

BERNARDUS CLAREVALLENSIS, *Sermones super cantica canticorum* [Sermons on the Song of Songs]

In Latin, decorated manuscript on parchment

The Netherlands? or Belgium?, dated 30 January 1416

90 ff., preceded and followed by 2 paper flyleaves, on parchment, complete (collation: i-x<sup>8</sup>, xi<sup>10</sup>), written in a rounded gothic bookhand in brown ink, by two distinct hands (ff. 1-66v a rather rounded gothic textualis; ff. 67-90v, with second hand a more angular gothic textualis), on up to 36 long lines (justification 190 x 110 mm), some catchwords, some quire signatures, ruled in pale brown ink, prickings still visible, rubrics in bright red, paragraph marks in red, some scriptural excerpts underlined in yellow, many capitals touched in yellow wash, 2- to 4-line high initials in red opening each sermon, one with reddish pen flourishing and a face (f. 40v), larger 6-line high initial on fol. 1 with yellow pen flourishing, numerous nota and manicha, some with brief textual captions (for ex. f. 38), numerous contemporary marginal corrections. Nineteenth-century long-grained maroon morocco over pasteboard, concentric frames on boards of gilt and blind fillet borders with gilt foliate tool at angles, back sewn on 5 raised bands outlined with blind fillets, gilt "Venetian apple," tools in compartments, gilt lettering on spine, board edges and turn-ins tooled, edges gilt, marbled paper pastedowns and first flyleaves, contained in a marbled paper slipcase [Imitation of a Venetian 16<sup>th</sup> century model, signed [J.] Zaebnsdorf (1816-1886) on lower turn-in of front cover, Austro-Hungarian bookbinder, established in London: examples of his refined workmanship were to be found in libraries of all the great English book collectors] (Binding slightly scuffed and rubbed, front inner hinge split, ink faded on ff. 86v-87). Dimensions 260 x 175 mm.

This dated manuscript of Saint Bernard's most important work includes the third part of his sermons on the Song of Songs (52-87). Although existing in a large number of manuscripts and early printed editions, Bernard's mystically evocative text is nonetheless relatively rare on the market in the last century and is found in surprisingly few North American libraries. The present copy bears many codicological features that merit further study of its production and use.

## PROVENANCE

1. Script as well as the style of decorative penwork and rubrication suggest a Northern origin for this manuscript, likely Netherlandish or Flemish. The manuscript is clearly of monastic origin, and further research might enable one to determine whether it was copied in a Cistercian environment and also provide regional comparisons.
2. Peter Hardy, F. R. S. (1813-1863), an actuary whose library passed onto his son R. P. Hardy, also an actuary: his heraldic bookplate on upper pastedown, with motto, "Le Hardy ne querre pas querele."
3. Lord William Amhurst Tyssen-Amherst, 1st Baron Amherst of Hackney (1835-1909), a British Conservative Member of Parliament: his heraldic bookplate on upper pastedown, with motto. He is chiefly remembered as a collector of books, manuscripts, antique

furniture and other works of art. In 1906, he was forced to sell a large portion of his collection due to financial troubles.

## TEXT

ff. 1-90v, Bernardus Clarevallensis, *Sermones super cantica canticorum*, sermons 52-87, rubric, *Incipit liber tertius sermonum super cantica canticorum beati bernardi abbatis clarevallensis doctoris melliflui. Incipit sermo quinquagesimus secundus*; incipit, "Adiuvo vos filie iherusalem per capreas..."; rubric, *Sermo .lxxxvii.*; incipit, "Non est quod a me iam queratur cur querat anima verbum..."; explicit, "[...] Item ad omnes elcans ut filii lucis inquit ambulate"; colophon, "Expliciunt catica canticorum beati bernardi abbatis clarevallensis anno domini millesimo quadringentesimo .xvi. [1416] penultima die januarii."

This manuscript contains the third part of St. Bernard's Sermons on the Song of Songs (sermons 56 to 87 [sic]). Called the "mellifluous teacher" or the "honey-sweet doctor" (because he made the hidden sense flow from the text with ease and fluidity), Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) viewed the relationship between the Divine Word and the individual soul as a spiritual marriage between the heavenly Bridegroom and the human bride. Considered his most accomplished work, Bernard's 86 sermons interpreting allegorically the Song of Songs were composed between 1135 and 1153. The sermons are published in PL, 183, 785-1198 and *Sancti Bernardi Opera...*, Rome, 1957-1977, vols. 1 and 2. Not only do these sermons summarize Bernard's mystical theology, they fully develop the idea of spiritual marriage. Describing the joy and ecstasy of love, the Song of Songs, more than any other book in the Bible except Genesis, exercised a profound and enduring influence on Western literature.

The Cistercian monk, Bernard of Clairvaux, was one of the greatest spiritual leaders of the Middle Ages. He founded the abbey of Clairvaux in Burgundy in 1112 and personally oversaw the foundation of some sixty-five other Cistercian abbeys in his lifetime. Already as a young abbot, he wrote and delivered a series of sermons on the Annunciation, and, ahead of his times, he became especially noted for his contribution to the early development of Marian devotion, which became central to the Gothic religion, art, music, and literature. He composed a wide variety of spiritual works on grace, free will, humility, and love. According to one historian, his importance was such that "he carried the twelfth century on his shoulders." He is even considered the last of the Church Fathers, and just twenty-one years after his death he was canonized in 1174.

The present manuscript was certainly once part of a three-volume set, the complete set of sermons divided into three separately bound books, as indicated in the opening rubric: "*Incipit liber tertius sermonum super cantica canticorum...*" [Here begins the third book of the sermons on the Song of Songs...]. There are many extant manuscripts of all or part of the Sermons on the Song of Songs by Bernard of Clairvaux, most of which are listed in Stegmüller, II, 1721. The critical edition was based on 111 manuscripts, mostly from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. It remained popular through the later medieval period and was published many times in incunabular editions. Considering the widespread circulation of the text, it is rather surprising that DeRicci recorded only four manuscripts in North American collections, two in the Trappist Monastery at Gethsemani in Kentucky (now on deposit at Western Michigan University), one in the Free Library of Philadelphia, and one in a collection in Washington D.C. (now untraced). Nor are copies very plentiful in the Schoenberg Database. Interestingly, the present copy can be traced in the

Schoenberg Database in various bookseller's catalogues and auction sales from 1863 to 1988 indicating that it changed hands at least five times during that period. Further research into the sales history might uncover the two (?) missing volumes.

One interesting codicological feature of the present copy is well worth noting. On ff. 27-27v, the scribe has indicated that although the page is not completely covered in text, there is no text missing; his work was interrupted by a fold in the parchment, which would not have allowed for a clean copy. He warns the reader: "Hic nichil deficit. Averte folium et lege ultra" [Here nothing is missing. Turn the page and read further](f. 27) and on the verso, again: "Perge ultra. Nichil deficit ibi" [Pursue further. Here nothing is missing] (f. 27v)].

## LITERATURE

Astell, Ann. *The Song of Songs in the Middle Ages*, Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 1990.

Bernard de Clairvaux. *Sancti Bernardi Opera, ad fidem codicum recensuerunt J. Leclercq, C. H. Talbot, H. M. Rochais*, Rome, 1957-1977, vol. II, *Sermones super cantica canticorum*, 36-86.

Bernard de Clairvaux. *Sermons sur le cantique*, IV (51-68) et V (69-86), Paris, 2003 and Paris, 2007 [Sources chrétiennes, no. 472 and 511].

Bernard of Clairvaux. *On the Song of Songs*, 4 vols., Cistercian Fathers Series, tr. Kilian Walsh, Kalamazoo, MI, Cistercian Publications, 1980.

Stegmüller, F. *Repertorium biblicum medii aevi, Commentaria, Auctores A-G*, Madrid, 1950, vol. II.

## ONLINE RESOURCES

Sermons on the Song of Songs

[http://people.bu.edu/dklepper/RN413/bernard\\_sermons.html](http://people.bu.edu/dklepper/RN413/bernard_sermons.html)

Commentary on the Song of Songs in English

<http://www.glorifyhisname.com/sys-tmpl/stbernard1/>

Bernard of Clairvaux Biography

<http://www.bernardofclairvaux.org/>

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