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[MICHAEL OF MASSA]. *Vita Christi*
In Latin, decorated manuscript on paper and parchment
Germany, Neuss?, 31 July 1443

ff. i (modern paper) + I (medieval parchment) + 159 + i (modern paper), the inner and outer bifolia of each quire parchment, the rest paper, with perhaps three or four different watermarks, the only one of which is both clearly visible and distinctive is very close to Briquet no. 4639, dated 1438, foliated i-ii, 1-160 in pencil, complete (collation: i–xii¹², xiii¹⁶⁻¹ last leaf cancelled without loss of text), catchwords and quire signatures in lower-case roman numerals survive in most quires, written in brown ink in a semi-cursive gothic script, typically on 25-27 long lines (justification: c. 145 x 105 mm.), framed in plummet, rubrics in red, numerous paraps, underlinings, and marginal notes and pointing bands in red, each chapter introduced by a three- or four-line initial in red, the first initial six lines high with reserved foliate designs and penwork ornament (worm-holes in the first and last leaves, most leaves cockled and stained by damp, the parchment leaves also shrunk smaller than the paper ones, rarely if ever preventing legibility of the text). Bound in brown leather and faux leather over pasteboards, probably early 20th century, with gilt spine title "Lebensgeschichte / Jesu Christi / Handschrift / von 1443" and with the binder's purple ink stamp on the lower pastedown "G[eor]g. Grob, Köln / Buchbinderei / Rotgerberbach 19," a former pastedown (f. ii) is from a 14th-century manuscript with about 40 lines of partially legible text in German (the binding slightly worn and affected by damp, but generally sound). Dimensions 210 x 145 mm.

A previously unrecorded, precisely dated copy, signed by the unrecorded German scribe Johannes Boikmann, of a highly influential devotional Augustinian text, owned by the Augustinian nunnery of Marienberg, Neuss. The text forms the foundation and core from which the Carthusian Ludolph of Saxony derived his own *Vita Christi*, the hugely popular later medieval sourcebook for devotional exercises and sermons. No modern critical edition exists, and the work appears to be exceptionally rare at auction, the 34 extant copies located primarily in European libraries.

PROVENANCE

1. Signed and dated 31 July 1443 by the scribe Johannes Boikman, in an eight-line colophon immediately following the end of the text: "Deo gratias. Et sic est finis de quo deus est benedictus. Obsecro per christum te qui librum legis istum ut sis scriptoris memor in prece cordis et oris. Scriptus est iste liber per manus Iohannis Inder scholen aleas dictus Boickman. Et finitus Anno domini m° cccc° xliij in profesto vincula petri.", followed by several words in red, all but the first erased: "Orate ... " (f. 158v), the erased words were transcribed by 19th-century owners as "Pro meis liberis liberalissime" (ff. ii^v, 159). Boikman refers to himself as "in der scholen" ("in the schools"), which suggests that he was studying at university when he wrote the text; this is most likely to have been Cologne University

(founded in the 14th century), only about 35 kilometers southeast of Neuss. This is supported by the evidence of the distinctive watermark representing a coronet in the first quires of the volume, which is very similar to Briquet, *Filigraanes*, no. 4639, whose date—1438—is very close to that of the present manuscript, and whose localization—Dusseldorf—is immediately adjacent to Neuss.

2. The Augustinian nunnery of Marienberg, Neuss, where it was inscribed in the 15th century, “Liber regularisaru(m) mo(n)tis ui(r)gine intra nussia(m)” (f. ii^v). Marienberg was founded in 1462 so this text, written by an Augustinian author, was doubtless acquired as one of their first indispensable books. The monastery was suppressed at the Secularization of 1802
3. Johann Heinrich Küpper (1767-1836), last rector of the Neuss grammar school, with a long inscription immediately beneath the Marienberg inscription, beginning “Gehort itzt Joh. Heinrich Küpper von Neuss” and ending with a transcription of the erased part of the colophon (f. ii^v). A note on the back flyleaf, apparently copied from fol. ii^v when it was more legible than it is today, refers to Küpper and includes the date 18 November 1826; this is quite possibly the date on which Küpper acquired it. In the years following the Secularization Küpper is known to have owned a number of manuscripts from Marienberg: identical Marienberg and Küpper inscriptions occur in the unique manuscript of Geert Grote’s treatise *Contra turrim Traiectensem*, for example. The present manuscript may have had a similar series of owners as the latter, which went after Heinrich Küpper’s death to Sibylla Kamper-Küpper (d. 1851); to Josepha Schram-Kamper; to a series of members of the Schram family of Neuss. (On the Schram family and their manuscripts see Rosmarie Siepe, “Das Archiv Schram und die Familie Schram in Neuß,” *Mitteilungen der Westdeutschen Gesellschaft für Familienkunde*, 27 (1975), pp. 47–51). The manuscript was still in the region of Cologne, perhaps in Neuss, when it received its present binding. Inscribed with former shelfmarks “H 3” (f. ii^v) and “H 4” (f. i^r, in blue pencil).

TEXT

f. 1, Rubric: “Incipit Vita Ihesu Cristi. Prologus,” prologue incipit, “Fundamentum aliud nemo potest ponere preter id quod positum est quod est ihesus christus. Prima Chorinth. tercio. [i.e. I Corinthians 3:11] Cum sicut dicit Augustinus deus sit res summe sufficiens et homo sit res summe deficiens ...,” after the prologue the first chapter’s rubric is “De quibusdam incarnationem precedentibus” and the last is “Conclusio libri huius,” with incipit “Habes ergo ex predictis vitam domini nostri ihesu christi ...,” and explicit “... aut si corrumpuntur sanes,” followed by the scribal colophon (see Provenance).

Not very much is known of Michael of Massa’s life: he was probably born Michael Beccucci de Massa around 1298 at Siena or Massa Maritima; he became an Augustinian; studied and taught at the University of Paris, where he wrote a number of important works of scholastic philosophy and a commentary on the *Sentences*; and died in 1337, probably at Paris. Schabel (see below, p. 443) notes that Michael’s commentary of the *Sentences* is considered to be one of the “richest unedited, and for the most part unstudied texts of the fourteenth century.” The authorship of the present text, which is also unedited, has long been attributed to Massa, and while this has occasionally been called into doubt, because it rests primarily on the colophon of a single manuscript (Leipzig, University

Library, MS 800), it has always subsequently been re-affirmed, and no other author has been plausibly proposed.

In a series of recent studies, principally by Karl-Ernst Geith, it has been shown that the primary source for Michael of Massa's *Vita Christi* was the extremely popular *Vita Christi* traditionally attributed to Bonaventura (but probably written by an anonymous Franciscan in Tuscany, c. 1300), which consists of 100 chapters meditating on events from Christ's Incarnation to Pentecost and drawing material from the writings of St. Bernard of Clairvaux, St. Anselm of Canterbury, and others. Michael of Massa's *Vita* includes about seventy percent of the Pseudo-Bonaventura text, but also adds explanatory notes--for example details concerning religious feasts and geographical places as well as additional quotations from the Church Fathers. What makes Michael's *Vita* especially important, however, is that it was, in its turn, used as the primary source for the *Vita Christi* of Ludolph of Saxony (written between 1344 and 1368), which became the most widely-read *Vita Christi* text for the remainder of the Middle Ages. Ludolph quotes Michael word-for-word, but embellishes this source to produce a text about four times longer. Raitt et al. characterize Michael of Massa's *Vita Christi* as "the most important and immediate source of the influential work by the Carthusian Ludolph of Saxony [which] therefore influenced indirectly the whole of piety of the late Middle Ages and the beginning of the modern era up to the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius of Loyola" (1987, p. 67).

While Michael's text was thus highly influential on the rest of the Middle Ages, it was itself fairly quickly eclipsed, and therefore does not survive in anything like the numbers of copies of the Pseudo-Bonaventura and Ludolph versions. Although Geith (2000) cites 34 manuscripts of the Latin text and four early printed editions (including the Nuremberg, 1474/78 edition available in a digital version, see Online Resources), the text appears to be exceptionally rare on the market. Not a single example of the Latin text at auction is cited in the Schoenberg Database with the exception of a manuscript long located at Lambeth Palace Library. The work did, however, enjoy a certain popularity in translation, and two German translations survive in a number of recorded manuscripts (see below, Online Resources, for the Census: 9 complete codices of the second translation and 18 of the first translation, as well as numerous fragments). It was, moreover, translated into French, and six lavishly illuminated copies of the translation survive, showing that it was read and collected by such eminent French and Flemish bibliophiles as Duke Philip the Good and Louis of Gruythus.

The present manuscript offers a singular opportunity to acquire an important work of late-medieval devotion, one that is prime to receive a modern critical edition. Further study resulting from an edition of Michael of Massa's *Vita Christi* should ultimately enhance not only our knowledge of this relatively little-known Augustinian author but also our understanding of the Augustinian sources for Carthusian spirituality at the end of the Middle Ages. The fact that the manuscript is signed and dated by a scribe and can be so closely circumscribed to a known Augustinian foundation in the Cologne region increases its not inconsiderable significance.

LITERATURE

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Raitt, Jill in collaboration with B. McGinn and John Meyendorff. *Christian Spirituality: High Middle Ages and Reformation*, vol. 2, New York, Crossroad Publishing Co., 1987.

Schabel, Christopher. "Michael of Massa," in *A Companion to Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, XXIV (2003), pp. 443-4.

Schulthess, Peter and Ruedi Imbach, *Die Philosophie im lateinischen Mittelalter: ein Handbuch mit einem bibliographischen Repertorium*, Zurich, 1996, pp. 521-2.

Trapp, Damasus. "Augustinian Theology of the Fourteenth Century," *Augustiniana* 6 (1956), pp. 146-274.

ONLINE RESOURCES

Digitized incunable edition of the text:

http://www.digital-collections.de/index.html?c=autoren_index&l=en&ab=Michael+%26t%3Bde+Massa%26gt%3B

List and descriptions of the surviving German language manuscripts and fragments of the text:

<http://www.handschriftencensus.de/werke/5289>

<http://www.handschriftencensus.de/werke/5290>

Wikipedia page for Marienberg, Neuss, with photographs (in German):

http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kloster_Marienberg_%28Neuss%29

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