

S 116 C3:2 A

ANALECTA CARTUSIANA
EDITOR: DR. JAMES HOGG

63

Die Ausbreitung
kartäusischen Lebens und Geistes
im Mittelalter

Band 2



1991

Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik
Universität Salzburg
A-5020 Salzburg
Austria

Edwin Mellen Press
240 Portage Road
Lewiston, New York 14092
USA

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Two Carthusian Histories, Their Authors and Audiences

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Two Carthusian histories, the first, *Fasciculus Temporum*, by Werner Rolevinck, printed in Cologne in 1474, and the second, an unpublished manuscript, (shelf mark: *e Museo* 160 Bodleian Library) finished in 1518, written in Northern England by anonymous Carthusian, are examples of the creation of pastoral texts within the Order. Both texts were written in the tradition of the Order which recognized that, "From early in its history, that withdrawal from the temptations of the world did not eliminate the need for pastoral care of those in its communities," (Gillespie 164) or even those outside the cloister. These two texts illustrate the Carthusian interest and concern with the development of individual spirituality and catechetical instruction, both for the members of the Order and those beyond its walls.

The first text, *Fasciculus Temporum*, a Latin history, by Rolevinck, was used by the English Carthusian author, as he compiled his own history in Middle English twenty-five years later. A comparison of the two works reveals a variety of interesting points about Carthusian notions of spirituality and pastoral instruction of the late fifteenth century. Such a comparison is especially fruitful because, while the two writers were working under the same directives about literary composition in their Order, their texts illustrate widely differing intents, written for different audiences. Both texts were concerned with the care of souls, a concern of the Carthusians, who exercised their pastoral duties through the medium of the written word.

Werner Rolevinck, the author of *Fasciculus Temporum* was a member of Charterhouse of St. Barbara in Cologne from 1447 until he died of plague in 1502 (Holzapfel 13). He was the author of a number of works, including this history, sermons, local histories and devotional works. His work was highly regarded by his contemporaries, and enjoyed a wide circulation via the printing press in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century. The *Fasciculus Temporum*, first printed in Cologne by Arnold Ther Hoernen, was reprinted over fifty times in various countries in the succeeding fifty years. The name of the Carthusian monk who wrote the *e Museo* 160 history is unknown and his history is still unpublished. The copy of the manuscript, dated 1518, is in the Bodleian Library bound in with two plays, *Christ's Burial* and *Christ's Resurrection*, two romance fragments and the beginning of an English translation of a meditation, all written in the same hand. The author was from Yorkshire, a member of either the Mount Grace or Kingston-on-Hull Charterhouse.

On first inspection the two works seem quite different. The *Fasciculus Temporum* is written in Latin prose while the *e Museo* 160 history is in Middle English verse. The author of the *e Museo* 160 history had a printed copy of Rolevinck's history as he composed his own. He acknowledges his debt to Rolevinck about half way through his text when he writes:

It is to be knowene that this last hundreth yere, which I call the xv(1500) hundrethe, is not complete after the boke callit Fasciculus Temporum for that endes in the yere of our lord (1474) mcccc threscor and fourteyne (*e Museo* 160 f. 92r).

Rolevinck has also used sources; he cites all the major authors associated with history of the medieval period, Eusebius, Augustine, Orosius, Bede, Isidore, and others. He is more formal in his acknowledgments of sources than the *e Museo* author. At one point, as he is explaining which sources he has followed in his chronology, he says:

Further in the sixth age we follow the chronology of Martin and Vincent who proceed in an abbreviated way up to their own time. After them further through the years 200 I follow a remarkable book, a certain one whose author I do not know who is extended almost to his own time. (f. 7r)

He also cites within his text, giving references to the various authors as the history unfolds; unlike the *e Museo* author, while noting names in the margin of his manuscript, he is basically presenting the work without the scholarly apparatus of citations. This variation in the method of acknowledging the authors points out the difference in the audience for whom the works were created.

Both authors have perceived the need for an accessible history, but for different purposes. Rolevinck has created his "little bundle of the things of history" in the same tradition that goes back to St. Augustine, who in his *De Catechizandis Rudibus*, emphasized the need for a *narratio* of history to be taught to new converts and outlined a plan for teaching all of human history, from Genesis through the last judgment (Horra11 97). Rolevinck also says in his prologue to *Fasciculus Temporum* that he writes for "the clerics and those who have the governing of the ecclesiastical polity" because they "... need to raise up their eyes to the histories of things done" in order "that they may learn, while enjoying good fortune, from good examples of worthy men, to pursue worthy works and in bad fortune to avoid the rocks of perdition" (f. 6v). He clearly intends his work to be sent out into the world for a larger audience than would be found in the convent.

Rolevinck is responding as did other writers of the time to the general dictum of Jean Gerson who commented that a significant part of the writer's role is his support for the church and its institutions and ministers (Gillespie 176). The church, says Gerson, is enriched by books and they contribute

to improving the *cura animarum*, arm the church for the fight against heresy and preserve it from error (Gillispie 176). It is clear from the comments that Rolevinck makes in his prologue that he has intended his book for the education of those who are not able to study all the original sources and earlier histories, but still need this information in order to govern the church and educate the members of the faithful.

Rolevinck recognizes that he is doing a service to those who cannot spend hours reading and has made, as he says, "history much like a painting, embracing the whole image of humankind in a single book, therefore giving authority to those who have labored before us, we have entered in our own little way sprinkling here and there what we have been able to." (Rolevinck f. 7r). And he has also explained that he realizes that the available histories are just too time consuming for busy clerics. He says: "But unless the valuable be separated from the less valuable, the reader will drown in a headlong rush, so the useless accumulation of things, the unnecessary and trivial, such as superstitions fables and interminable genealogies which are not important to the matter at hand have been cut off" (Rolevinck f. 6v). He has produced in about ninety-seven pages a rendition of the history of the world, complete with pictures and diagrams. But the cutting off of useless things is not the only service Rolevinck has rendered his reader.

Though his text is in Latin, its vernacular syntax and catalog like arrangement, while demanding a certain level of education, is well within the reach of the parish priest, educated lay person, or university student. He has also carefully constructed a time line starting at the beginning of the text, giving a running chronology of the passing of history, and its reverse counting back from the birth of Christ. He says: "Moreover I have fitted together sufficiently with toil the line of Assyrian and Roman and others from diverse histories...and have portrayed in the center of the leaf, circles with the proper name of the persons for whatever the time, and under and over two lines of which the top one with its numbers, descends from Adam to Christ ... and the second line which is lower, ascends in a reversed order from the birth of Christ to the creation of the world that the very thing might be known easily ... because this year is most revered by us and needs to be found most quickly" (Rolevinck 7r). So his history is laid out in a form that aids the reader with its visual cues to the passing of time, and is an ideal text for pastoral use. It was indeed most popular, and enjoyed the status of a best seller in the early days of printing, and was *the* universal history until it was replaced by the *Nuremberg Chronicle* and later Renaissance histories.

The *e Museo* 160 devotional history, so called because it hasn't even been accorded a title, has languished in almost total obscurity since its creation.¹ It is an interesting manuscript, which begins very much like an emblem book, but ends up as a summary of history.² It appears that the author began, as he says in his brief prologue, to create an emblem book of Old Testament figures, but, perhaps as he has received a copy of Rolevinck's history sometime in the process of creating the emblem work, he switched to a presentation of verse history.

In his preface he explains his plan: "Now in this present treyte ar made into ynglische metre a prayere to ychon of the said holy faders, patriarkes, prophetes, (wt a pictor of the sam) contenyng a part of their nobill dedes & holy lyves" (*e Museo* 160 f. 1r). For the first forty-three folios he has even left the top half of the page blank with a ruled off box for the promised pictures. However, only the first two pages have been illustrated. He presents his Old Testament figures, but by the time he has reached New Testament times, he shifts his mode of presentation. In the final folios, forty-four to one-hundred and eight, his presentation is chronological rather than topological. He divides history into hundred year periods for 100 AD to 1518. His focus is considerably widened because of the diversity of material he includes in his section. Everything is grist for his mill; he presents popes, kings, martyrs, saints, historical events, both trivial and great, battles, invasions, persecutions, heretical movements, crusades, comets, rivers of blood, and miracles.

Despite this diversity of material, the general outline for each century is the same. The author opens with a five to ten line prayer to Jesus, then gives a verse summary of the times which may extend from five to ten pages, and finally closes with a prayer to the saints and popes of the century followed by a list of their names. The pattern of information that is offered in the text gives the reader or listener an accessible and undemanding summary of history and teaching the reader how to use history as devotional aid. This pattern,

¹The first description in print of this text can be found in Donald Baker, John L. Murphy, and Louis B. Hall, eds. *The Late Medieval Religious Plays of Bodleian MSS Digby 133 and E Museo 160*, Early English Text Society. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1982.

²For a more extensive description of the *e Museo* 160 history see my two articles, "Historiography in an Early, Sixteenth-Century, English Manuscript: *e Museo* 160," in *Medieval Perspectives*, 1988 Issue (1987 Southeastern Medieval Association Conference, Appalachian State). And, "Historiography on the Eve of the Reformation," in *New Explorations, Old Texts: Essays from the Sixth Citadel Conference on Medieval and Renaissance Literature*, eds. David Allen and Robert White, Delaware: U of Delaware P, 1991.

repeated over and over, throughout the text points as does the information in the prologue to the audience for whom the history is intended.

While "... determining lay readership of printed religious books" may be a complex and difficult task (Driver 230), determining the readership for a manuscript that exists in a single copy only, written by a cloistered monk in the wilds of early sixteenth century Yorkshire is nearly impossible. However, the author does give clues within his text. First, the choice of the vernacular points to an intended audience. "In the upper houses, the function of the Prior in relation to the other monks was of "the first among equals," but in the lower houses, the Prior's function in the exercises of the pastoral ministry was more comparable to that of a priest in a secular environment (Gillispie 16). The lower houses in many monasteries consisted of various groups of lay brothers and domestics and were dependent on the monks of the upper house to provide catechetical and spiritual guidance. As early as 1156 Prior Basil in his *Consuetudines* expresses the need for books for instruction and private prayer in the vernacular for these members of the house. (Gillispie 166). The significance of this dictum, which was repeated in 1432, was that the Carthusian Order had direct experience of vernacular instruction of a pastoral and catechetical nature (Gillispie 166). And, since the Charterhouses of Mount Grace and Kingston-on-Hull, like other English Charterhouses, were centers for the production and transmission of texts, specifically vernacular, devotional writings, (Keiser "To Knowe God Almyghtyn" 105), it is not surprising that the *e Museo* 160 text is of this type.

The author in the prologue explains very specifically what the function of his text is for the reader. He indicates that those with the learning and leisure will be already acquainted with the material he is presenting. As he writes, "Unto this intent that alyf they be well enoughe knowen to tham that redes the hoole bibill," (f. 1r), he eliminates the group of readers who have the linguistic skills and time to study the Bible and the scholarly histories of earlier writers. The author further explains that he has created this work so that the deeds of the patriarchs, "may be mor shortly brought to mynd when thay ar son rede & comprehendit in a shorte sermond..." (f. 1r). And like other Carthusian translators, who "made serious modifications to [their] source in order to create a work accessible to a wider audience than the exclusively monastic one" (Keiser, *De Cella* 147), the *e Museo* author has adapted the passages from the Bible and Rolevinck's *Fasciculus Temporum* for his audience.

He continues to explain what he has in mind for the reader: "Therfor this trete is made in maner of prayer that the reder lese no tym for yf he dis-
pose hym yerto." Thus those in the lower houses whose work was mostly manual

labor (Gillispie 166), could receive vital instruction about the faith without wasting valuable time struggling with texts beyond their abilities or training.

In fact, the listener or reader will receive additional benefits, as the author says: "In the redinge he shall pray devowtly, lern gud vertues: and have a knowlege of the cowrse of holy scripture which god graunt at his pleasure" (f. 1r). How great a contrast is this modest claim to the one that Rolevinck makes for those who could read his text! Rolevinck explains that the reader of his history, by contemplating the things of "human industry, flying through these things and infinite other things by means of certain wings, of internal contemplation, not only of the past and present, but of the future, will move from similar things to similar things, progressing, if of good will conjoined, from a certain boredom to rise up to God for the purpose of first praising and finally to the desire to be dissolved and be with Christ for eternity" (Rolevinck f. 6v). This is certainly an exalted promise, but fits into the Carthusian vision of the use of any text, which was finally to move the reader to union with God. This use of a text as a basis for meditation and finally contemplation was basically reserved for the monks who had the time and training to do so.

The two histories, one Latin prose and the second in Middle English verse, illustrate the range of readers for whom the Carthusian authors created their texts. Undoubtedly the learned and pious Rolevinck envisioned his readers as capable of understanding the intricacies of time, history and theology. The anonymous English Carthusian who penned the *e Museo* history aimed his work at a different audience who would be captured by the vision of acquiring a simplified outline of history linked in nearly every line with prayer and moral instruction. The theological and scholarly dimension so present in Rolevinck, is subordinated to the devotional aims of the author of the *e Museo* text. But both authors were driven ultimately by the same desires, to witness to their vision of God's providential plan in the frame of human history and explain this vision in terms of intellectual, moral, spiritual development to their readers.

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JAMES HOGG

Levinus Ammonius¹ was born at Gand on 3 or 13 April 1485. He entered the charterhouse of Bois-Saint-Martin on 18 August 1506, where he was professed in 1507. His brother Jean also joined the Carthusians, - at La Chapelle, the house to which their father Jacques, who became an Augustinian canon after his wife's death, donated a substantial collection of books. Levinus was appointed procurator at Bois-Saint-Martin in 1529. His relations with the prior, Michel Diericx, who was also provincial visitor, were cordial right up to the prior's death in the winter of 1530. Levinus was allowed considerable liberty in his pursuit of humanistic studies, towards which the Flemish prior of the Grande Chartreuse, Guillaume Bibaut of Thielt (1521 - d. July 1535), was also sympathetic. Although Levinus was only taught Latin at school and criticized the inadequacy of his teachers in later life, he assiduously learnt Greek in the charterhouse and developed a great enthusiasm for classical literature. His extant letters, of which 86 date from his period at Bois-Saint-Martin in the years 1518-33, reveal his passionate pursuit of classical learning. In a letter dated 1 June 1521 he declares that he intended to transcribe the whole of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odysee*, as copies were too rare and expensive to allow the possibility of purchase. He was greatly aided in his studies by Canon Johannes de Molendino of Doornik, a regular correspondent of Erasmus 1515-34, who procured for him *Libanii sophistae graeci declamatiunculae aliquot eademque latinae per Des. Erasmum Rot., cum duabus orationibus Lysiae itidem versis incerto interprete, et aliis nonnullis*. In inclyta Basilea, ex aedibus Jo. Frob. Mense martios anno MDXXII, - a volume that also contained Isocrates on Peace and Lucian's *Abdicatus*. On the margins Levinus wrote his annotations. The volume was unfortunately destroyed by fire at the University of Louvain early in the present century.

In 1520 Levinus copied the four Gospels in Greek for the charterhouse library and one of his four transcripts of the Greek Psalter "cum canticis" is conserved at the library of Dresden under A. 304. By 1522 he seems to have so overstrained his eyesight by his continual studies that he was nearly blind in the left eye.

His correspondence, conserved in MS. 599 of the Bibliothèque publique de Besançon, a volume of 569 pages in quarto, to which were added 6 folios containing an index, presents 167 letters in Greek and Latin, addressed to 90 different persons, - priests, members of religious Orders, civic officials, who were in some way connected with the spread of humanism at the moment when protestantism was making inroads into the Low Countries.

The Collège des Trois Langues had been founded at Louvain in 1518 under the

¹ His name appears in various forms in the records: *Van der Maude, Vander Maude, Llévin, Livin, Liéven, Laevinus, Levinus, Livinus Ammonius, de Harena, de Arena, Van den Sande*.