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Vaderboec (second Dutch translation of the *Vitae Patrum*)

In Middle Dutch, manuscript on paper.

Southern part of the Northern Netherlands, probably Limbourg, c. 1475-1500

188, paper, no watermarks discernible, modern foliation in pencil on rectos in the upper right corner on each leaf, but only less faint on the first, each tenth and the last leaf (1, 10, 20, 30 ... 160, 170, 180, 188); mostly in quires of ten leaves, collation: i^o lacking 1 and 2 (ff. 1–8, no loss of text), ii–xviii^o (ff. 9–178), xix^s (ff. 179–186), xx^t lacking 3 and 4 (ff. 187–188, loss of text); no catchwords, signatures in the lower right corners of the rectos of ff. 150 = second leaf of quire xvi (“q2”), 159 = first leaf of quire xvii (“r1”), 160 (“r2”), 170 (“s2”), 179 (“t1”), 180 (“t2”), 187 (“v1”) and 188 (“v2”); written on top line in a *littera hybrida* by one hand (first rubric, on f. 1v, possibly by another hand, in a *littera textualis*), ruled in pale brown ink, no prickings present, 1 column (justification 144 x 86 mm.), on 26–27 lines, six eleven- to seven-line red-and-blue duplex initials with pen-flourishes (ff. 2r, 30r, 77v, 100r, 116r, 146r), several seven- to four-line red or blue lombards with pen-flourishes, some three-line red or blue lombards without pen-flourishes, one two-line red lombard with pen-flourishes, several two- and one-line red or blue lombards without pen-flourishes, paragraph signs in red, majuscules in text stroked in red, rubrics in red, in good general condition, quire iii (ff. 19–28) nearly loose, ff. 23 and 24 entirely loose, tear of c. 7 cm. in f. 90, some unobtrusive stains.

CONTEMPORARY BINDING, wooden boards covered with brown leather, blind-tooled with double and triple fillets, two brass clasps, spine with five raised bands, vellum pastedowns over maculature from a 15th-century vellum manuscript in Latin (both covers worn, both catches missing, upper hinge weak), in a tailor-made box of grey linen over pasteboard, made in c. 2000, from the *Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica* (see below). Dimensions 207 x 140 mm.

This neatly written codex still in its contemporary binding includes the second Dutch translation of a compilation of early Christian hagiographic texts, presenting the lives of third- and fourth-century hermits as examples worthy of imitation. Appearing high on the list of recommended reading for the *Devotio Moderna*, the *Vaderboec* in this particular translation that originated not far from the heartland of the Modern Devotion is nevertheless very rare.

PROVENANCE

1. The manuscript has been in the possession of brother Conrad Melis of Roermond (a city in northern Limbourg, the Netherlands). In 1688 Conrad presented it to the monastery in which he was professed, the Benedictine monastery of St. Vitus in Mönchengladbach (Nordrhein-Westfalen, Germany), as stated in an inscription in the right margin of f. 2r: “Liber Monasterij S[ancti] Viti M[artyris] in Gladbach procuratus per Fr[atrum] Conradum Melis Ruraemundensem professum in Gladbach A[nn]o 1688.” Having entered the library of the monastery, the manuscript received the shelf mark 4 P 62, which was written on the pastedown in the front as well as on the upper and fore-edge. The monastery of St. Vitus, founded in 947, was dissolved in 1802.
2. Owned in the late 1960s by Mr. P. Mullaert in Ghent, Belgium, when Bernard Lambert listed it in his *Bibliotheca hieronymiana manuscripta*, and when Peter Mullaert (the owner himself?) and Myriam Feys made partial editions of it (see the Literature below). It is

unknown where and when Mr. Mullaert acquired the manuscript and how long he owned it.

3. Belonged to Joost R. Ritman (b. 1941), Amsterdam, the Dutch businessman and distinguished collector of art and books, shelfmark of the Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica, MS 213, ex-libris of the library glued to the front paste-down; acquired by Ritman at The Romantic Agony (book auctions Devroe & Stubbe) in Brussels as lot 969, 16 June 2007

TEXT

ff. 2r–188v, the *Vitae patrum* in Dutch: the *Vaderboec*:

ff. 2r–24v (rubric on f. 1v), Life of St. Macarius of Alexandria alias Macarius the Younger (died 395), monk, rubric: "Hier beghint dat leven des heiligen vrintd Goids Sunte Macharius commende op Sunte Stevens," introduction: "Het waren twe heilige vaderen die hieten beyde Macharius. Ende die eyne was van Egipten gheboeren welcke oec was des heiligen vaders sunte Anthonis discipel gheweest. Ende die ander was geboren van Alexandrien. Ende also der eyn der anderen gelijk was aenden name, alsoe was ghelijck der eyn den anderen aenden leven. Mer die Macharius die geweest hadde sunte Anthonis discipel die overginc den anderen wat van gueden wercken of leven. Want hy enen soe gueden meyster hadde. Van desen Macharius sullen wi vertellen naeden anderen Macharius die van Alexandrien was," second rubric (f. 2r): "Van Machario van Allexandryen," incipit: "Die ierste Macharius die welcke op sunte Stevens dach coemt, die was van Alexandrien. Hy was een heilich vernoempt priester inder woestynen die Cellio gheheiten is."

ff. 24v–29v, On St. Macarius of Egypt alias Macarius the Elder or the Great (c. 300 – 391), monk, rubric: "Van Machario die van epten [sic] was. Ende sinte Anthonis iongher was."

ff. 30r–69r (rubric on f. 29v), On St. Hilarion (291–371), hermit, rubric: "Van Hylarion den wysen jonghelinck."

ff. 69r–77v, On St. Malchus of Syria alias Malchus of Chalcis (died c. 390), hermit, rubric: "Dit is dat leven vanden [a word like "dienre" skipped] Gods die hiet Malchus."

ff. 77v–90r, On St. Abraham the Hermit (died c. 370), rubric: "Vanden heiligen vader die hiet Abraham."

ff. 90r–100r, On St. Mary the Harlot (died c. 375), a niece of St. Abraham the Hermit, rubric: "Van Maria die Abrahams broeders dochter was."

ff. 100r–103v, On St. John the Merciful alias John the Almsgiver (died c. 620), patriarch of Alexandria, rubric: "Van sunte Iohannes Elemosinarius."

ff. 103v–106r, On Saint Peter of Galatia (early fifth century), hermit, rubric: "Van sunte Peter den tolleneer."

ff. 106v–109v, On Serapion of Thmuis (died c. 370), bishop, rubric: "Vanden heilighen man Serapion."

ff. 110r–113r, On St. Eulogius of Alexandria (died 608), patriarch of Alexandria, rubric: "Vanden heiligen vader die geheiten is Eulogius ende van eenen melaetsce menschen genoemt Elefantiosus. Elefantia is is een ziecten vander lazarien."

ff. 113r–115v, On the Anchorites, rubric: "Vanden anachoriten. Dese waren zeer geisteliken lude ende heilige heremiten."

ff. 116r–118v, Example from the *Vitae patrum*, rubric: "Dit is uten heilighen vaderen leven ghenomen ende ghetoghen tot eynen exempelen."

ff. 118v–137r, On St. John the Hermit (4th century), rubric: "Vanden heiligen heremiten die hiet Iohannes."

ff. 137r–139v, On St. Appollo (died 395), hermit and abbot, rubric: "Vanden heiligen priester Appollo."

ff. 139v–144v, On Pasuncius, rubric: "Vanden vader Pasuncius."

ff. 144v–145r, On St. Elias of Jerusalem (died c. 518), patriarch of Jerusalem, rubric: "Vanden vader Helyas."

ff. 145r–v, On many other monks, rubric: "Van voel anderen monnicken."

ff. 145v–146r, On St. Eulogius of Alexandria (died 608), patriarch of Alexandria, rubric: "Vanden heiligen vader Eulogius."

ff. 146r–160r, On St. Apollonius of Alexandria (died 286), martyr, rubric: "Vanden heiligen man die hiet Appollonius."

ff. 160r–v, On St. Copres (4th century), priest, rubric: "Vanden vader Copres."

ff. 160v–167r, On St. Mucius (died 304), priest and martyr, rubric: "Vanden heiligen vader Mucius."

ff. 167r–170v, On St. Elomeus, rubric: "Vanden heiligen vader Elomeus."

ff. 170v–171v, On St. Theonas of Egypt (died 395), hermit, rubric: "Vanden heylighen vader die hiet Theonas."

ff. 171v–172r, On St. Dioscorus (died 305), martyr, rubric: "Vanden vader Dyoscorus."

ff. 172r–174v, On St. Hor, martyr, rubric: "Vanden heiligen man die hiet Hor."

ff. 175r–177r, On St. Serapion of Thmuis (4th century), bishop, rubric: "Vanden priester Serapion."

ff. 177v–179r (two rubrics, on ff. 177r and 177v), On the monks of the Nitrian Desert, rubrics: "Vanden monnicken van Nytrien."

ff. 179r–180r, On St. Ammon or Amun (4th century), hermit, rubric: "Vanden vader Ammonis."

ff. 180r–182v, On St. Didymus the Blind (c. 313 – 398), theologian, rubric: "Vanden man Didimis."

ff. 182v–183r, On St. Benus (d. 474), abbot, rubric: "Vanden altvader Beno geheiten."

f. 183r–v, On St. Isidore of Pelusium (died c. 436), abbot, rubric: "Vanden heiligen abt Ysidorus."

ff. 183v–185v, On Syrus, Isaiah and Paul, hermits, rubric: "Vanden abten Sirius, Ysaias ende Paulus."

f. 185v: On St. Ammon or Amun (4th century), hermit, rubric: "Vanden heiligen vader Ammon."

ff. 186r–188v, On St. Paul of Thebes alias Paul the Anchorite (died c. 341), hermit, rubric: "Vanden heiligen man Paulus."

f. 188v, On St. John the Dwarf alias John Colobus (c. 339 – c. 405)?, hermit, rubric: "Van eynen diet Johannes."

f. 188v, Epilogue, rubric: "Dat eynde dis boecks," incipit: "Hyer omme bewijst die meister dis boecks mit welcken arbeide, mit willigen kummer hi die dingen die hi gesproken hevet ghesament hevet op dat hi die reden des te mee in hem dructe ende ghenade hebben mochte. Want hi voel dinghen niet geschreven en hevet. Ende voel andere stede saghen wi in Egipten wie die Gods heilighen gedeilt sien, die voel doechden ende teyken daden. Ende mennigherleye Gods genaden vol waren, mer van een eygheliken hebben wi ewenich gesproken. Ende weer ever alle over ons cracht dat wi van hon allen wolden spreken. Mer alleyne weten wy van horen wandelinghen die inden oversten moerlande sien, dat sie voel hogher ende groter heilighen [text breaks off]."

The *Vaderboec* ("Book of the Fathers") is a compilation and Dutch translation of short biographies and anecdotes of the Anchorites or Desert Fathers, ascetic hermits and cenobites, who lived mainly in the desert of Egypt in the third and fourth centuries. Paul of Thebes was the first hermit to set the tradition of monastic asceticism and contemplation, and Pachomius of Thebaid is considered the founder of cenobitism, or early monasticism. It was Anthony the Great, however, whose example drew thousands of monks and nuns to living in the desert; after Anthony's death his biographer, Athanasius of Alexandria, wrote that "the desert had become a

city." The Desert Fathers laid the base for Western monasticism and had a major influence on the development of Christianity.

Treasured in monastic circles throughout the Middle Ages, these texts were also important in Modern Devotion circles, appearing near the beginning of their lists of devotional reading. In the *Imitatio Christi* Thomas a Kempis devoted a chapter to "The Examples of the Holy Fathers" "who were given as an example for all religious" (Book one, ch. 18). Thomas extolled the austerity of their lives, their long days and nights spent in prayer, their patience and obedience to their superiors, and concluded, tellingly, by comparing this early piety and fervor with the lukewarm religion of his own day.

The *Vaderboec* was translated from a corpus of texts known as the *Vitae patrum*. There existed two translations of the *Vitae patrum* from the Low Countries. The first one, a translation into Southern Middle Dutch, was made in the third quarter of the fourteenth century by the so-called "Bijbelvertaler van 1360" (Bible translator of 1360), who may be identical with the Carthusian monk Petrus Naghel. A second Dutch translation was made in the Northern Netherlands in the early fifteenth century. This version was mostly transmitted in the context of the *Devotio Moderna*, and its source was a Latin compilation of the *Vitae patrum*, also known as the *Historia monachorum in Aegypto*, written around the year 400 by Timothy of Alexandria.

The manuscript described here contains the second Dutch translation. The dialect indicates that this manuscript originates from the region where the Northern Netherlands, the Southern Netherlands, and Germany touch and influence each other. Manuscripts with the *Vaderboec* are rare: the databases of medieval manuscripts in Dutch collections and of the *Bibliotheca Neerlandica Manuscripta* (see below) list thirteen manuscripts with (excerpts from) the *Vaderboec*.

LITERATURE

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Williams, Ulla and Werner Hoffmann. "Vitaspatrum (Vitae patrum)," in *Verfasserlexikon*, X, 2nd ed. Berlin etc., 1999, pp. 449–466.

ONLINE RESOURCES

Database of medieval manuscripts in Dutch collections:

<http://www.mmdc.nl>.

Database on Middle Dutch manuscripts, the Bibliotheca Neerlandica Manuscripta:

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

The *Vitae patrum* translated into English by Benedict Baker:

<http://www.vitae-patrum.org.uk/page2.html>

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