

## *Ad modum Cartusiensium* *Carthusian Inspiration for the Enclosed Saint-Agnes Convent at Maaseik*

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### Abstract

After the enclosure of the Saint-Agnes convent at Maaseik in 1430, the regular canonesses had to learn how to live within the *claustrum*. They received support from at least two Carthusian monks: James of Gruitrode, prior of the charterhouse in Liège, and Denys the Carthusian from the charterhouse of Roermond. Both Carthusians maintained a regular contact and exchanged literature. James seemingly had a close relation with the nuns: he helped them enlarge their corpus of relevant religious literature, and there is evidence that he was involved in practical matters of the convent. Denys corresponded with the *mater* of the canonesses, at whose request he sent an elaborate instruction on life within the enclosed convent, *De vita inclusarum*. In this triangle of religious relations, the Carthusians, experts in enclosed life, took their pastoral responsibility to support the reform of the canonesses and used the means available to them: the written word.

### Keywords

Saint Agnes, Maaseik – Regular canonesses – Carthusians – Dionysius of Rijkel – James of Gruitrode – late medieval reform

### 1 Introduction

The Saint-Agnes convent of regular canonesses at Maaseik originated from a beguinage that was founded outside the walls of the city of Maaseik shortly before 1265 at the Hepperpoort. After its heyday with 70 beguines, the number of inhabitants of the beguinage decreased to eight at the beginning of the fifteenth century and the standard of living degenerated according to the narra-

tive of the charters from that period. Around 1425 two beguines moved within the city walls to live like the Sisters of the Common Life in the houses of the Modern Devotion. Their fresh spiritual zeal attracted many women and in 1429 this new community was transformed into a convent of regular canonesses under the rule of St. Augustine. The convent was settled in a part of the former beguinage. Shortly after its foundation in 1430, the convent was enclosed. Four canonesses from the convent of Mariaweide in Venlo came to lay a stable foundation and to teach the sisters how to live according to the Augustinian rule. Finally, in 1455, the Maaseik convent became part of the Chapter of Venlo.<sup>1</sup>

Life in an enclosed convent with a formalised liturgy demanded religious education that was not solely provided by the oral teaching of its rector and his *socii*, but also by relevant religious literature. The Maaseik nuns collected a considerable number of books: according to a list made up in 1795 by the last prioress, Sister Bollen, at command of the French government, the library included at least 156 manuscripts. On February 12, 1797 the sisters of Saint-Agnes were forced to leave the convent by the French Government. By luck, 39 of the Maaseik manuscripts were preserved in a wooden box that was forgotten on the third floor of the Maastricht Government building and they were only found in 1839. Manuscripts were also found in other locations, ten of which are not mentioned in Bollen's list. The most recent list identifies 83 extant manuscripts—77 in the vernacular and six in Latin—as written by the Maaseik sisters or used in the convent, the largest preserved collection of a female convent in the Netherlands.<sup>2</sup> This rich manuscript collec-

1 An elaborate study of the history is provided by Jean Delfosse, *Het Sint-Agnesklooster te Maaseik (1429–1550)* (Master thesis, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 1968). The degradation of the beguinage and the early history of the convent are described there in chapter 2, 31–44; the oldest official document on the beguinage dates from 1265, there 31; the charter of foundation of the convent dates April 1, 1429, there 36; the beguinage at the Hepperpoort was divided between the canonesses and the remaining six beguines; on February 5, 1432, the canonesses received formal approval from pope Eugene IV, there 42; the chapter of Venlo was founded on November 4, 1455, there 65. A short overview of the history of the convent is given in *Monasticon Belge* 6, Province de Limbourg (Liège, 1976), 283–291. On the Chapter of Venlo, Rudolf van Dijk, *De constituties der Windesheimse vrouwenkloosters vóór 1559*, 2 vols. (Nijmegen, 1986), 2: 591–608.

2 The manuscripts are first presented by Jan Deschamps, "Handschriften uit het Sint-Agnesklooster te Maaseik," in *Album Dr. Christiaan Mathieu Bussels* (Hasselt, 1967), 167–194; and following by Jos. M.M. Hermans, "Elf kisten boeken uit het Gouvernementsgebouw te Maastricht. Lotgevallen van de Limburgse handschriften en oude drukken, gevonden in 1839," in *Opstellen voor dr. Jan Deschamps ter gelegenheid van zijn zeventigste verjaardag*, ed. E. Cockx-Indestege and F. Hendrickx, 3 vols. (Leuven, 1987), 1: 105–143. Stooker and Verbeij identify

tion contains an enormous amount of information that still demands attention.<sup>3</sup>

The zeal of the sisters of the Saint-Agnes convent in Maaseik led to the choice to be enclosed. In that respect the convent associated with a reform movement in the Southern Netherlands that started around the turn of the fifteenth century and was inspired by the Carthusian way of life. From the *Chronicon Bethlemiticum* of Petrus Impens (d. 1523) it is clear that as such this aspiration to live enclosed like the Carthusians, *ad modum Carthusiensium*, was a break with the tradition. He qualifies the enclosure of Barberendaal in Tienen, the first monastery of regular canonesses that was enclosed in 1404, as a matter that was thus far *inaudita* (unheard of).<sup>4</sup> How did the Carthusians influence the

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77 vernacular manuscripts in their inventory as either produced in Maaseik or used there: Karl Stooker and Theo Verbeij, *Collecties op orde. Middelnederlandse handschriften uit kloosters en semi-religieuze gemeenschappen in de Nederlanden*, 2 vols. [Miscellanea Neerlandica 15–16] (Leuven, 1997), 2: 261–288, nrs. 789–865. The most recent and most complete overview is provided by Willemien van Dijk, *Handschriften bij de Hepperpoort. Omvang en doel van de schrijfvacatures van het Sint-Agnesklooster te Maaseik* (Master thesis, Leiden University, 2004).

- 3 Several aspects of the corpus have been studied; the mystical texts by Hans Kienhorst, “Mystiek op schrift in vrouwenkloosters uit de traditie van de Moderne Devotie. Een oriënterende vergelijking van drie collecties: Arnhem, Geldern en Maaseik,” *Ons geestelijk erf* 81 (2010), 38–63, there 43–49; saints by Anneke Mulder-Bakker, “Heilige maagden aan de Maas” in *Genoehclieke ende lustige historiën. Laatmiddeleeuwse geschiedschrijving in Nederland*, ed. Bunna Ebels-Hoving, Catrien Santing and Karin Tilmans (Hilversum, 1987), 121–139; St. Gregory by Mathilde van Dijk, “Sinte Gregorius seet ...’ Werken met een kerkvader in Sint-Agnes, Maaseik,” *Ons geestelijk erf* 80 (2009), 142–170; hymns by Youri Desplenter, *Al aertrijc segt lofsanc. Middelnederlandse vertalingen van Latijnse hymnen en sequensen*, 2 vols. [Studies op het gebied van de oudere Nederlandse letterkunde 3] (Gent 2008), 1: 456–466. The Maaseik sisters owned four copies of a translation of Henry Suso’s *Hundred articles of the Passion* that only occurs in their convent, see Jan Deschamps, “De Middelnederlandse vertalingen en bewerkingen van de *Hundert Betrachtungen und Bekehrungen* van Henricus Suso,” *Ons geestelijk erf* 63 (1989), 309–369, there 319–320. This is remarkable, as several translations were available in circles of the Modern Devotion, that were adapted to a female audience, for instance the *North Netherlandish version* that is studied by José van Aelst, *Vruchten van de Passie. De laatmiddeleeuwse passieliteratuur verkend aan de hand van Suso’s Honderd artikelen* [Middeleeuwse studies en bronnen 129] (Hilversum 2011), 46–92.
- 4 Literature on this reform: Tom Gaens, “Les chartreux de Zelem lez Diest et la clôture des monastères dépendant du chapitre de Windesheim,” in *Liber amicorum James Hogg. Kartäuserforschung 1970–2006*. Internationale Tagung Kartause Aggsbach 28.8–1.9.2006 Kartause Mauerbach, ed. Meta Niederkorn-Bruck, 6 vols. [Analecta Cartusiana 210, 1–6] (Salzburg 2007–2008), 1: 133–174; and Floris Prims, “De kloosterslot-beweging in Brabant in de 15de

spiritual life in Maaseik? Like other enclosed convents, the Maaseik sisters had contact with Carthusian monks from their surroundings. A central character in their network was James of Eertwege, who was born in Gruitrode and lived most of his life in the charterhouse of Liège. A friend of his, Dionysius of Rijkel, known as Denys the Carthusian, from the Roermond charterhouse also seems to have been in contact with the Maaseik sisters. Both Gruitrode and Roermond are approximately twenty kilometres from Maaseik. In the present article, I will investigate how these two Carthusians contributed to the religious education and reform of the Maaseik convent and how they co-operated in doing so.

## 2 James of Gruitrode

James of Gruitrode was most likely born around 1400–1410. He entered the charterhouse of the Twelve Apostles at Liège, where he was prior from 1440 until his death in 1475, with a short interruption from 1445–1447 during which he was prior at Zierikzee. According to the obituary of Liège, he died on February 12, 1475.<sup>5</sup> There is clear evidence of his connection with the sisters of Maaseik, and some of the evidence is surprisingly material.

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eeuw,” in *Mededeelingen van de Koninklijke Vlaamsche Academie voor wetenschappen, letteren en schoone kunsten van België. Klasse der letteren* 6 (1944), 5–34. The first quotation from Impens’s *Chronicon Bethlemiticum, ad modum Carthusiensium* is given by Ern. Persoons, “De Zuidnederlandse kloosters van het Kapittel Windesheim. Een bibliografisch overzicht,” *Archief voor de geschiedenis van de katholieke kerk in Nederland* 3 (1961), 73–89, there 73, n. 1. See also Tom Gaens, “*Fons hortorum irriguus, ceteras irrigans religiones*. Carthusian Influences on Monastic Reform in Germany and the Low Countries in the Fifteenth Century,” in *A Fish Out of Water? From Contemplative Solitude to Carthusian Involvement in Pastoral Care and Reform Activity*, ed. Stephen Molvaere and Tom Gaens [*Miscellanea Neerlandica* 41—*Studia Cartusiana* 2] (Leuven, 2013), 51–103, there 61. The second quotation, *Res hactenus erat inaudita*, is given by Floris Prims, *Onze-Lieve-Vrouw-Priorij Korsendonk* [*Campina Sacra* 7] (Antwerpen, 1947), 76–77, n. 1.

5 An overview of his life is given by Koen Seynaeve, “Jacobus van Gruitrode,” in *Amo te, sacer ordo Carthusiensis. Jan De Grauwe, passionné de l’Ordre des Chartreux*, ed. Frans Hendrickx and Tom Gaens [*Miscellanea Neerlandica* 38—*Studia Cartusiana* 1] (Leuven, 2012), 401–427. Published before in *Historia et spiritualitas Cartusiensis. Colloquii quarti internationalis Acta, Gandavi—Antverpiae—Brugis, 16–19 September 1982*, ed. Jan De Grauwe (Destelbergen, 1983), 313–336. The most complete overview of the transmission of the work of James is given by Tom Gaens, “*Spiritu Ihesu operante*. Written Sources for the Work of James of Gruitrode,” in *The Carthusians in the Low Countries. Studies in Monastic History and Heritage*, ed. Krijn Pansters [*Miscellanea Neerlandica* 43—*Studia Cartusiana* 4] (Leuven, 2014), 129–172.

He made a very concrete contribution to the library of Maaseik by binding two of their manuscripts around 1440. The first manuscript, The Hague, Royal Library, MS 73 H 22, contains the vernacular translation of the *Liber de virginitate*, in the Late Middle Ages ascribed to the thirteenth-century theologian Henry of Ghent. The text is a collage of quotations from the church fathers Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine, and Gregory on the virgin life and it was read in several female houses and convents of the Modern Devotion.<sup>6</sup> This *Boec vander joncfrouscap* fits perfectly in the education of the Maaseik sisters. The second manuscript, The Hague, Royal Library, MS 73 H 24, contains *Dat boeck vander vader insettinge*, a Middle Dutch translation of a treatise written by John Rode of Hamburg, prior of the charterhouse of Brno, Frankfurt and Stettin. To this main text a few vitae and examples are added. *Dat boeck* is a compilation of the fourth book of John Cassian's (d. 435) *De institutis coenobiorum* and a series of excerpts, mostly examples, that were translated, among others, from the Rule of St. Benedict and the *Vitae patrum*. According to the prologue, John Rode wrote this text for the Benedictine nuns of *Vallis virginum* in Hamburg, whom he wanted to teach to live "without possession, in poverty, without self-will, in humbleness and obedience without consent to impure desires, but in chaste purity of soul and body, without hate and disharmony, in sisterly love and unity," as the Benedictine rule prescribed. This way of life was as relevant to the Augustinian nuns of Saint-Agnes as to the Hamburg

6 On this manuscript, Deschamps, "Handschriften uit het Sint-Agnesklooster" (see above, n. 2), 176; Stooker and Verbeij, *Collecties op orde* (see above n. 2), 2, nr. 831. Henry of Ghent studied in Cologne under Albertus Magnus and was magister at the Sorbonne in Paris. The vernacular text, called *Dat boec der reynicheit* or *Dat boec vander joncfrouscap*, is edited by Erik Bergkvist, ed., *Dat boec van der joncfrouscap* (sprachlich untersucht und lokalisiert) (Ph.D. diss., Hochschule Göteborg, 1925). There are six extant manuscripts of the vernacular translation according to the *Bibliotheca Neerlandica Manuscripta*; in chronological order: 1) Bibliothek Rotterdam, MS 96 E 18, (first half 15th century, sisters of the common life Mariengaard, Schüttorf, Kreis Bentheim, used for the Bergkvist edition); 2) The Hague, Royal Library, MS 73 H 22 (ca. 1440, Sint-Agnesklooster Maaseik); 3) The Hague, Royal Library, MS 132 F 17 (ca. 1450, enclosed tertiaries St. Ursulaklooster at Delft); 4) Deventer, Stads- of Atheneumbibliotheek, MS I, 51 (101 F 7 KL) (1466, Deventer, Brandeshuis); 5) Deventer, Stads- of Atheneumbibliotheek, MS I, 47 (101 E 10 KL) (mid 15th century); and 6) Brussels, Royal Library, MS II 5572 (ca. 1520, Diest, regular canonesses Mariendaal). The manuscripts 2, 3, 4 and 6 are also listed in Stooker and Verbeij, *Collecties op orde* (see above, n. 2), 2, respectively under the nrs. 831, 297, 330 and 411. The Hague, Royal Library, MS 133 F 9 possibly contains excerpts from the text. The *Boec der Ioncfrouscap* was read by the sisters of Diepenveen, D.A. Brinkerink, ed., *Van den Doecheden der vuriger ende stichtiger susteren van Diepen Veen (handschrift D)* (Groningen, 1904), 317.

Benedictines. The manuscript, dated 1440, is the only complete extant copy of *Dat boeck vander vader insettinge*.<sup>7</sup>

These two manuscripts, containing literature on core values and issues of an enclosed convent, were copied around 1440 by the so-called “first *libraria*” or “first scribe” of Maaseik, who most likely can be identified as one of the four sisters from the Venlo convent of Mariaweide who helped found the Maaseik convent. She copied sixteen manuscripts in the period 1427 to 1445. According to Willemien van Dijk, who studied the contribution of the first scribe, she did not copy for her own private use, but in service of the community and by doing so, she laid the foundation of the library of the convent. The texts she chose belong to the standard works of the program of the Modern Devotion, meant to educate the sisters in how to lead and develop a monastic life.<sup>8</sup>

On the flyleaves of both manuscripts a similar remark on the binding is noted. In the Hague 73 H 24 it reads: “This book was bound by brother James of Gruitrode (added: vanden Eertwech), a poor Carthusian at Liège, and Christian, his brother, paid the leather. Pray for them for the love of God.”<sup>9</sup> The course of events is not clear. Were the manuscripts copied at Maaseik, sent to the charterhouse of Liège and returned after binding? Or did James visit the Maaseik

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- 7 The manuscript is described by Jan Deschamps in *De kartuizers en hun klooster te Zelem. Tentoonstelling ter gelegenheid van het negende eeuwfeest van de Orde 1084–1984*, ed. Frans Hendrickx (Diest, 1984), 201–204; the quotation on the desired way of living of the audience is given on 203: “sonder eyghenscap, in willigher armoeden sonder eynghe wylle, in oetmoedicheit ende ghehoersam sonder volboert der oncuysscher begheerten, in cuysscher reynicheit der seelen ende des lijves, sonder hat ende twidracht, in susteliker liefden ende eendrachticheit”; see also Deschamps, “Handschriften uit het Sint-Agnesklooster” (see above n. 2), 175. Stooker and Verbeij, *Collecties op orde* (see above, n. 2), 2, nr. 832. The life of the author is studied by Gerhard Schlegel, “Johann Rode (1373–1439),” in *Liber amicorum James Hogg* (see above, n. 4), 6: 69–91.
- 8 Van Dijk, *Handschriften bij de Hepperpoort* (see above, n. 2), especially chapter 3, 23–42. The first scribe has written The Hague, Royal Library, MS 73 H 10 in 1427, which manuscript was produced in Mariaweide, Venlo, before the foundation of Maaseik according to Stooker and Verbeij, *Collecties op orde* (see above, n. 2), 2, nr. 1219.
- 9 “Dit buec heeft ghebonden brueder Jacobus van Gruytroey (added: vanden Eertwech), arm carthuser by Luyck. Ende Cristiaen sijn brueder heeft dat leder betaelt. Biddet om gods wille voer hon.” James bound a third manuscript, namely Brussels, Royal Library, MS 11 468, the only copy of his *Hortus aurearum rosarum, Jesu et Mariae*. This manuscript dates from 1430 and is partly copied by himself. At first it was made and owned by the charterhouse at Liège, next it was in the possession of the Regular Canons of Ter Nood Gods in Tongeren. The manuscript is described by Jan Deschamps in Hendrickx, *De kartuizers en hun klooster te Zelem* (see above n. 7) 215–218, nr. 34.

convent while on his way from Liège to his native town, Gruitrode? And did James also provide the source text? In any case, there must have been a direct exchange.

Furthermore, the Maaseik library owned a vernacular translation of two texts that James had originally composed in Latin. The first, *die Roesengaert Jhesu ende Marie*, is a translation of his *Rosarium Jesu et Mariae*, a short revision James made of his original *Hortulus aurearum rosarum*. It seems most likely that he translated the *Rosarium* himself into the vernacular, even though there is no material evidence. In the vernacular prologue, two passages in the first person have been added, but neither of these explicitly states anything about the process of the translation. The oldest extant manuscript of *die Roesengaert*, The Hague, Royal Library, MS 73 H 20, dated 1445, was also copied by the first scribe of Maaseik.<sup>10</sup> James's text consists of spiritual exercises and prayers, one for every day of the week, dealing with the life of Jesus and Mary from the Annunciation on Monday till the Resurrection, the Ascension of Christ, and the descent of the Holy Ghost on Sunday. It is a large text that consists mainly of quotations and excerpts from other authors whose names are indicated in the margin. The exercises of Thursday on the Blessed Sacrament and of Friday on the Passion are the most elaborate. Reading a work like this was very helpful to develop devotion to Christ and his Mother.<sup>11</sup>

The second text of James in possession of the Maaseik sisters is the *Coronula laudis Marie*, the *Croenken des loefs*. They owned approximately ten copies of this text, the oldest dating from 1475, the year in which James died.<sup>12</sup> After an introductory prayer on the Hail Mary, the exercise blesses 23 body parts of Mary for the way they treated Jesus. It addresses among others her ears, her

10 The different versions of the *Hortulus* have been studied by Jan Deschamps, "De lange en de korte redactie van het *Rosarium Jesu et Mariae* van de kartuizer Jacobus van Gruitrode en de Middelnederlandse vertaling van de korte redactie," in *Codex in context. Studies over codicologie, kartuizergeschiedenis en laatmiddeleeuws geestesleven aangeboden aan Albert Gruïjs*, ed. Chr. Bakker, A.J. Geurts, and A.G. Weiler (Nijmegen, 1985), 105–128; on the translation of the text, 120–122. The eight known manuscripts of the vernacular translation are listed on 122–125; see also Gaens, "*Spiritu Ihesu operante*" (see above, n. 5), 153–154.

11 How James used one of the sources, the *Hundred articles of the Passion* of Henry Suso in his Passion exercise is analysed by Van Aelst, *Vruchten van de Passie* (see above n. 3), 165–170.

12 It concerns the numbers 789, 799, 800, 803, 804, 806, 848, 851 and 855 of Stooker and Verbeij, *Collecties op orde* (see above, n. 2), 2. To this list can be added Cambridge, University Library, MS Add. 2876, described by Jayne Ringrose, *Summary Catalogue of the Additional Medieval Manuscripts in Cambridge University Library Acquired before 1940* (Woodbridge, 2009), 32–34. Most of the copies (7) date from around 1500–1510, a prosperous period of the convent.

eyes, her cheeks, her nose, her lips, her throat and her heart. It is not known who translated the *Coronula*. Neither the *Roesengaert*, nor the *Croenken* is available in a modern edition. Their “unoriginal” patchwork character seems to be the main obstacle to modern editors’ interest in preparing a modern text edition. James did not have the aspiration of composing an original text. He describes his writing process in the prologue of his *Roesengaert* as follows: “Know therefore that I only collected this work, but did not make it. For as you well know, I am not so talented that I could make something new, but I can mix together what others have made, for the devotion of other people and for the teaching of myself.”<sup>13</sup> A detailed analysis of these texts will have to wait until modern editors have discovered the interesting aspects of this type of text composing, that is characteristic of many Carthusian authors.

Finally worth mentioning is manuscript The Hague Royal Library, MS 73 H 16, copied by “scribe four,” also called the “second *libraria*,” who was active between 1471 and 1497. The manuscript contains on fol. 116v–119v a quotation from Petrus Damianus’s *Institutio monialis* that also occurs in chapter six of James’s *Mirror of a sinful soul*. The fact that it is announced under the title *Der sunderen spiegel* [The sinner’s mirror], seems to indicate that the text was classified as an excerpt of James’s *Mirror*, rather than as a translation of Damianus’s *Institutio*.<sup>14</sup> The examination of the conscience and the confession of sin are the main topics in many of the other texts in the manuscript, such as the anonymous *Cancellierboek* [Chancellor’s book], Jan van Ruusbroec’s *Vanden vier becoringhen* [The four temptations] and excerpts from Godfried van Wevel’s *Van den XII dogheden* [The twelve virtues]. These last two texts demonstrate the interest of the Maaseik sisters in the mystical life. The sisters had copied mystical literature in no less than nineteen manuscripts.<sup>15</sup>

It seems that James did not only contribute to the spiritual and literary needs of the Maaseik convent, but was also involved in economic matters: on March 19, 1460 he sold a rent charge of two hectolitre rye to John of Geisbach, who was the rector of Maaseik from 1434 to 1482.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore it is tempting to think

13 The Hague, MS RL 73 H 20, fol. 1v: “Weet daer om dat ic dit werck alleyn verghadert hebbe, mer niet ghemaect. Want alsoe ghi wael weet, ic en ben soe cunstich niet, dat ic wat nuwes selven maken mocht. Mer dat andere ghemaect ende ghearbeydt hebben, dat mach ic te samen menghen omme andere mynschen stichtinghe ende omme myne eyghen leringhe wil.”

14 Gaens, “*Spiritu Ihesu operante*” (see above, n. 5), 142–143, n. 47.

15 Kienhorst, “Mystiek op schrift in vrouwenkloosters” (see above, n. 3), 60–63.

16 This is mentioned in Delfosse, *Het Sint-Agnesklooster te Maaseik* (see above, n. 1), 28: “Op 19 maart 1460 verkocht hij (i.e. Jacobus van Gruitrode) aan Jan van Geisbach een



that family ties played a role in the connection between James and the Maaseik sisters. Above it was noted that James mentioned that his brother Christian paid for the leather he needed for the binding of two Maaseik manuscripts. He may have also had a sister: a calendar with necrological data from Maaseik mentioned for instance a canoness, called Beatrix of Ertwege on May 9 (without year).<sup>17</sup> In addition James definitely had a nephew, Herman, who was head of the convent schools of the chapter of Aldeneik from 1464. In that capacity Herman was certainly involved in the pastoral care of the Saint-Agnes convent, the sisters were under the supervision of the Aldeneik chapter. Finally, the sixth rector of Maaseik was called Mathijs van den Ertwech. He entered the convent in 1496, so after the death of James of Gruitrode. The relationship between James and Mathijs is not clear.<sup>18</sup>

From the available data we may conclude that James was involved in a range of activities of the Maaseik sisters who lived near his place of birth. He helped them in practical matters such as binding of books of religious literature. The vernacular translation of two of his texts provided the sisters with a large set of spiritual exercises. He sold a rent charge to their rector. Most likely family ties constitute a part of their connection.

### 3 A Carthusian Friendship: James and Denys

A good friend of James of Gruitrode was Denys the Carthusian (1402–1471), a highly productive author from the charterhouse of Roermond.<sup>19</sup> The most

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erfrente van twee mud rogge die in Maaseik geleverd werden,” from a Maaseik “*Registre au stock*,” fol. xcviro–vo. Hasselt, State Archives, Archives of the convent Maaseik, Collection Marcel Hendrix, no. 496, fol. 5, item 97 reads: “1460 bekent Jan van Gruytroed prior der Carthuseren van Luik verkocht te hebben twee mudde rogge erfpacht aan Jan van Geisbach als pater en rector des gemeyne convents S. Agneten Cloester buyten muren van Eyck.”

- 17 The necrology in Antwerp, Ruusbroecgenootschap, MS 5, fol. 2r, is discussed by Frans Hendrickx, “Een *Directorium* uit het St.-Agnesklooster te Maaseik, mogelijk herkomstig van St.-Luciadal te St.-Truiden,” *Ons geestelijk erf* 56 (1982), 184–211, there 204–205.
- 18 H. Van de Weerd, “Jacob van Gruitrode of Van den Eertweech?” *Limburg Maandschrift* 13 (1931–1932), 168–170. A summary of likely family relations is given by Seynaeve, “Jacobus van Gruitrode,” (see above, n. 5), 402, n. 5. Mathijs, professed in 1497, and rector from 1513 till 1521, is mentioned by Delfosse, *Het klooster te Maaseik* (see above, n. 1), 96–97.
- 19 The claim that James and Denys met when Denys accompanied cardinal Nicolas Cusanus on his visitation and reform journey through the Netherlands from September 1451 till March 1452, has recently been questioned by Erich Meuthen, “Nikolaus von Kues und

recent edition of his oeuvre covers 42 large volumes.<sup>20</sup> Denys referred explicitly to James several times in his texts. For instance, Denys mentioned that he translated the work of John Cassian into a simpler style “urged by the fathers and brothers of the charterhouse near Liège, above all their prior, dominus Jacobus de Gruitrode, a friendly, learned, humble, and devout man.”<sup>21</sup> Also in the first chapter of *De vita et fine solitarii*, a text on enclosed life, James is addressed as the instigator of the work: “Often, my beloved brother James, you have asked me to write something for you.”<sup>22</sup> It is assumed that James wrote a fair part of his texts at an early stage, before 1440, because his heavy duties as a prior did not allow him to write. Is this the reason why he “frequently asked” Denys to write something for him? From a letter to Arnold Campion, a doctor in law, it is clear that Denys lent the manuscripts, written by his own hand, to

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Dionysius der Karthäuser,” in *En kai plèthos. Einheit und Vielheit. Festschrift für Karl Bormann zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Ludwig Hagemann and Reinhold Gleis [Religionswissenschaftliche Studien 30] (Würzburg, 1993), 100–120; the reliability of the biographies is analysed on 110–120. See also Peter Nissen, “Dionysius de Kartuiser (1402/3–1471): de roem van de Roermondse Kartuis,” in *Het geheim van de stilte. De besloten wereld van de Roermondse Kartuisers. Verschenen ter gelegenheid van de tentoonstelling in het voormalige kartuiserklooster ‘O.L. Vrouw van Bethlehem’ te Roermond, maart – juni 2009*, ed. Krijn Pansters (Zwolle, 2009), 158–165 and 289–290; there 161, and 289–290, n. 26.

- 20 *Doctoris ecstastici D. Dionysii Cartusiani opera omnia*, 42 vols. (Montreuil, 1896–1901; Tournai, 1902–1913; Parkminster, 1935), hereafter referred to as DCOO. Denys’s life and the transmission of his work are studied by Kent Emery Jr., *Dionysii Cartusienensis. Opera Selecta. Prolegomena. Bibliotheca Manuscripta. Studia bibliographica*, 2 vols. [Corpus Christianorum. Continuatio Mediaevalis 121–121A] (Turnhout, 1991). A short overview of his life and works is given by Anselme Stoelen, “Denys le chartreux 1402/3–1472,” in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité ascétique et mystique*, 45 vols. (Paris, 1932–1995), 3: 430–449.
- 21 DCOO (see above, n. 20), 27: 13: “Idcirco eosdem ad stilum clarum atque facillimum, auxiliante superdulcissimo Spiritu Sancto, transferre intendo ac elucidare, accedente et me instigante ad hoc affectuosa humilique instantia venerabilium Patrum ac Fratrum meorum Cartusiensium prope Leodium, praesertim domini Jacobi Gruytrode eorumdem Prioris, viri benigni, docti, humilis ac devoti.” Denys refers to this in the preface of his translation of Joannes Climacus; see DCOO (see above, n. 20), 28: 11.
- 22 DCOO (see above, n. 20), 38: 266: “Saepe, mi carissime frater Jacobe, aliquid tibi a me scribi rogasti.” In two of his other texts, Denys seems to refer to James, although he does not explicitly mention his name. See *De natura aeterni et veri Dei*, in DCOO (see above, n. 20), 34: 15bAB: “Quoniam igitur, mi frater carissime, et in visceribus sincerissimae caritatis unice praedilecte ...”; and *De fructuosa temporis deductione* in DCOO (see above, n. 20), 40: 53: “Denique ad aggrediendum istud, quod etiam meas omnino supergreditur vires, inclinavit et quodammodo compulit me devota humilisque instantia quorundam Fratrum domus Ordinis Cartusienensis prope Leodium ...”

James. The text that Arnold asked for was not present in Roermond, but “it is at the house of our order near Liège, and the honourable father prior of that house will send it to your highness; or, if it pleases you, you send him a message that he sends it to you.” And that book contained “many other works” of Denys.<sup>23</sup> Denys and James exchanged texts, which led to false attributions. Five *Specula*, written by James, were for instance incorrectly attributed to Denys as late as 1913 and included in Denys’s *Opera Omnia* under the *opera spuria et dubia*.<sup>24</sup>

With a little exaggeration the Carthusian monks of Montreuil-sur-Mer concluded that there was a group of theologians around Roermond and Liège they would like to call “the school of Denys.” This comment of the editors of Denys’s oeuvre should not be taken as serious historical evidence, but still it reflects their observation that the contact between the two Carthusian monks is prominently present in their textual references.<sup>25</sup> It is safe to conclude that James and Denys were closely involved in each other’s literary activities.

#### 4 Denys and Maaseik

Denys contributed to the spiritual education of the Maaseik sisters in a highly concrete and direct way, so we learn from manuscript Brussels, Royal Library, MS 9682–9699 (fols. 135rb–147v), a manuscript that was written in 1457–1458 at James’s command for the charterhouse of Liège. Above the table of contents on the flyleaf it reads: *Liber Cartusiensis prope Leodium quem fecit scribi per clericum Leodii dominus Jacobus prior* [Book of the Carthusians near Liège, that prior father James ordered to be written by a cleric from Liège]. This manuscript contains, among others, Denys’s *De vita inclusarum*, an instruction

23 DCOO (see above, n. 20), 41: 619A: “... est in domo Ordinis nostri prope Leodium, et venerabilis Pater Prior domus illius mittet pietati tuae; vel, si placet, mittas ad eum ut mittat. Multa alia opuscula continentur in libro illo in quo inter cetera praefatus continetur libellus”; Emery, *Dionysii Cartusiensis* (see above, n. 20), 1A: 28.

24 The *Specula* were printed as his in 1495 (Nuremberg) and 1532–1533 (Cologne). They appear in DCOO (see above, n. 20), 42: 649–817 under the *Opera dubia aut spuria*. Concerning the attribution, see Gaens, “*Spiritu Ihesu operante*” (see above, n. 5), 133, n. 9 and 134, n. 15; Emery substantiates that the *Specula* are not written by Denys or another author, but by James: Emery, *Dionysii Cartusiensis* (see above, n. 20), 1B: 445–459.

25 DCOO (see above, n. 20), 42: 605: “Nos vero ad illam libenter deveniremus conclusionem, nempe, circa Cartusianum, eoque auspicante et inspirante ..., Ruraemundae et maxime Leodii (quod infra probabitur), pusillum quemdam Cartusiensium theologorum exstitisse gregem, quem cuiquam ambitiosiori vocabulo forsitan << scolam Dionysianam >> vocare libebit.”

on the way of living in an enclosed monastery.<sup>26</sup> At the end of the copy of the text the following note is added: *Explicit tractatus fratris Dyonisii Carthusiensis de vita inclusarum directus inclusis sororibus ordinis sancti Augustini in opido Eyckensi degentibus* [Here ends the treatise *De vita inclusarum* of brother Denys the Carthusian, that was directed to the enclosed sisters of the order of St. Augustine who live in the city of Eyck]. So the text is identified as a treatise that was addressed to the enclosed sisters of Maaseik. The copying happened under James's supervision, who qualifies as a reliable source of information concerning Denys's literary works.<sup>27</sup>

Within the text a more accurate indication is given about the period in which the treatise was conceived. In his first article—a division in articles instead of chapters is common in Denys's texts—he addressed the *mater* of a convent. He had sent her a short letter that pleased her so much that she asked him to compose something more extensive. And *De vita inclusarum* is his reaction to that request. Denys declared that his text would be more valuable to the younger sister of the convent, because the *mater* was “decorated with honourable old age” and “for so many years experienced in spiritual life.”<sup>28</sup> As the *mater* must have been old and wise before 1457/58, the date of the Brussels

26 The text is edited in DCOO (see above, n. 20), 38: 383–409. An inventory of the extant manuscripts is published by Emery, *Dionysii Cartusiensis* (see above, n. 20), 1A: 168, 191, 240, 353–354 and 365. For the Brussels manuscript, see J. Van den Gheyn, *Catalogue des manuscrits de la Bibliothèque Royale de Belgique*, 13 vols. (Brussels, 1901–1948), 3 (*Théologie*): 201–203; and for the date *Manuscrits datés conservés en Belgique*, 6 vols. (Brussels and Ghent 1968–1991), 3 (1441–1460): 87, Pl. 660–661. The manuscript was copied by Johannes de Scoville; see Émile Van Balberghe, “Un manuscrit de la *Vita Petrarcae* de Giannozzo Manetti (Bruxelles 11466–11478),” *Humanistica Lovaniensia. Journal of neo-Latin studies* 22 (1973), 77–82, there 81. A second copy of the text in manuscript Paris, Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, MS 532, fols. 131rb–143ra, also copied in 1457, belonged to the Regular Canons of Korsendonk, who were advocates of the enclosure; Henry Martin, *Catalogue des manuscrits de la Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal*, 9 vols. (Paris, 1885–1899), 1: 388–392. The autograph of Denys from the Roermond charterhouse (olim Roermond, charterhouse, inv. no. 22; inventory of Francois Bernard van der Renne, 1783) was destroyed in the library of Louvain during the first World War.

27 No copy from the Maaseik convent has been preserved. The text is not mentioned in the overview that prioress Bollen made of the Maaseik book collection as described by Deschamps, “Handschriften uit het Sint-Agnesklooster te Maaseik” (see above, n. 2), nor in the list of Van Dijk, *Handschriften bij de Hepperpoort* (see above, n. 2), Bijlage 1; cf. Delfosse, *Het Sint-Agnesklooster te Maaseik* (see above, n. 1), 191.

28 DCOO (see above, n. 20), 38: 387aAB: “... venerando senio decoratam, in spirituali conversatione tot annis exercitatam.”

manuscript, we can conclude that Oda Chraes was the Maaseik prioress who Denys addressed. Her successor, Elisabeth van der Eel, who died in 1482, did not have “honourable old age” before 1457. From this we may conclude that *De vita inclusarum* must have been written in or before 1452, the year in which Oda died.<sup>29</sup>

Originally, the text was most likely conceived for unidentified enclosed sisters, as it speaks in general terms about “a person, enclosed according to the form or rule prescribed to her.” Only after the text was finished, does it seem to be directed to Maaseik.<sup>30</sup> It addresses general issues starting from the reform at the beginning of the enclosed life till the highest union with God that can be reached. It teaches how to spend a day in solitude: Denys urged his reader not to extinguish spiritual zeal by being talkative, a weakness of women, but to learn to love the solitude of the cell like heaven. He wrote about the fruitfulness of the meditation on the passion, prayer and psalmody, how to deal with temptation and tribulation. In his opinion, women had the disadvantage of being less sensible and stable than men, but by nature they were more humble and more inclined to devotion than men. All these general teachings were needed to explain how the sister could follow in the footsteps of the Son of God and reach perfection. The treatise ends with the highest mystical contemplation of God.

*De vita inclusarum* is an example of Denys’s engagement with the world around him and shows how he communicated from his cell with the religious in his surroundings. He was informed about the needs of the inhabitants of female convents and provided them with a written instruction to direct their way of living. The Maaseik sisters could profit from his wisdom in their enclosed monastery. Even though they most likely did not sleep in separate cells, like the Carthusians, but in a dormitory, still Denys’s instruction showed them the way to reach spiritual focus, silence, and solitude to the highest degree that their choices allowed.

29 Delfosse, *Het Sint-Agnesklooster te Maaseik* (see above, n. 1), 27–28; the mothers of Maaseik are discussed and listed on 53–55. Lassus, the editor of a recent French translation Denys le Chartreux, *Livre de vie des recluses. De vita inclusarum. Introduction, traduction et notes par Louis-Albert Lassus*, ed. Louis-Albert Lassus [Spiritualité cartusienne] (Paris, 2003) suggests on 2, 5–7 that the text was written for a recluse, living in a cell at a parish church in a city. However, neither the introductory chapter nor the rest of the text fit a solitary recluse; the text does fit enclosed convent sisters, like Maaseik.

30 DCOO (see above, n. 20), 38: 392aB: *Persona ergo inclusa, juxta formam seu regulam sibi praescriptam.*

## 5 Conclusion

Maaseik is an example of how Carthusian monks influenced the monastic world in the fifteenth century. At least two Carthusians, James of Gruitrode and his friend Denys from Roermond supported the reform of the Maaseik sisters in a concrete way and helped them to learn how to live within the *claustrum*. In the exchange with these two monks, the sisters played an active role: they took the initiative to a reformed life and collected relevant literature. One of them, the first scribe, copied texts and had them bound outdoors. And *De vita inclusarum* was directed to them at the request of their own prioress who corresponded with Denys. Denys not only supported Maaseik, he also wrote several other texts to instruct the enclosed, like *De professione monastica*, dealing with the profession of “devout regular canonses who are enclosed,”<sup>31</sup> and *De vita et fine solitarii*, that was written at the request of “my beloved brother James,” as is mentioned above.<sup>32</sup> His *De reformatione claustralium*, focused on reform, was addressed to “the Benedictine monks of Saint-Truiden” according to the Brussels manuscript that was written at James’s command.<sup>33</sup> James in his turn inserted extensive quotations from a text of Denys, *De reformatione claustralium*, and from two of Denys’s other texts when composing his *De quintuplici definitione*, as Tom Gaens has recently demonstrated.<sup>34</sup> The cross-fertilization between the texts of Denys and James that Gaens exposes, confirms the close relationship between the two Carthusians.

The contact between the sisters of Maaseik and the two Carthusian monks dates from before Maaseik became a member of the Chapter of Venlo. Some of

31 DCOO (see above, n. 20), 38: 547–582, there 550: “... devotarum Regularissarum qui clausae sunt.” The final article of this text is addressed to the mater of such a convent. James cites this text in his *De quintuplici definitione nominis monachi secundum Climachum*, in which he also quotes from Denys’s *De reformatione claustralium*.

32 DCOO (see above, n. 20), 38: 263–322, there 266aC: “... mi carissime frater Iacobe.” Another example of a text that addresses the enclosed is *De reformatione monialium*, that appears to be an exhortation to reform spiritual life and to start living within the *clausura*. It is edited in DCOO (see above, n. 20), 38: 243–261.

33 Brussels, Royal Library, MS 9682–9699, fol. 135ra: “Explicit epistola fratris Dyonisii Carthusiensis de reformatione claustralium scripta monachis sancti Trudonis ordinis sancti Benedicti.”

34 Gaens, “*Spiritu Ihesu operante*” (see above, n. 5), 166–167. In *De quintuplici definitione nominis monachi* he also quotes from the preface, article 1 and 3 of *De reformatione claustralium*, and from *De professione monastica*. Furthermore, in *De preparatione ante missam* James excerpted a prayer from article 34 of Denys’s *De laude vitae solitariae* and in his *Coronula* he used Denys’s *Laus Cartusiana*.

the observations concerning Maaseik may be relevant for other monasteries of the Venlo chapter. One such monastery was Mariaweide in Venlo, which supported the founding of Maaseik by sending four of their nuns, among whom most likely the productive first scribe who was in contact with James. However the observations may also be relevant for Luciëndal in Sint-Truiden, which owned texts of the Carthusian Petrus Dorlandus, and Sint-Geertrui(d) in Den Bosch, that had a copy of James's *Coronula* translation.<sup>35</sup> The Carthusians seem to have virtually acted as vicars for the enclosed monasteries in the diocese of Liège, achieving pastoral care through the pen.

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35 Stoker and Verbeij, *Collecties op orde* (see above, n. 2), 2, number 1147 and 628. On Den Bosch, see also Gaens, "*Spiritu Jhesu operante*" (see above, n. 5), 157, and Gaens, "*Fons hortorum*" (see above, n. 4), 64–66.