below that "10K," good condition. Dimensions 298 x 220 mm.

Demand for vernacular texts of devotion and theology grew in the later Middle Ages, intended for readers outside the clerical elite. In this environment, Otto von Passau's popular text was quickly diffused to both lay readers and smaller religious houses. Owned by Augustinian nuns at Inzigkofen as early as the fifteenth century, this copy is of special interest. The Inzigkofen community cared for the manuscript, supplying a missing leaf and repairing tears in the paper with thread, testifying to its frequent use by the nuns and to the importance of vernacular devotional and theological texts for the religious life of medieval women.

PROVENANCE

1. This manuscript was finished on September 3, 1429, according to the colophon on f. 186. The script and watermarks suggest it was produced in a center in southern Germany.
2. On the front pastedown, in a hand later than that of the manuscript, appears "Diß Buoch gehört zu die gemainen Teütschen Libereij zu daz Gotzhauß..." followed by an erasure. The ownership clause, found in another 188 manuscripts, identifies the manuscript as belonging to the Augustinian Women's Choir Monastery in Inzigkofen. (Fechter, 1997, p. 45; see also further discussion by Graf, 2021 and 2024) These ownership marks date from the fifteenth-sixteenth centuries. The manuscript remained at the library at least until the seventeenth century, when the shelf mark "Gotüsch von dem H. Gebett N. 121" (Gothic [i.e. medieval] concerning holy prayer, no. 121) was added to the spine. The other number on the spine, "10K," indicates the bookshelf (Kasten) where the manuscript was stored in the library.

The monastery at Inzigkofen was founded in 1354 by two sisters from Sigmaringen, Mechthild and Irmengard Sönnnerin, and a third woman named Ludgart. The small community then became Franciscan tertiaries, before becoming an Augustinian Choir Monastery in 1394. By 1412 the parish was a legally independent entity from the town of Inzigkofen. In 1802 the monastery was possessed by Prince Anton Aloys, but the nuns were allowed to remain. The last sister passed away in 1856. Fechter (1997, pp. 53-172) describes sixty manuscripts that belonged to the community at Inzigkofen in detail. (See especially no. 1 (Karlsruhe, Badische Landesbibliothek, Donaueschingen MS 241), another copy of *Die 24 Alten* copied around 1400 by Fridericus Winterlinger of Rottweil.)

3. A book plate with the motto "vita sine libris – mors est" (Life without books is death) on the front pastedown shows that this manuscript belonged to Maximilian Joseph Pfeiffer (December 12, 1875-May 3, 1926), who served as the librarian at the Staatsbibliothek in Munich from 1912-1919. From December 24, 1921 until his death, he served as an envoy of the German state to Vienna.

TEXT

ff. 1-2v, [List of chapter headings for *Die Vierundzwanzig Alten*], incipit, "Das ist die tafel des büchs das da geuet...habent an end mit got vnd allen sinen erwöhnen";

ff. 2v-5, [Vorrede to *Die Vierundzwanzig Alten*], incipit, "Sanctus Iohannes ewangelista sach in der togen büch in dem himmel sitzen...Buch ain ende nimet";

ff. 5-186, [*Die Vierundzwanzig Alten*], incipit, "Der erst alt [w]iset und lert wer [d]er mensch sigi...der tron werd in der höhsten wonung. Amen daz helff uns got. Finitus est liber iste in festo Sancti Gregorii Anno Domini M CCCC XXIX^o Signum uere penetentie: noua uita. Qui sibi nequam est tui [sic]: alii bonus erit"; [f. 186v, blank].

Otto von Passau is not well attested in the historical record. He first appears in a charter dated August 8, 1362 as a lector of the Franciscan convent in Basel and confessor to the knight Hüglin von Schöneegg. His status as a *conventualis* in the Basel Franciscan convent, recorded in 1385, means that Otto was in contact with religious women as part of his duties. Otto continues to appear sporadically in documents from Basel until he names himself in the so-called *Dankbarkeit* (Thanksgiving) appendix to *Die Vierundzwanzig Alten* dated to 1386. (Mossman, 2020, pp. 110-12; (The *Dankbarkeit* is not transmitted in this manuscript.)

The earliest manuscript copy of *Die Vierundzwanzig Alten*, copied in Rottweil, predates the *Dankbarkeit* appendix by three years, according to its colophon dated May 14th, 1383 (Karlsruhe, BLB, Cod. St. Georgen 64). The text survives in 171 manuscript witnesses (including this manuscript) according to handschriftencensus.de (Online Resources). Schmidt lists thirteen editions of the text printed in Germany and the Netherlands before 1610, the first edition being printed in Augsburg in 1480 (Schmidt, 1938, pp. 230-52).

Our manuscript transmits the entire text of *Die Vierundzwanzig Alten* without the *Dankbarkeit* appendix. Its chapter headings differ somewhat from those transmitted in the earliest copy (Karlsruhe, BSB, Cod. St. Georgen 64), especially in the chapters which begin with a first-person pronoun, like chapter 17 "Darnach ler ich xvii alt dich minnenden sel betten" (Then I, the seventeenth elder, teach you, beloved soul, [about] prayer). Despite the large number of

manuscripts and their wide diffusion, the text of *Die Vierundzwanzig Alten* has not yet been the subject of a modern critical edition. It has only recently been edited digitally (*Die 24 Alten digital*) from a small selection of manuscripts based upon the text in the earliest Karlsruhe copy. A fuller recension would likely reveal many textual and linguistic families of manuscripts, work which Werner Besch began in his thesis (Besch, 1967).

Otto von Passau's *Die 24 Alten* was a remarkably successful work in the later Middle Ages. A significant proportion of the manuscripts contain elaborate illuminations of the Elders, which Norbert Ott links to lay ownership and piety (Ott, 1987, pp. 142-43; cited in Mossman, 2020, p. 120). The less adorned copies usually were destined for religious houses of both men and women, as was the case of the manuscript described here. The work is essentially a treatise on moral and religious life compiled from dozens of church fathers and other religious authorities. To organize his material, Otto uses Apocalypse 4:4 as a frame for his treatise, "And round about the throne were four and twenty seats; and upon the seats, four and twenty ancients sitting, clothed in white garments, and on their heads were crowns of gold." Each of the elders in Otto's narrative takes a turn discoursing on Christian faith and moral living. The first half concerns the human estate and how it can seek God and culminates in the longest, twelfth chapter, a life of Mary. In the second half of the work, the elders teach the reader about eternal wisdom and the life to come.

Due to its compilatory and didactic structure, the literary merit of *Die Vierundzwanzig Alten* has been called into question, most forcefully by Irene von Burg, who locates the modern disinterest in the work in its lack of sensuality and overdetermined structure (von Burg, 1991, p. 9). Recently Stephen Mossman has placed the text within the literary milieu of Southern Germany in the fourteenth century and found that it was deeply involved with the Franciscan order and their educational network, noting in particular Otto's discussion of the Eucharist and penance and his use of Alexander Neckam's (d. 1217) Mariological commentary on the Song of Songs in his life of Mary (Mossman, 2020, p. 143). The treatment of theological subjects in the vernacular combined with the early circulation of manuscripts in lay and women's communities gives modern readers a privileged glimpse into non-elite discourses on faith and piety in late medieval Germany.

This manuscript is an excellent example of a book produced for religious houses in late Medieval Germany. The cursive book hand and modest treatment of rubrication both suggest that this copy was intended as a reading copy. The later repairs made to the manuscript show that it was indeed read often and cared for by the nuns of Inzigkofen, testifying to the importance of vernacular devotional and theological texts for the religious life of women.

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