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Breviary (for the Abbey of Saint Gertrude at Nivelles)

In Latin, illuminated manuscript on parchment

Southern Netherlands, Brabant, c. 1450-1475

ii (paper) + 697 + i (paper) folios on parchment, modern foliation in pencil top outer corner recto, missing two folios after f. 3 [calendar with March, April, May, June], otherwise complete but collation impracticable due to the tightness of the binding, no catchwords or signatures, ruled very lightly, usually indiscernibly, in lead with the top two and bottom two rules full across, with ff. 7-10, ruled for one column in red ink, with the top and bottom rules full across and with full-length single vertical bounding lines (justification 110-105 x 70-68 mm.), written in two columns in a gothic bookhand in 30 lines, ff. 7-9 and ff. 298-307, written in a formal cursive gothic script (approaching *batârde*) in 27 long lines, red rubrics, 2-line alternately red and blue initials throughout, ten 4- to 5-line gold initials infilled with white-patterned blue or pink on grounds of the opposite color (ff. 40v, 173v, 578, 609, 616, 622v, 629, 637, 644v, 652v), four 7- to 5-line white patterned blue or pink initials infilled with vine scrolls on gold, on notched gold grounds, and with short ink tendrils with gold leaves extending from the first two of these initials (ff. 11, 224, 308, 598), ff. 1-7, darkened with some staining at the edges, some of the parchment is quite slick, and a few folios have very slight ink flaking (f. 289, 443, 467, 492), red yarn or thread on ff. 264v, 578, and 589 (repair to parchment?), overall in excellent condition. Bound in sturdy nineteenth-century tooled blond leather, spine with three raised bands and handwritten title, "Breviarium Colegii S. Gertrudis," edges dyed red, excellent condition, in a light brown fitted box (box somewhat worn). Dimensions 160 x 110 mm.

A Breviary from the powerful and influential secular abbey of St. Gertrude at Nivelles, a double monastery where the abbess ruled a community that included noble canonesses and canons. Our Breviary is one of only two early liturgical manuscripts that survive from this important foundation. The authors of the two recent scholarly publications on the abbey's *Liber ordinarius*, now at the Houghton Library, Harvard University, were unaware of our manuscript, which now will serve as the crucial source for the abbey's living liturgy. The text is long and detailed, and notably includes several new feasts, and even notes for a liturgical drama.

PROVENANCE

1. Written for the canonesses of the secular abbey of St. Gertrude in Nivelles (Brabant), Belgium; the text on f. 7 on the Advent office is "... selon l'ordinaire du Venerable Colliege de Madame sancte Gertrud de Nivelle en Brabant pour le partie des dames chanoinesses" (according to the ordinary of the venerable college of Madam St. Gertrude of Nivelles in Brabant for the participation of the lady canonesses), and the contents of the calendar, the feasts in the sanctoral and litany, and the use of the Office of the Dead and Hours of the Virgin, all support this fact.

The style of the script and illumination suggests this was a local production made in the Southern Low Countries in Brabant, somewhere near Nivelles, in the third quarter of the fifteenth century. Liturgical evidence supports this suggested date. It may date before 1456, since the Transfiguration on August 6 is lacking in the calendar and Sanctoral (although arguing from negative evidence is always a little risky). The

Presentation of Mary is added to the calendar on November 21, suggesting a date before 1476; this feast (which is not found in the earlier *Liber ordinarius* from St. Gertrude's now at Harvard) was sanctioned by Pope Gregory XI in 1372, but it was not widely observed until the second half of the fifteenth century, when it was championed by Sixtus IV (it was included in the Roman Missal of 1472, and later suppressed by Pope Pius V in 1568; see Pfaff, 103-151; Wright, p. 122). Finally, an early note on f. 1v dated 1481 (now mostly trimmed), is certain evidence of a date before 1481.

Also relevant to the date of the manuscript are the passages on ff. 7-9 and 298-307, which are copied in long lines in a formal cursive gothic script found nowhere else in the manuscript. These may have been additions made while the manuscript was being copied, or additions made slightly later after the manuscript was complete. One feast in particular, the Recollection of the Feasts of the Virgin (celebrated on the fourth Sunday in August), on ff. 298-305, is of special interest, since it allows us to date these additions after 1474 and before 1494, when it was observed at St. Gertrude's (the feast originated in Cambrai in 1457; Haggh, 1988; Soenen, 1987; discussed below).

The Abbey of St. Gertrude at Nivelles was founded c. 650 by Ida (or Itta) of Aquitaine, the widow of Pepin the Elder, who was mayor of the palace for the Merovingian king, Dagobert I. St. Amand, bishop of Tongres consecrated the foundation. Ida and Pepin's daughter, Gertrude (d. 659) was the first abbess. St. Gertrude's was a double monastery, originally including monks and nuns, which evolved by the ninth century into a chapter of secular canonesses and canons. By the thirteenth century, the rules of the chapter required the canonesses to be of noble birth. Their duties included attending the Divine Office and Mass, and probably also teaching young girls. The canonesses were not bound by vows of poverty and chastity, and they were allowed to leave to be married. Both the canonesses and canons lived under the rule of the Abbess. The abbey suffered during the wars of religion in the sixteenth century, and it was suppressed in 1798, and their library and archives were dispersed.

Until the rediscovery of our Breviary, only one early liturgical manuscript from St. Gertrude's was known, the fourteenth-century *Liber ordinarius*, Harvard University, Houghton Library, MS Lat 422. Apart from these two manuscripts, there are a number seventeenth- and eighteenth-century liturgical manuscripts from St. Gertrude's (Felix, 1978-1979) and parts of their archives, including three fifteenth-century cartularies (Hoebanx, 1964, pp. 270-272), now mostly in the Bibliothèque Royale de Belgique, section des manuscrits, and the Archives Générales du Royaume à Belgique, Fonds des Archives Ecclésiastiques. There is also fifteenth-century Book of Hours copied for an abbess of Nivelles, Margaretha of Escornaix (d. 1462), Brussels, BR MS IV,1113, written in 1445 at the Augustinian priory of Bois-Seigneur-Isaac (Hours of the Virgin, Use of Nivelles, Online Resources).

2. Occasional corrections in later hands, and on f. 307v, added prayers, testify to active use of this Breviary.
3. Note dated 1481 at the top of f. 1, now mostly trimmed away, concludes "a Aa <4?>," perhaps a shelfmark.

4. Belonged to Helena de Montmorency, canoness of Nivelles, who sold it to "Madamyselle de Malberghe" and then bought it back in 1598 (f. 297); she still owned it in 1599 (f. 1v, 3v, 297): f. 1v, "Ce brevier me Dit a Helena De Montmorency, chanoniesse De nivelle en brabant que nulle <erasure?> 1599"; above this on f. 1v in a different hand is a note dated 1598 mentioning Mlle Malberghe; f. 3v, "Vertu Je cherche. Helena de Montmorency. 1598; f. 297, "1598. Le present breviayre et appartenant a Helena de Montmorency lauant[?] achete a reuendue de madamoyselle de malberghe ...," and "Vertu je cherche. Helaine de Montmorency 6 nove[m]bre] 1599." Below is added in another hand, "Vertu pas tout," Marie erneste de berlo."
5. Belonged to Isabel D'Oyembrugge de Duras, whose name is inscribed on f. 2, who was abbess from 1654-1688 (Hoebanx, 1964, p. 299).
6. Belonged to a library of St. Andrew (unidentified), eighteenth-century(?) ex libris, f. 11, "Ex libris Bibliothecae Sancte Andr.";
7. Sold, June, 1926, Antiquariat Weiss and Co., Munich, *Codices, manuscripti, incunabula typographica*. Katalog 1, no. 11.
8. In modern pencil, front paper flyleaf, f. ii, "Breviarium secundum ordinem colegii S. Gertrudis nivellensis, xv cent."; inside front cover, "BBMHG"; very tiny traces of paper, remain on f. 1, suggesting something was once glued onto the page.
9. Described by Father Leonard Boyle, Pontifical Institute, Toronto, on January 30, 1974, at the request of William Albert Ross MacFadden (1935-2020) of Toronto, prominent businessman and collector, whose family owned the manuscript at that time (description housed with manuscript). (See note in pen at the bottom of Boyle's typed description, apparently from an appraisal, "Phillipps Auct...., Estimate 8-10,000 pounds UK, October 4, 2001).

TEXT

[ff. 1-2, blank, with later notes (see Provenance above)]; ff. 2v, The Pater noster, Ave maria, and Creed; blank space at the bottom of the leaf filled with later liturgical notes.

ff. 3-6v, Calendar, with entries for every day of the month, now lacking two folios after f. 3 with March, April, May, and June, including the Elevation of St. Gertrude, 10 February, in red, nine lessons, full and solemn office; translation of St. Begga, 7 July; Killian and "Visio sanctissimi corporis beate Gertrudis" (8 July); translation of Benedict, 11 July; Margaret, 13 July, nine lessons; Dedication of the Altar of St. Gertrude, 24 July, nine lessons, full and solemn office with procession; Anne, mother of Mary, 26 July, nine lessons; Commemoration of St. Gertrude, 4 August, procession; Lambert, 17 September, in red, nine lessons; St. Michael, 29 September, in red, nine lessons; Consecration of blessed Gertrude, 2 December, in red, nine lessons, full and solemn office; and Begga, 17 December; and memory of "Dominus Pepinus" (18 December);

Like the fourteenth-century *Liber ordinarius* from St. Gertrude's, now Harvard University, Houghton Library, MS 422 (discussed below), this calendar includes saints for every day, and a comparison of the months of January, February, July, and August shows their contents are almost identical, although our Breviary includes the Visitation on July 2 (celebrated from 1389).

ff. 7-9, [Liturgical directions, in French], *Sensuit la rubrice de l'office des aduens, . . . selon lordinaire du venerable colliege de madame sancta Gertrud de niuelle en brabant pour la partie des dames channoinesses. . .*; [f. 8], *Nota que ap[re]s historia Regum sensuit l'histoire de sapience de sagesse . . .*; [concluding with a note about the feast of St. Aldegunda]; [ff. 9v-10v, blank but ruled];

ff. 11-295v, Temporal, from the first Sunday in Advent through the twenty-fifth Sunday after the octave of Pentecost; [ending mid col. b f. 295v; ff. 296-297v, blank apart from later note on f. 297, see provenance above];

ff. 298-307v, *Officium Recollectionum festiuitatum beatissime virginis marie, . . .*; f. 305, Office of St. Michael; [f. 307v, Marian prayers added by a later hand];

Copied in a formal cursive gothic script in long lines, by the same scribe as ff. 7-9. The Office of the Recollection of the Feasts of the Virgin has been studied by Barbara Haggh (1988), who says a rhymed Office for this feast, celebrated on the fourth Sunday in August, dates from 1457 in Cambrai, where it was first observed in 1458. The text in our manuscript is very close to the text printed by Haggh. The feast was adopted in the Low Countries and in Aosta in the second half of the fifteenth century. It was endowed at Nivelles by Walter Henrici before his death in 1494 (he endowed the feast at fourteen churches, including Nivelles, apparently from 1474 on; see Haagh, p. 366, citing Soenen, 1987, p. 425).

ff. 308-559, Sanctoral beginning with Saturninus (29 November), including on f. 312v, Consecration of Blessed Gertude (December 2); Waldetrudis (February 4), f. 363, Elevation of Gertrude (February 10); f. 374v, Transitus of Gertrude (March 17), Begga (translation, July 7), Etho (July 10, not in the *Liber ordinarius*), f. 438, Dedication of the altar of St. Gertrude (July 24), Lambert (September 17), Leodegar (October 2), Aldegundis (November 13), and concluding with vigil of Andrew (29 November);

ff. 559-560v, [Office for the Feast of the Holy Lance and Nails of Christ], *Incipit hystoria sacratissime et clamorum domini que seruanda est feria vi post feriales pasche . . .*;

This feast was instituted in 1354 or 1356 by Pope Innocent VI.

ff. 561-577v, Common of Saints;

ff. 578-597, Hymns for the year, Temporal, Sanctoral, and Common of Saints; [f. 597v, blank];

ff. 598-668v, Liturgical Psalter with secular divisions for the days of the week and Vespers (Psalms 1, 26, 38, 52, 68, 80, 97, and 109);

ff. 668v-675, Canticles: "Confitebor tibi Domine" "Ego dixi in dimidio" "Exultavit cor meum" "Cantemus Domino" "Domine audivi auditionem tuam" "Audite celi", "Benedicite omnia

opera" "Te Deum" "Magnificat" "Benedictus Dominus" "Nunc dimittis," followed by the Athanasian Creed, "Quicumque vult"; ff. 675-678, Litany;

ff. 678v-687, Additional Offices and texts for the Office, including Office of the Dead (use of Nivelles), f. 682, *Recommendationes animarum*, incipit, "Subvenite sancta dei ..."; f. 686, *Incipiunt communia suffragia, primo de sancto cruce, ...*; f. 688, *De sancta Gertrude per ebdomadarium, ...*; f. 691, Hours of the Virgin (Use of Nivelles; CHD, Online Resources); f. 694, incipit, "Ave per quam orbis lapsi ..."; f. 695, Antiphons for feasts of saints with nine lessons;

f. 687rv, [Possibly copied in a slightly later hand, including texts for St. Lambert, and concluding f. 687v, with responses from the Common of Saints of many confessors. Preceding the final text is a very interesting series of short texts for Easter (perhaps from a liturgical drama), with rubrics for *Chorus, Mulieres ad sepulchrum*, and *Angeli*], *Chorus*, incipit, "Maria Magdalene et altera maria fecebant diluculo ...; *Mulieres ad sepulchrum*, Quis reuoluet nobis ...; *Chorus*, Surrexit dominus ... alleluia."

The Abbey of St. Gertrude at Nivelles throughout most of its long history was an influential and powerful monastic foundation, playing an important role politically and economically in its region and beyond. It was, moreover, a double monastery, where the abbess governed a chapter of noble canonesses and canons, and thus it holds special interest for modern scholars interested in the history of women and of gender politics.

Breviaries include the prayers and readings for the Divine Office (today known as the *Liturgy of the Hours*), the daily prayer of the Church, recited (or chanted) by priests, and other religious, including monks and nuns, beginning with Matins, said during the night, and continuing through the day, with Lauds at dawn, followed by Prime, Terce, Sext, None, Vespers, and concluding with Compline. For all historians interested the history of St. Gertrude's, the Breviary described here is of great importance, and this is especially true for historians studying complex liturgy at St. Gertrude's. Our Breviary is one of only two early liturgical manuscripts that survive from this important foundation. The earliest is their *Liber ordinarius*, or Ordinal, now Harvard University, Houghton Library, MS 422, likely dating from the mid-fourteenth century, c. 1346, which has recently been edited and is the subject of volume of scholarly essays (Hamburger and Schlotheuber, 2022, where most contributors argue for this date, while Waler Simon suggests a date c. 1298-1300, or c. 1310, p. 120; ed. Kelly and Klöckener, 2022).

In 2022, the editors of the *Liber ordinarius* stated: "It is unfortunate that liturgical and musical manuscripts that would complement and complete the liturgical information provided by the ordinal are almost completely lacking. Liturgical manuscripts of the Abbey of Nivelles are known only from the 17th and 18th centuries, with the exception of this ordinal. The dispersal of materials at the French Revolution has left scant traces of any early sources." And they conclude, "While the later books preserve a few precious survivals of the unique medieval practices of Nivelles, we shall have to await the discovery of further medieval liturgical books before we can complete the picture of the living liturgy of Nivelles as it is depicted in this precious ordinal" (Kelly and Klöckener, 2022, p. 6). Happily, scholars have not had to wait long; our fifteenth-century Breviary offers precious evidence of the "living liturgy" of this great abbey.

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Liber ordinarius of St. Gertrude, Harvard University, Houghton Library, MS Lat 422
[https://iif.lib.harvard.edu/manifests/view/drs:51441376\\$1i](https://iif.lib.harvard.edu/manifests/view/drs:51441376$1i)

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