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A Companion to Mysticism and Devotion in Northern Germany in the Late Middle Ages

Edited by
Elizabeth Andersen, Henrike Lähnemann and Anne Simon

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In memoriam Timothy McFarland
1936–2013
University College London

A wonderful friend and inspiring colleague to whose encouragement we owe a great deal
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We regard the translations as a distinctive feature of this volume. The early ones were done by Laura Ball, the later by Anne Simon. For help and consultation with the various translation tasks involved, we are indebted to Friedel Helga Roelfs, Frauke Thees and Gabriele Wright; for critical reading to Rabia Gregory, Jeffrey F. Hamburger, Silvia Ranawake, Ann Marie Rasmussen, Annette Volling and especially to Nigel F. Palmer and Stephen Mossman whose profound knowledge of the religious landscape of late medieval Germany provided a constant point of reference. For the dialect map, we received help from Robert Peters, who further defined the Low German dialects, and Sheila Watts, who clarified the English terminology. The copy-editing was done by Suzanne Dorf Hall and Rhonda Kronyk with the help of Jenny Lemke, Aletta Rochau and Almut Sichler.

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Elizabeth Andersen, Henrike Lähnemann and Anne Simon
Newcastle upon Tyne, Easter 2013
CHAPTER FOURTEEN

INTELLECTUAL HORIZONS: LETTERS FROM A NORTHERN GERMAN CONVENT

Eva Schlotheuber

The role of monasteries as religious, cultural, and intellectual centres in medieval society has long been recognized. For nunneries, however, the often strictly enclosed life led by women renders the extent to which they could participate in, or even shape, the intellectual life of their era less apparent. We know much about the academic education of monks and secular clergy in the monastery and cathedral schools, but very little about the intellectual training of religious women. Could they understand the Bible, the writings of the Church Fathers, and the legacy of learned Latin texts for themselves, or were they dependent on interpretation by their provosts and confessors? In order to appreciate spiritual women’s independent expression of their religious experience, we need to know the age at which they entered the convent and the level of education received there, as this was the basis on which they developed their own distinctive spiritual expression, an expression often significantly shaped by mysticism. The nuns’ communication with their families, the city council, laity and clergy, neighbouring convents, and representatives of the diocesan cathedral was determined by their linguistic competence and ability not only to passively understand but also to work independently with texts, shaped by their theological training and reading.

The nuns’ education, combined with convent tradition and the religious and spiritual environment, created a specific mode of spiritual expression for each community (→ Lähnemann). In this respect, regardless of the particular order to which they belonged, the Dutch and southern German convents developed traditions that differed from the northern German ones. We may thus conceive of different monastic landscapes and use them as a methodological approach. Since this approach takes as its starting point (monastic) centres—in contrast to the modern concept of space, which is defined by borders—it corresponds more closely to the actual situation in the Middle Ages, when geographical space was determined
and dominated by such centres (→ Bollmann). In this chapter, the centres we shall consider are the northern German religious houses, which as religious, social, and economic hubs shaped their immediate environment and, hence, the region. Such influence was possible because medieval convents were not supported merely by the individual families that endowed them, but also by the fruende—the wider social circles connected to relatives and friends. Daughters from these families lived together in the convents; the families were connected to each other by marriage and would frequently have their family tombs in the convent cemetery. Thus, the women were tied into a network of social relationships and obligations. Indeed, recent research has revealed that over many generations the ties between the families that endowed convents, their social circles, and the female communities themselves remained much closer than was the case for monasteries. It is this web, or personal network, which naturally included both lay and religious male relatives, that defined the convents’ sphere of action and within which they operated. Normally, it is not easy to quantify the number of relationships in the networks woven by each convent, let alone determine their quality. However, the collection of letters from the Benedictine convent of Lüne allows us special access to the nuns’ intellectual horizons and social practices. This collection, hitherto almost unknown, consists of around 1,800 letters written between 1480 and 1555, collected and copied by the nuns in three volumes ("Briefkopiare", illustration 11). The letters not only illustrate how women living a strictly enclosed life shared knowledge and information, but also reveal the women’s linguistic competence and their applied knowledge, that is, the knowledge that was essential for communication in everyday religious life.

The Letters from the Benedictine Convent in Lüne

Qui vult ridere/ debet ista scripta videre./
Penna fuit vils/ sensus et manus puellis;/ penna nihil valuit/ dicit qui bene scribere nescit./

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2 Schlotheuber, "Familiengründungen in fränkischen Diözesen" (2009).
3 Klosterarchiv Lüne, ‘Handschriftenruhe’ (‘manuscript chest’ referred to as ‘MsC’ in the following text) ms. 15, ms. 30, ms. 32; cf. Nolte, Quellen und Studien zur Geschichte des Nonnenklosters Lüne bei Lünebach (1932), 26ff.

(vinum ferratum), symbolizing the humanity of Christ in the Passion and the harshness of the Cross. Then he could drink the "purified wine", vinum defecatum, "with the angels", and, third, the "clarified wine" (vinum claritatum) that is given to the apostles. Fourth, he might enjoy "rose wine" (vinum rosatum) with the martyrs; fifth, "sage wine" (vinum salviatum) with the confessors; sixth, the "spiced wine, often drunk warm" (vinum conditum), and enjoyed by the host of virgins; and, finally, the vinum glorificatum that rewards the host of the elect. In this way each of the seven celestial hierarchies is dealt with, the spiritual virgins elegantly positioning themselves therein as the "brides of Christ", with the aim of their shared spiritual life being a lofty position in the celestial hierarchy, in the eternal, divine order. The girls had prepared a literary "banquet" for the Provost and his familia. It is easy to imagine this cheerful letter, with its satisfying rhymes, read aloud during the banquet enjoyed by the Provost and the other clerics and scholars. The young nuns also seem to use the humorous concluding poem quoted above to poke fun at their own eloquence: laughter was clearly allowed. We have before us a letter of spiritual friendship, which accompanies the nuns' material gift. The letter attains a high level of linguistic and theological accomplishment and is evidently designed to show the Provost that the schoolgirls knew how to express themselves in Latin; had understood the liturgy for Palm Sunday; and, furthermore, knew how to set the meal prepared for the day within its spiritual context and how to interpret it. The convent school taught not only the ars dictaminis, or art of letter writing, but also how to interpret the world in which the nuns lived, thereby imbuing it with specific symbolism and deeper meaning. Thus the letter is not only a product of late-medieval attempts at reform, which advocated an internalized religiosity and a spiritual outlook which penetrated all areas of their life; it also bears testimony to the intensive education provided for the novices at Lüne, who were evidently fluent in both their passive and active mastery of learned Latin.

The convent of Lüne was founded in 1172, probably originally as a foundation for noble canonesses, although it later followed the Rule of St Benedict (most likely from the second half of the 13th century onwards). To assist in reforming the convent in 1481, nuns were summoned from the neighbouring Benedictine convent in Ebstorf, which had already been reformed. At the behest of the Bishop of Hildesheim, Berthold of Landsberg (before 1464–1502), Ebstorf's Provost, Matthias, came to Lüne on 18 October and announced the arrival of seven nuns from Ebstorf for the following day. Also present at the visitation were Otto Vulle, formerly Provost of Lüne (c. 1470) and now Dean in Verden; the Canon from Verden, Hermann Schuten; and Gerhard Hapelaghe, Vicar of Buxtehude. They undertook a revival of spiritual life in line with the Bursfelde Reform and subjected the convent to interrogation. Although no serious malpractices or misdemeanours were ever established, the prioress and former sub-priores were removed from office. Through circumvention of the community's voting rights, Sophia of Bodendike (1481–1504), a nun from Ebstorf and niece of Bishop Berthold of Hildesheim, was promoted to prioress; and Gertrude of Elzen, Provost Matthias's niece, became the sub-prioress.

Eodem anno reformatum est monasterium Lune super feriam sextam, alia die post festum sancti Luciae evacangeliste quod illo anno [1] fuit super feriam quintam. Sex virgines et una conversa venerunt hic de Ebekesterope pro reformatione et una ex illis nomine Sophia de Bodendike eligebatur in priorissam huius monasterii super sabbatum. Eodem die eligebatur ex illis in subpriorissam nomine Gertrudis de Elzen. In the same year the convent of Lüne was reformed on a Friday, a day after the feast of St Luke the Evangelist, which in this year fell on a Thursday [19 October 1481]. Six virgins and one lay sister came here from Ebstorf for the reform; one of them, Sophia of Bodendike, was elected Prioress of this convent on Sunday. On the same day, one of them, Gertrude of Elzen, was elected sub-Prioress.

Around 1490 there were probably about 33 nuns at Lüne (Appendix 14a). The girls' letter strongly suggests that there were also 35 lay sisters living in Lüne, which means the community was one of the larger convents (Appendix 14b). The oldest of the three collections of letters (ms. 15) was compiled about 1483, shortly after the reform. Octavo in format, it consists of 35 individual quires written by a considerable number of different hands. Although the oldest letter in this collection is dated 1450, the manuscript was probably compiled in its present form only after the

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6 Note, Quellen, 127f.
8 Note, Quellen, 127.
9 Klosterarchiv Lüne, Ms C, fol. 1r-1r. Note, Quellen, 127 n. 4.
10 Note, Quellen, 26–29.
death of the Prioress Mechthild Wilde, as the 12th quire contains a letter dated 7 December 1535. To date, the only person to devote attention to this collection of letters from Lüne is Ernst Nolte, who briefly describes the three manuscripts. The other two manuscripts are quarto and divided according to outgoing and incoming correspondence: ms. 30 is a register of all outgoing correspondence, and ms. 31 contains the letters received by the convent. In both these later collections, the letters appear to be ordered according to their senders. The letters are written not just by office-holders: the collections also contain correspondence by 'simple' nuns. The letters reveal a dense network of relatives in the neighbouring convents of Lüne, Ebstorf, Medingen, Walsrode, and Wienhausen. They are roughly ordered according to date and are not recognizably ordered according to content. These manuscripts have been largely ignored until now: ms. 15 is not even fully foliated. Hence, the appendix to this essay provides the text of the letters discussed here. The language in which the letters are written depends on the recipient: letters to ecclesiastics are in Latin; those to neighbouring convents generally in a characteristic mixture of Latin and Low German; and letters to lay men, such as members of the Lüneburg City Council, are composed completely in Low German (+ Lähnemann). What, then, did the education of the ladies at Lüne look like, as it clearly enabled the whole convent to express itself in the most elegant, sophisticated, scholarly Latin?

**Entering the Convent, Education and Knowledge of Latin**

Despite numerous studies, we still know little about the standard of education received by the nuns, lessons in the convent school, or the possibilities for linguistic expression open to religious women. For a long time, intensive research into the intellectual profiles of famous female mystics obscured the question of the general education of women living in convents. In what context should great mystics such as Mechthild of Hackeborn, Gertrude of Helfta, or Margarete Ebner be seen and appreciated (+ Hellgardt; Nemes)? Were they solitary exceptions, or were they rooted in a lively religious discourse within the convents and in their own tradition of theological interpretation? Burkhard Hasebrink suggests the education of religious women was reflected less in text production than in

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11 Ehrenschwendiener, *Die Bildung der Dominikanerinnen; Schlotheuber, Klostereintritt und Bildung.*


not just in the language but also in the skill in organizing information or categorizing it according to different areas of convent life. The written culture also reflects the different practices transmitted within convents. A rich source for information regarding daily life in the convent is the Liber usuum, the canonical translation of and commentary on Cistercian practices by a Cistercian nun from Lichtenthal in the second half of the 15th century.16 The Geschicht-Buech of the abbesses of Frauentheimssee,17 begun in 1468, and the "Hausbuch" of the Birgitteins of Maria Mai near Augsburg provide further examples.18 As documents produced within the convent for everyday use, such texts have usually been found stored in a convent's archives rather than its library. Like the previous two examples, the "Hausbuch" of the Dominican nuns from Altenhovenau (1509–1515)19 is written in German; it served a predominantly economic purpose. However—and this is typical for the often motley mixture of information in such books—a report on the acceptance of reform in 1465 was added to the text (fol. 497r), although there was no chronological connection. Thus, the records produced by the Dominican nuns at Altenhovenau provide us with the first indication that, even if convent material is predominantly composed in German, we should not be too quick to assume that religious women were entirely excluded from the world of learned Latin. The Dominican nuns recorded the titles of their newly acquired books in separate lists according to whether the works were in Latin or in German.20 As books in both languages were acquired in equal measure, the nuns' passive knowledge of Latin must have been at least sufficient,21 especially as this knowledge was indispensable for the performance of the liturgy.

Interestingly, in 1496 Altenhovenau acquired a book that was intended to serve as a library catalogue or book inventory: Ein puch in die liberey, ist ein register der andern pucher.22 From this we may conclude that the convent library must have been quite extensive. Other writings intended for internal convent use are the records of the Nuremberg Poor Clares and their Abbess, Caritas Pirkheimer (1467–1532), known as the Deutsche Chronik.23 This title is, however, rather misleading, as the text is, in fact, a translated and annotated collection of documents from the convent.24 Although the Abbess herself wrote excellent Latin and her fellow nuns possessed at least a good passive knowledge of the language, it was considered sensible to make the convent's privileges more accessible by translating them from Latin into German and simultaneously organizing them systematically in order to gain a precise overview of the convent's charters and privileges. The German texts cited as examples above suggest that the usual language in these convents was German, and the writings of Anna Roede from the Westphalian convent of Herzbrock (16th century) also belong in this context.25 Other types of source also support the observation that German was usually used for the purposes of communication. Examples include the extensive correspondence of the Poor Clares from Söflingen (near Ulm) from the second half of the 15th century,26 or the sister-books and convent chronicles they composed to edify their community and serve as models for guidance in their own lives. From the 14th century onwards these were written completely in German, partly by the women themselves (the Emmericher Schwesternbuch, for example) and partly by their male supervisors27 (→ Bollmann).

17 Hauptstaatsarchiv Munich, Frauentheimssee Kl. 87, Geschicht-Buech der abesse Magdalena Auer (1469–1494). The first part was written on her commission by her chaplains Peter Franck. Cf. Schlotheuber, Klosterinrit und Bildung, 379f.
18 Staatsarchiv Augsburg, Malingen Kl. 1, Das Hausbuch des Birgittenklosters Maria Mai (Malingen/Ries 1522); cf. Nyberg, "Das Hausbuch des Klosters Malingen" (1971); Nyberg, "Der Ritus der Abissinnenwelte im Birgittenkloster Maria Mai, Malingen/Ries" (2001).
20 Hauptstaatsarchiv Munich, Altenhovenau Kl. lit. 12, fol. 505v–506r (Latin texts), fol. 507r (new acquisition in German).
21 The most recent publication on this topic: Schlotheuber, "Buecher und Bildung", 241–252.
22 Hauptstaatsarchiv Munich, Altenhovenau Kl. lit. 12, fol. 506r.
24 Munich, Bayerisches Nationalmuseum, ms. 1591, original text of the "German Chronicle" from the Poor Clares in Nuremberg (Parchment, after 1503); Staatsarchiv Nuremberg, Kloster St Klar, Acta et Volumes Nr. 1, Concept of the "German Chronicle" of the Nuremberg Poor Clare Convent (produced around 1490, with numerous additions until 1503).
The use of German within the convent does indicate the nuns’ active use of Latin had declined, although in many cases passive skills may still be assumed. We encounter a similar situation in the Dutch convents affiliated to the *Devotio moderna* (→ Bollmann): their libraries were full of works in the vernacular, and since their statutes served as guidelines for their spiritual lives these were translated into the vernacular as well. However, the nuns’ monolingualism had direct consequences for their everyday lives: when the Augustinian Canonesses in Memmingen underwent an official visitation by representatives of their order, they were heavily criticised for not adhering to the ten articles of reform that had been imposed upon them. The nuns excused themselves by claiming adherent had been impossible because the Provost had only produced a brief, summarizing translation into German and had assured them that the articles would not result in their convent life becoming any more burdensome. At a hearing before the council the Provost frankly admitted this.

Upon closer observation, however, it becomes apparent that most of the sources indicating widespread monolingualism stem from the southern German region. Those from the northern German convents paint a very different picture. They reveal a monastic landscape with its own character as well as its own distinct religious and literary traditions. The majority of texts from within the convents of Ebstorf and Lüne and the Cistercian convents of Warßungerode, Derenburg, Wienhausen, Isenhagen, and Heilig-Kreuz near Brunswick are in Latin. Furthermore, their libraries consisted mainly of books and treatises in Latin. The rich late-medieval holdings in Lüne constitute impressive testimony to the linguistic competence of Benedictine nuns. There was no need to translate the Bursfelde Statutes, which were regularly read out in chapter, and the whole convent obviously possessed a good active knowledge of Latin: it was self-evident that, in her book of office, the sancta at Lüne should note details of the daily liturgical ritual of the convent, as well as the ritual on feast days, in elegant Latin. A Latin report on the introduction of the reform at Lüne is probably the starting point for the keeping of records to document important events within the convent. Momentous occasions such as the convent’s first election of a prioress after the reform in 1504 were regularly recorded in Latin. This text in particular, written by an anonymous nun at Lüne, is distinguished by clear phrasing and a descriptive style that aids the imaginative reconstruction of events. The aim was to record important events for posterity, and the skills necessary for such textual mastery were practised in the convent school. Moreover, the newly elected head of the convent herself, the former cellareria Mechthild Wilde (1504–1535), uses Latin to describe the process of her election and subsequently notes the first few events of her period in office. The contents of these scattered notes, written partly on paper in hasty cursive script, were tidied up shortly after 1506 and transferred in a careful Gothic *textualis* to a manuscript that was later given the title of the *Lüne Chronicle*. However, even here we are not dealing with a chronicle in the strict sense of the word, but with a text in which individual notes and items of news were compiled haphazardly, without critical evaluation or literary aspiration, for the use of the convent community. However, the texts from Lüne bear witness not only to a mastery of both Latin and German, but also to the nuns’ ability and desire to create a written account of their daily life in the convent. They served communal memory as well as performing a corrective function, and reveals a remarkable level of reflection. In contrast to the Benedictines at Frauenchiemsee and the Birgitine nuns at Malbingen, who cheerfully placed notes regarding internal matters, administrative information, dates of ordination, and short lists of property holdings alongside each other, the *sacrista* at Lüne divided the convent’s daily life into three areas (*liturgica routine*, *memoria* and anniversary celebrations, and anything concerning the novices), and organized diverse information accordingly.

The intensive correspondence of the nuns at Lüne must be seen within the context of a lively tradition of writing and composition in which, even when the texts were intended only for their own community, the women had gained considerable practice in the reflection of their own daily lives and in literary expression. Together with the nuns’ letters, these internal texts provide evidence not only of the high quality of expression in the

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28 Van Dijk, *De constituties der Windekeixeheemse vrouwenkloosters voor 1559.*
foreign language that was Latin, but also of an intense written exchange between convents both during and after the reform. Their mutual influence can also be seen: linked together as they were, the convents could to some extent maintain their own linguistic environment, one appropriate to their own specific needs. However, the nuns' linguistic competence also had a not inconsiderable effect outside the convent. As Administrator of the diocese of Verden, the Bishop of Hildesheim, Berthold of Landsberg, was responsible for the convent of Lüne. In a letter replying to the nuns, he praised them for the excellent, elegant language and good exegetical abilities revealed to him by their letters. The letter is dated 13 March 1494: *Datum [* ... raptissime manu propria feria quinta post Letare anno etc. XCIHI solito sub signetum* ("Written in my own hand on the Friday after Laetare Sunday in the year 1494 with the usual seal"):

> Bertoldus dei gratia episcopus Hildensensis et administrator Verdensis ecclesiarum. Sincissimia in Cristo affectione premissa, religioso et dilectissimo in Christo filie, religiosam conversationem laudabilemque vitam vestram, ludum nobis perspexit, rerum magista affecti experience, hodie vero quis in doctrina fructus, in colligendo modus, in scribendo stilus, in dicendo oratam personis vestris ornatissimis discipline studio accesserit, novissimae hec [* ... littere docuerunt, unde non possimus merito non letari tante vestre probitati, que in aperto est, sanum intellectum sacramurum scripturarum, quantum satis est, multas dulcedines et consolaciones atulisse, quod quia rurum est vestro sexuique [* ... insolitum, nisi venerabilis propositus vester veritatem persuasisset vix crederem pre admiracione licisset, sed agite ut cepistis doctas personas, ut congregatio vestri habeat quam plures longa aevi duratione sibi vicissim succedentes [* ...].

Berthold, by Grace of God Bishop of Hildesheim and Administrator of the Church of Verden starts by sending you, his pious and deeply beloved daughter, his most heartfelt regards. Recently we were able to assure ourselves scrupulously with our own eyes of your pious and praiseworthy conduct of your lives—for indeed experience is our teacher in all things—but not until today did your most recent letter teach me what fruits of scholarship, what sound prudence in collecting evidence, what elegant style and what beauty of speech you, such excellent persons, have attained through your endeavours to acquire schooling. Hence we must rightly rejoice that of your exemplary moral virtues, which are there for all to see, the proper understanding of Holy Scripture has brought you manifold sweetness and comfort in such rich abundance. As such things are rare and not at all common in your sex, pure astonishment would have rendered it barely possible for us to believe all this, had not your honourable Provost convinced us that it was indeed true. Do, therefore, continue as you have begun, as educated people [* ...].

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36 Klosterarchiv Lüne, ‘MsC’ ms. 15, sixth quire, fol. 21r–21v.


38 Heinrich Rüthing reaches the same conclusion for the library of the Cistercian convent at Wölltingerode, Rüthing, "Die mittelalterliche Bibliothek des Zisterzienserinnenklosters Wölltingerode" (1994), 154.

the spiritual centre of convent life in prayer.\textsuperscript{40} Three lengthy Low German sermon manuscripts have been preserved. They contain sermons, in translation, by the two Dominicans Jacobus de Voragine († 1298) and Johannes Herolt († 1468), by the Cistercian Bernard of Clairvaux († 1153), and the Augustinian hermit Heinrich of Friemar the Elder († 1340).\textsuperscript{41} They also include one of the most widely read devotional books of the 14th and 15th centuries, the Büchlein der ewigen Weisheit ("Little Book of Eternal Wisdom") by the Dominican Heinrich Seuse († 1366) (→ Warnar). The large collection of Seuse's writings suggests that his works were popular in Ebstorf. They provided suitable reading for the nuns, as Seuse had dedicated himself intensively to the cura animarum ("pastoral care") in convents. The convent library also offered the Horologium sapientiae, a new extended edition of the Little Book of Eternal Wisdom in Latin enlarged by reflections on the nature of convents and of scholarly study. The Horologium sapientiae is included in a library codex written partly in German and partly in Latin (ms. IV 12) in which a whole series of texts by the most important mystical authors were bound together. These include the Rede der unterscheidung, sermons and compilations of quotes by Meister Eckhart (†1328) (→ Warnar), who was Seuse's teacher for the Dominican Studium generale in Cologne. Their sheer number indicates that Eckhart was highly regarded in Ebstorf. Bound together with these texts are sermons by the Dominican Johannes of Stengassen (Head of the Cologne Studium generale around 1320); an extract from De spiritualibus ascensionibus by Gerard Zerbolt van Zutphen († 1398), an important representative of the Devotio moderna (→ Hascher-Burger); the Stimulus amoris by Pseudo-Bonaventura, and several Pseudo-Bernardine texts. The codex also included the 'bestsellers' of spiritual reform literature, De imitatione Christi by Thomas à Kempis (15th century) and the equally widely disseminated Vita Christi by Ludolf of Saxony († 1378), who was first a Dominican and later a Carthusian. Together with extracts from the Liber specialis gratiae by the mystic Mechthild of Hackeborn (ms. IV 4), who died in 1289/1299 in the Cistercian convent of Helfta (→ Hellgardt), these texts vividly demonstrate the reception of mystical texts, above all those by Dominican theologians written as part of their pastoral care for nuns. It is probably no coincidence that the only two codices to be preserved from the convent's older, now lost, holdings were a manuscript written entirely in Latin, ms. IV 4, from the 14th century and a prayer book,\textsuperscript{42} since, tellingly, the Latin manuscript contains texts by the Church Fathers Augustine, Ambrose, and Jerome, who remained relevant in the new, reformed context as well.\textsuperscript{43} In another codex, ms. IV 29, the nuns had the Decretals of Pope Gregory IX († 1241) readily at hand.

Exploring the avenues of linguistic expression available to the nuns leads one to examine their education. Whereas men who entered monasteries were usually educated adults who had decided, during or after their studies, to lead a religious life, the starting point for women entering convents was fundamentally different. Future nuns were generally received into the foundation when they were still children, so the education of the next generation fell almost entirely to the convent.\textsuperscript{44} This practice led to a problem latent in all convents: the level of education in a convent depended largely on the magistra's own level of knowledge, so that the ability adequately to understand and write Latin could decrease from generation to generation. In the Cistercian convent of Lichenthal, near Baden-Baden, the nuns' knowledge of Latin eventually became so inadequate they could neither read nor understand the commented rules, table readings, or the liturgical texts vital to everyday convent life. A Cistercian nun, Sister Regula, sent to Lichenthal as part of the reform, became active as a translator and copyist in order to make the books of table readings accessible once again to those nuns without any Latin.\textsuperscript{45} Educating future nuns was a key part of convent life for it was here that the skills and attitudes of the next generation were formed. It was here that a start had to be made if the novices' inner attitude to spiritual life was to be deepened and the future convent schooled in the spirit of reform. As the nuns' education was entirely devoted to their liturgical and spiritual duties, it was not possible to admit lay girls to the convent.\textsuperscript{46} If future nuns lived in too close a community with girls who would later leave the convent, this would make not just the education of the next

\textsuperscript{40} Härtel, "Die Klosterbibliothek," 245f.
\textsuperscript{41} Giermann and Härtel, Handschriften, Mss. VI 5, VI 6 and VI 19.
\textsuperscript{42} Ms. IV 16. On the lost library of the 14th and 15th centuries, Härtel, "Die Klosterbibliothek," 257f.
\textsuperscript{43} Giermann and Härtel, Handschriften, Ms. IV 24.
\textsuperscript{44} Scholetheuber, Klosterertritt und Bildung, 111–120.
\textsuperscript{46} Scholetheuber, Klosterertritt und Bildung, 111.
generation considerably more difficult but, more concretely, the maintenance of enclosure would be threatened.

The education of the nuns lasted approximately five to six years and required substantial input from the community. This sustained communal effort was what Bishop Berthold of Hildesheim had in mind when he praised the nuns at Lüne for their discipline studium and expressed his hope that this high standard would be maintained for many years to come. Thanks to the careful record keeping of the sacrista at Lüne, we can ascertain the age of the girls entering the school and reconstruct the various milestones they passed. According to these records, the future nuns began their schooling one year after entering the convent. Magdalene Schneverding, for example, arrived in Lüne in 1515 at age seven and started school a year later, attending it for seven years (until 1523).47 The convent's reform statutes also furnish an indication of the formal educational goals. The introduction states that it is part of the set-up of the school that every girl "should learn according to her age and ability; this must be observed most closely for girls of a tender age." Once they had diligently learnt how to read and write (diligenter litteris imbute) and had been sufficiently instructed with academic rigour in scholarly knowledge and the monastic order (scientia et disciplina erudite ac scolasticali rigore sufficierent instruente), "the priess [could] humbly petition the provost to allow them to leave the school".48

From the Latin essays by the Ebstorf schoolgirls, it emerges that the abbess personally examined the candidates' Latin dictamina before they took perpetual vows.49 The immense importance accorded by the convent to education is evident in the graduation ceremony for the girls leaving the convent school. On this occasion—the so-called release from the academic yoke (a iugo scolasticali)—the provost preached a sermon for the candidates and concelebrated in the chapter house.50 As a rule, girls had to complete their convent education before taking their vows. By the time Magdalena Schneverding professed in 1525, she had already been living at Lüne for ten years, just like Anna of Bülow, who left the convent school after five years. However, an adequate level of knowledge was considered so important at Lüne that in 1507 three nuns, although permitted to take their perpetual vows, had to remain at school for another year.51

The Nuns' Letters: Applied Knowledge

The allegorical understanding of and ability to interpret both sacred and secular daily life shaped the nuns' thought and linguistic expression. Within it we can recognize certain central metaphors that clearly belonged to particular literary circles: in southern Germany, popular metaphors included the heart-convent allegory (the inner enclosure of the heart; sealing the senses)52 or the spiritual voyage; whereas in the texts from Lüne the vineyard allegory is much more dominant. The complex, layered meanings present in the nuns' allegorical language enabled them to express the transcendental level of their existence and activities as well as to refer to actual events.

The obituary of Gertrude of Elzen, a former Benedictine nun at Ebstorf who became sub-prioress at Lüne during the reform in 1488, provides an instance of this, as well as an example of the use of literature to overcome bereavement and grief. The letter is addressed to the neighbouring community in Ebstorf, which had lost one of its former members upon Sister Gertrude's death. It was written by another nun, originally from Ebstorf, who had obviously been a long-time companion of Gertrude. As usual, she names herself only with her initials (B.H.), and the letter is written in the mixture of Latin and Low German typical of documents written to the neighbouring convents. These letters begin with a general aphorism, rather like a preamble, that establishes the tone and theme before a personal link is established by naming the recipient.53 In this particular case, a letter of condolence, the theme of solace is addressed: "May the Lord's fountain of mercy provide you with pious comfort in your tribulations". Grief at the death of the nun, of the "most worthy and beloved mother," is first arrestingly captured in words and anchored in the body as an emotion: the nuns' inner hearts are in anguish at the loss. Almost imperceptibly, the reader is led from an expression of deep grief and sadness to the recollection and veneration of Gertrude of Elzen's life. In a somewhat flowery turn of phrase, her relocation from Ebstorf to Lüne with

47 Schlothueber, Klosterermittritt und Bildung, 141f.; for more examples see 148 n. 196.
48 Klosterarchiv Lüne, MsC Ms. 14 (Statute book) fol. 20v.
49 Convent Archives Ebstorf, Ms. V 4, fol. 48v.-49v.
50 Ebd. fol. 21v.-22v.
51 Schlothueber, Klosterermittritt und Bildung, 150f.
53 Camargo, Ars dictaminis—ars dictandi.
her beloved Sophia of Bodendike (the reform abbess) on the path of holy reform is likened to bearing the ripe grapes of a religious life in Christ, the true vine. The subsequent Low German lines are shot through with countless Latin expressions. According to the letter, Gertrude of Elzen received an excellent education in Ebstorf from earliest childhood (a tenera infan-
tia); she was introduced to the austerity of reform "together with us in the school of virtues by the sweet and wise schoolmistress," thereby growing strong in the Lord's vineyard and bringing forth rich fruit. Building on these foundations, the letter of condolence brings comfort to its readers by revealing the heavenly joys deservedly awaiting Gertrude of Elzen as the bride of Christ in Heaven among the other virgins now that God has called her to Himself, releasing her from earthly toil after her long years of unrelenting care and labour. Last but not least, the literary expression of this letter, which is written by a practised hand and deeply felt, displays great professionalism. As Bishop Berthold had already emphasized, the nuns at Lüne possessed the art of comforting others through words alone and with it the transcendence of a daily life constantly under threat from danger and death. This attribute made them desirable as correspondents, as the large number of letters both written and received in the few years following the reform testify. Not only did the nuns have at their disposal their own networks of communication through their connections to the other convents, they obviously occupied an independent and respected position in the regional communication between laity and clergy as well.

They could also use these skills to assert their own rights. In March 1517, the Abbess of Medingen, Elizabeth I of Elvern (1513–1524), turned to her colleague, the Abbess of Lüne, for legal advice. Following a long introduction highlighting the good relationship between both convents and the part played by Medingen in the fortunes of the women at Lüne, Elizabeth broaches the reason for her letter: Ceterum—"by the way", following the death of Johannes Tegeler, a vicarate at St Lambert's church in Lüneburg had become vacant. They would like to present their own confessor for this position, but so that they might actually succeed in the appointment, Elizabeth asks the abbess at Lüne to check whether she still has any rights (ichteswelke iura) from the von Dalenborn family, as the position was last filled by someone from Lüne. She also asks the abbess to let her know the contents of the foundation letter for the vicarate, so that her appointee might legally receive the benefice. This example highlights the importance of the convent's own archives for asserting their rights. To be able to assert their rights and claims over those of competing parties from within the enclosure of their convent, the nuns were much more dependent on written communication than were lay circles or monasteries.

When Elizabeth I of Elvern's nieces Dorothear of Elvern and Anna Schomaker were formally admitted to the convent at Lüne in 1518, the Abbess of Medingen honoured the occasion with a letter and some small presents for the girls. Anna was probably the daughter of Hartwig Schomaker († 1546) and Gertrude Elvern, who had married in 1494. Female members of the noble family of Elvern usually entered the convent of Medingen. By 1518, Dorothea of Elvern had already been in the convent for three years, having in all likelihood been admitted in 1515, aged five. At her investiture in 1515 she was still under the age of majority, so this step later had to be confirmed by her profession. The investiture of both girls is also mentioned in the Lüner Chronik. Two years later, in 1520, Dorothea ceremoniously graduated from the convent school and took perpetual profession in 1524, having attained the age of majority. Elizabeth I of Elvern greets both her nieces on this day as "fellow citizens of the angels, members of the household of God and brides of Christ" (concives angelorum, domestice dei ac sponsae Christi). The act was celebrated as a spiritual wedding, for in taking this step the girls put off their "worldly dress" in order to don their "spiritual one," thereby binding themselves legally to convent life. As the abbess put it, they had now chosen Christ as their bridegroom. Elegant liturgical quotations from the investiture ceremony, which took place in the nuns' choir during mass, are woven into the whole letter: now, she writes, both girls will be clothed with the "robe of salvation, the robe of religion and the garment of righteousness" (Appendix 14c). At the same time the letter is an urgent admonition that they, chosen from hundreds of thousands of people (mille milia hominum) to be brides of Christ, should in humility and obedience be worthy of the high demands of convent life. The exalted self image expressed here—"chosen from among thousands"—is justified primarily through the special access to God, or particular intimacy with God, enjoyed by spiritual virgins. The unio mystica, understood as the soul's inner path to God, was the key to this access. Although complete "unification of the soul with God" was as a rule only achieved after death, the mystics showed the way by illustrating the soul's journey to Him. This could serve as a guideline and signpost

54 Klosterarchiv Lüne, 'Ms C' Ms. 13, fol. 78'. On the rite of investiture Schlotheuber, Klosterertritt und Bildung, 134–146.
55 Schlotheuber, Klosterertritt und Bildung, 134–146.
Lüne demonstrates above all that they related their theological knowledge and aptitude for allegorical interpretation to their particular position as spiritual virgins and brides of Christ. Thanks to this skill, their speech gained a particular authority which caused them to become revered and sought after correspondents for lay and religious alike.

* * *

The nuns at Lüne were more than mere recipients of spiritual literature: rather, the quill was in many ways their medium. They shaped a language that was suited to their needs and gave appropriate expression to their daily life and religious goals. Reception of the challenging writings by the mystics can readily be located within this spiritual and intellectual atmosphere and in the demands of a devotion that was intensified and interiorized as a result of the reform. Indeed, the educated nuns and the theological discourse they nurtured among themselves formed an environment suitable to preserving the resonance and vitality of mystical thought in ever new ways. This body of thought enabled the women to form a deeper understanding of their own religious life and duties as an inner spiritual path, even under the banner of the new, internalized theology of the 15th century. Latin afforded them a degree of emancipation from their male counterparts, as they were able to communicate independently with high-ranking clergymen. It also opened up to them literary exchange with educated reform circles. The collection of letters by the nuns of

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56 Schlotheuber, Klosterleben und Bildung, 104–111.
Latin Prose Letter of Thanks from the Nuns to the Provost

The Benedictine nuns at Lüne send a meal to their provost Nicholas Graurock, probably on Palm Sunday (sixth Sunday in Lent) to thank him for his faithful service. He is instructed to share it with those who dine with him. Ms. 15 second quire, fol. 8v/v. Edition: Eva Schlotheuber. With thanks to Prof. Fidel Rädle (Göttingen) for his corrections and valuable comments; translation: Eva Schlotheuber/editors.

Textual apparatus: a sit. b qui. c diligamus. d mittamus. e spernatis. f omnes.

Ista sequens littera est missa domino nostro preposito Nicolao Graurock.

Singulari nostro refugio ac venerabili patri nostro Nicolao cum humilitate filiæm obedientiam debitam et devotam.

Precordialissime pater. Honestati vestre gratiamur totis precordiorum medullis pro omnibus bonis nobis a vobis multociens exhibitis, quas nunc letteris vel verbis exprimere non valerimus. Conditor omnium, qui sciæ preterita, presencia et futura, miro modo divina ordinacione vos elegit ante mundi constitutionem sibi in fidelem famulum, nobis in pium patrem, ut vineam suam queb pene perierat corroboraretis XXXIII palmibus, quas in vineam suam presentem plantastis. Gaudere enim potestis gaudio magni, quod tam magnum ceterum sub pastorali cura habetis.

Diligimus vos in tantum quod nescimus dicere quantum. The following letter has been sent to our master, Provost Niolaus Graurock.

To our unique refuge and our venerable Father Niolaus with humility, in appropriate and submissive filial obedience.

Father beloved above all others, we thank Your Honour from the bottom of our hearts for the many kindnesses you have so frequently shown us, kindness we are barely able to express either in letters or in words. The Creator of all things, who knows the past, the present and the future, has, through divine Providence, miraculously chosen you for Himself, even before He created the world (Eph 1:4), as His loyal servant and our pious father. His vineyard had almost perished; and He chose you to strengthen it with 33 new, young vines, which you have planted in His present vineyard. You can rejoice with great joy that you have so large a flock to tend in your pastoral care.

For so great is our love for you that we lack words to express it.

According to Scripture, the touchstone of love is proof through deeds. (Gregorius Magnus, Homiliae in Evangelia II, 30) As a sign of our love we send you a meal and humbly request you not to despise it but to distribute a small portion of it to all those now present at your table. Etc.

Latin Verse Letter from the Young Nuns to the Provost

Letter from the young nuns (juniores domine) to the provost Nicholas Graurock on Palm Sunday concerning the distribution of the feast they had sent to him and the (allegorically interpreted) varieties of wine. Ms. 15, second quire, fol. 9r-22v. "Master Henry" is the confessor to the nuns; "Master Arnold" the oldest servant in the convent; "John" is the clerk; "Master Bernhard" the nuns' former chaplain; another "John" the cellarer of the Provost; "Ludolf" is the warden of the convent. The final couplet does not occur anywhere else and is possibly an original composition by the Benedictine nuns at Lüne.

Textual apparatus: a Lubicensis. b est vester ce deleted after qui. c pectoribus. d tollentur deleted after cordiam. e cui. f plane primogenitas. g layt deleted. h Chrispian. i lapiendo.

Salutem in gratia spiritus sancti carissima/
que repleat corda nostra
consolacione sua dilectissima./

Venerabili domino, domino preposito,
prelato, patri, pastor ovium
monasterii Lunensis, archidiacono,
canonico, domino domino preposito
Lubicensis*.

Transmittunt ovicule et filie xenia vel
munuscula/
que pretotem non spernat, quia vilia et
paupercula/
ser recipiat pro affectu intime caritas/
filialis dilectio et paterne affinitatis./

Prandeat inde gaudioso cum suis
edibus/
in prando vel cena semper suis
commensalibus./

A greeting in the most precious grace of the Holy Spirit. May it fill our hearts with most welcome solace.

To the Venerable Master, Master Provost, Prelate, Father and Shepherd of the sheep of the convent Lüne, the Archdeacon, Canon, Master, Master Provost of Lübeck.

Your lambs and daughters send presents or small gifts. May our mighty Master not disdain them because they are vile and worthless, but rather receive them as an expression of intimate affection, of filial love and affinity with our father.

May he also dine merrily with the members of his household at lunch or at dinner, always with his companions at table.
Prebeat inde frustum dominio Hynrico, 
nosdro confessori, 
honorabili presbitero et animarum 
zelatori.

Reficiatur eciam (fol. g7) dominus 
Arnoldus, servitor noster 
primogenitus, 
et or et sedulo, ut proprietur nobis 
dei unigenitus.

Reportet inde mensuram bonam 
dominus Hennequinus, provisor sancti 
Bartholomei fidels, 
ut meremur omnes veniam ab eo, qui 
habitat in cellis.

Recreetor eciam dominus Johannes, qui 
sonat Dei gratia; 
ut per eius precanima scandamus celli 
pallacia.

Recipiat inde partem dominus 
Bernardus, antiquus noster 
cappelianus, 
et or et assidue, ut cedt noster serviat 
deo sanus.

Tribuat frusticulum iterum Johanni, 
qui est vester cellerarius; 
ut prediam nostram nobis numquam 
vacuum remittat vel rarius; 
sed bonis pocionibus repleat usque ad 
summum, 
ut pro hoc re (fol. 10r) cipiat post hanc 
vitam eternitatis munium.

Non obliviscatur Ludolphus, claviger 
noster bonus, 
ut in quadragesima sit in diliculoo ad 
ecclesiam pronus.

Distributis micas non nobis notis aliis 
vestris servitoribus, 
quorum ecclesiasticum officium suis 
clamoribus, 
May he also give a portion of it to 
Master Henry, our confessor, the 
venerable priest and lover of our 
souls.

May Master Arnold also be 
invigorated with it, our oldest 
servant. May he pray diligently that 
the only begotten Son of God have 
merry on us.

May Master Hennequinus, the faithful 
provost of Saint Bartholomew, also 
receive a good portion, so that we 
may all receive forgiveness from Him 
who lives in Heaven.

May Master John also be refreshed, 
who is called "the grace of God" 
(St. Jerome, Interpretatio nominis 
Hebr. 69.16), so that we may reach 
the place of Heaven through his 
tercessorion on our behalf.

May Master Bernhard, our old 
chaplain, also receive part 
and may he constantly pray so that our 
contented congregation may serve 
the Lord.

May you also apportion a small bite 
to John, your cellarius, so that he 
may never, or only rarely, return 
our portion to us empty but fill it 
with sweet beverages right to the 
brim, so that after this life he may 
receive the gift of eternity.

May those, therefore, who dine 
with the voice of joy (Ps 17.5) not lack 
the wine of spiritual jubilation which is 
now being pressed in the Church 
and also pressed in the vineyards of devout 
hearts for those who work for their 
daily bread (Mt 20.2) and for those 
who praise the Creator in their hearts 
and with their mouths, especially in 
the vineyard of the monastic paradise 
that is the spiritual life for both men 
and women, the vineyard tended by 
Christ, the Farmer and true Vine 
(John 15), who with us has planted and 
gathered in, in His pure charity.

The venerability of our lord, Master 
Nicholas, our pious father, unites no 
small number of shoots, ready to serve 
God, as mystical limbs belonging to 
the head that is the true Christ. He has 
charge of them in these times just like 
the head of the family:

First of all the venerable elders whom 
he led through obedience, as in 
the first hours of the morning; and 
shortly after, at the third hour, the ten 
beloved firstborn in their profession 
explicitly. And at the sixth hour he 
went out and summoned 17 in the 
promise of the wedding ring; and at 
the ninth hour as many again in their 
profession. Then at the eleventh hour 
he called the workers, too, 35 shoots, 
although at very different times 
and ages, namely by exchanging 
cy garments for spiritual dress, before 
whom he stands piously for the sake 
of God's mercy, like a pious father and 
good shepherd, so that for him the 
burden of sin is relieved and we may 
live our present life in the pleasant 
love and fear of God, in such a way 
that we are able unanimously to gain 
from God threefold peace in the 
here and now. May it be with us 
all in our hearts, mouths and minds; 
and for the love of Jesus Christ and
ac pro amore Ihesu Christi et pie matris relaxetur, si male gessimus/
in verbis vel factis in alioquin si excessimus.
(fol. 11v) Hoc pie puter in caritate vera integratit tertatis/
ac oculo pio pretreunde quasi non videatis/
seu faciatis secundum consilium beat
Augustini precipuit doctoris/
qui legem dei implevit momentis
omnibus et horis/
quia scriptit ad Crispium dulciter
sapiendo/
et nos ad dulcedinem amoris ipsius
trahendo?
Si quis aliqum toto corde fideliter
dissimulat pacifice quicquid contra eum
deliquerit etc.

Sed nos pacifice, mansuetae et pie ad
laborandum in vinea instruat/
unus nobiscum haurire valeatis/
vinum tripex videliecet conpunctionis/
devoconis et sacramentis fruitiosis/
it in futuro recipieti vinum
septemplicis (fol. 12r) retributionis.

Primo vinum ferratum de Christi
humanitate/
in passione et crucis acerbitate.
Secundo cum angelis vinum defecatum
tercio vinum claretum apostolicis
principibus datum.

Quarto vinum rosatum/
cum martiris quintum vinum salviatum/
cum confessores, sexto vinum
conditionum/
quod letticat cetum virgineum/
septimo vinum glorificatum,
quod premiabt omnium electorum
numerum.

His pious Mother sin will be relieved
when we have behaved badly, when
we have transgressed in words or
deeds.

May you, pious father, cover this
in true love; And with a pious eye,
pas over it as if not seeing it, but
act according to the counsel of Saint
Augustine, the excellent doctor, who
fulfilled God's Law in every moment
and in every hour and who wrote
thus to Crispus, sweetly displaying
his knowledge, drawing us, too, into
the sweetness of his love: 'If one has
loved another truly with all his
heart, may he conceal in peace all
sins committed against him' etc.

Quilibus omnibus nos dignetur in gloria
aggregare/
qui non dedignatus est nos indignas in
vinceam hanc vocare/
un de divinitate et humanitate Christi
mereamur satiari/
et ex electro aureo speculo sancte
trinitatis eternitate inebrari.

Quod nobis et vobis omnibus concedat/
(fol. 12v) qui eternali deus vivit et
regnat
qui quae desiderat, dictat Amen, inde
satis;
valetatis valetatis valetatis et valetant
omnes,
quae vos valete desiderant.

Qui vult ridere/ debet ista scripta
videre./
Penna fuit vili/ sensus et manus puerillis/
penna nihil valuit
dicti qui bene scribere nescit./

juniores domine
dilecte vestre fille

But may you instruct us to toil
in the vineyard peacefully, gently
and piously, so that you may drink
together with us the threefold wine,
namely of remorse, of devotion and
of sacramental refreshment, so that
in future you receive the sevenfold
wine of repayment.

First, the "iron wine" (bitters) of
Christ's humanity in the Passion and
the harshness of the Cross;
Second, the pure, clear wine with the
angels;
Third, the spiced wine given to
the Princes of the Apostles.

Fourth, the rose wine with the martyrs;
Fifth, the sage wine with the
confessors;
Sixth, the warm spiced wine which
delights the congregation of the virgins;
Seventh, the glorified wine with
which the number of all chosen are
rewarded, with all of whom he who

Quiquam sublimis in Christo sorores et
consanguineae
has not declined to lead us unworthy
ones into this vineyard, deeming us
worthy to unite us in glory, so that we
can receive to be satisfied with the
divine and human nature of Christ,
and make us drunk from the smeared-
gold mirror of the Holy Trinity for all
eternity.

May He who lives and reigns as etern
God grant this to all of us and to
you. If anyone wishes this, let him say
"Amen" and so be it. May you prosper,
may you prosper, may you prosper:
and may all prosper who wish
you may prosper.

Whoever wishes to laugh should look
at these writings: The quill was use
less; the mind and hand childish; the
quill was good for nothing—is what
is said by him who cannot write well.

Your young mistresses, your
beloved daughters.

14c) Latin-Low German Letter from the Abbess of Medingen
to Her Nieces at Lüne

Letter of the abbess of Medingen Elizabeth I of Elvern to her nieces, Doroth
ty of Elvern and Anne Schomaker on their investiture at the convent in
Lüne. She sends the girls, who have already been living in Lüne for some
time, some small presents for their "wedding day" (Ms. 31, 16 May 1568). Title:
Devotis virginibus Dorothea Elvers et Anne Schomaker amitis suis per
charis in Lune presentetur. ("This is sent to the devout virgins Dorothy Elvers
and Anne Schomaker, her most beloved nieces."). Low German.

Textual apparatus: a vestimento partially covered by an ink blot. b Probably
instead of ut devote salutatam.

(fol. 128v) Concives anglorum,
domestiche dei ac sponsae Christi in
gloriosa ac ammirabili Christi ascensione
per eius graciam dignae efficii.
Precedelliasime in Christo sorores et
consanguineae
Fellow citizens of the angels,
members of God's household and on
the glorious day of Christ's Ascension
deemed worthy through His grace to
be brides of Christ, in Christ sisters
and relatives most beloved.
Domina mater und iuuen anderen
matres iuue rede wol villijhen exhortert
hebben, dat gy andercken vocacionem
vestram, wo iuue god inter milie milia
honunum heft utherkoren an syns eighe
neltterwede brid, up dat he iuue de
leverse wesen und gy allen trent,
vronden unter sodichet und allent, dat gy beger-
neren in eme moghen vinden. Den schollen
gy boven alle dingh beleven unter ieme
myt vilte denen und boven alle timoren
domin in iuue hebben, quia ubi timor
ibis salus, uppert dat gy moghen bloyen
unter vortghen an eme gudan ghestyken
levende und her voren vitam Angelicanam
in (fol. 129r) terris, dat gy na dessen
levende meten waertken werden sorese
et concives angelorum, unter meten
dar komen, dar gy emfanghen dat grote
lon, quod preparavit deus diligentibus
se, unde myt deme ghestyken lyke
dariru no alse gekleydet werden, veste
immortalitatis in superna patria.

Demum, carissime amice, transmitto
vospro signo innate caritatis makk en
kleyn kroseken, on gleesen, en roth
vormadet weten, on wumpel, enen
lachteren unde on kleyn hilgene
biedeken, in quo continentur effigies beate
Marie virginis, de scholle gy nu eligeren
in matrem, quia ipsa est, de iuuw beste
kan sprekken apud quibus sumus sponsum
vestram, darumme solly gy dar gherne
iuue devocien vor hebben unde beghere
gy myner ok nicht willen vorhetlik wesen
apud deum an iuue bruudage.

Your Mother Superior and the other
mothers have already exhorted you
diligently, so that you may be mindful
def your calling since God has chosen
you from amongst many thousands
of people as His eternal chosen bride,
so that He may be dearest to you and
you may find in Him all the comfort,
joy and sweetness and everything that
you desire. You should love Him above
all else and serve Him assiduously and,
above all, have the fear of the Lord
in you, for "where there is fear, there
is salvation", so that you may flourish
and progress in a good spiritual life
and lead the life of angels here on
earth so that after this life you may
truly become sisters and fellow-
citizens of the angels and may
ultimately come where you receive
the great reward which God has
prepared for those who love Him
and so may be clothed in spiritual
garb—be clothed with the robe of
immortality in the celestial
homeland.

Finally, dearest nieces, as a sign of
my innate love for you, I send each
of you a little small jug, a small glass,
and a small vessel painted red, a wimple,
a small candlestick and a small
devotional image of the Holy Virgin
Mary, whom you should now choose
as your mother, for she is the one
who can best intercede on your behalf
with her Son, your bridegroom; for
this reason you should gladly perform
your devotions in front of it; and I
ask you not to forget me before God
on your wedding day.

61 Proverb. Around the same time, Erasmus of Rotterdam created the following saying from it: *Ubi timor, ibi et pudor*, Erasmus, Adagia 164 (after Diogenianus).

62 Quotation from the Antiphones of Laudes (OSB) applied to the Confessors, but also Vita prima sancti Bernardi, P. 185, Sp. 255-256, Sp. 257 vitam Angelicanam geren in terris.
I shall think of you in my prayers and ask you to greet in my name your venerable Mother Superior from me, and desire above all, that you carry out her will, are humble and obedient—as you are obliged to—since she loves you with all her heart as I sincerely believe and take care and toils for your wellbeing both day and night.

Please also convey greetings on my behalf to your mothers, Gertrude Hemke and Irmgard Ermgard Tzerstede and also to your sisters.

Written with a hurried hand and tired eyes on the eve of the Ascension of Our Lord.

Elizabeth, the unworthy Abbess of Medingen, your beloved aunt.

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1. Mystical Transmission: Gothic Brass Fountain at the Convent of Lüne

The Gothic Brass Fountain is to be found in the Convent of Lüne, which belonged to the Lüneburg convent network. For the last 700 years every visitor to Lüne has been greeted by the sound of running water flowing into the “Handstein” (basin) of the fountain. The water is transported from the stream running through the grounds of the convent into the entrance hall to the cloisters via the fountain. We have chosen this image for the cover of the volume because of what it conveys about transmission. Beyond the literal transportation of water, the fountain alludes to several biblical models of knowledge transmission important for religious houses: the brass basin on the sandstone pedestal recalls the holy vessel made of brass with a stone pedestal used in the tabernacle (Ex 38:8); the brass water cistern formed like a round tower imitates the sealed fountain of the Song of Songs (Ct 4:12); and the crowning cross above the water spouts turns the whole construction into a spring of grace. From the beginning, the “living water” (Jo 4:13), indispensable for any religious house, has been imbued with meaning beyond the practical use.
2. Foregrounding the Region: Northern Germany on the Ebstorf Map
The 13th-century world map found in Ebstorf, one of the Lüneburg convents, highlights the sense of regional pride in the prominence given to Northern German cities and religious houses. This map consisted of 40 goatkins sewn together, making it the largest world map from the Middle Ages. It shows Christ, with His head at the top of the map, embracing the world which has Jerusalem, with a depiction of the Resurrection in the style of the Wienhausen Risen Christ (→ Mattern), at its centre. The world is represented in the conventional T-scheme that divides it into three sections with Asia occupying the top half, Africa at the bottom right, and Europe at the bottom left. Northern Germany dominates, with Ebstorf (the three little squares in a row next to the chapel-like convent building indicating the grave of the martyrs buried there) and the sponsoring city of Lüneburg (marked by the moon for Luna) marked out clearly. It also shows the seat of the local bishops, Verden (tower at the edge) and Bremen (cathedral with three towers next to it), as well as the seat of the Duke, Brunswick (southeast of Lüneburg, i.e. above right, marked by the lion monument). The detailed Latin description surrounding the circle of the world, written by several hands, probably in the convent of Ebstorf around 1300, shows the high standard of learning in the Lüneburg area in the 13th century. This level of literacy in Latin (latinitas) was maintained well into the 15th century as evidenced by the Latin Easter ceremonial read by the nuns of Wienhausen (→ Mattern), the prayer books written by the nuns of Medingen (→ Lähnemann), and the letters written by the nuns of Lüne (→ Schlotheuber).

3. Liturgy and Mysticism: Adoration of the Host from the Convent of Wienhausen
The panel painting of the adoration of the host in a monstrance (+ Bischof, p. 39), painted in northern Germany around 1450/60, shows at the top the Nativity in the form described by Birgitta of Sweden, with the angels singing the gloria (+ Andersen); in the centre the host is held up by the angels and accompanied by apostles; at the base in front of the church representing Wienhausen (→ Mattern) a female saint and several men are kneeling, flanked by Benedict and Bernard of Clairvaux.
4. Translating Mysticism: An Early German Print of Mechtild of Hackeborn
The first text page praising the devotional value of Mechtild of Hackeborn's writing in the Leipzig print of 1508 is representative of the manifold transmission processes which the texts discussed in the volume undergo. The Leipzig print of 1508 is a revised, restructured and abridged version of the 1503 Leipzig German print, taking in a Latin manuscript; the German text of the 1503 print was translated from the 14th-century Dutch translation of Mechtild of Hackeborn's 13th-century Liber specialis gratiae. (→ Hellgardt).

5. Dorothea of Montau as Saint: Woodcut for Johannes Marienwerder's Vita
The woodcut, the only pre-modern image of Dorothea, shows the profile of her Vita which foregrounds the suffering of the figure (→ Suerbaum). The author Johannes Marienwerder is not named in the print: Das leben der seligen fruwen Dorothee clewsseneryne yn der thumkyrchen tsu Marienwerdir des landes tsu prowfisen ("The Life of the Blessed Lady Dorothea, Rechuse in the Cathedral Church of Marienwerder in the Country of Prussia"). It was printed in Marienburg by Jacob Karweysse on 23 March 1492.
6. Birgitta of Sweden as Saint: Woodcut for *Sunte Birgitten Openbaringe*
   The iconic image of Birgitta of Sweden does not capture a historical moment but rather aspects of the history of transmission. Birgitta sits writing in the conventional pose of the author, familiar from depictions of the Gospel writers and the Church Fathers (→ Andersen, p. 220); the caption addresses her as "bride of Christ", asking for her intercession (→ Introduction, p. 13). Lübeck: Mohnkopfdrucker, 1496, fol. 9v.

7. Passing on Devotional Reading: the Göttingen *Sunte Birgitten Openbaringe*
   That Birgitta's revelations were used as devotional reading can be seen from the inscription in the Göttingen copy of *Sunte Birgitten Openbaringe* (→ Andersen, p. 221), SUB Göttingen, 8 H E SANCT 176/33 INC, fol. 17.
8. Visualizing Easter: The Ceiling of the Wienhausen Nuns' Choir
Beyond devotional reading there was a wealth of images available especially for the nuns in the Lüneburg convents; the Wienhausen nuns were surrounded by representations of biblical scenes painted on the ceiling of the nuns' choir, among them prominently the Hortulanus scene. Reading and meditating on Mary Magdalene's dialogue with the gardener, which is also the pivotal scene in the Wienhausen Easter Play and Ceremonial, allowed the nuns to participate in this encounter with the risen Christ (→ Mattern).

9. Singing with the Heart: Musical Notation for Devotional Use
The musical notation, frequent in the northern German prayer books, is another visual reminder of devotional processes that encourage “singing with the heart” (→ Hascher-Burger). The extract is that printed in Appendix 12b where at the bridal bed the Leise “Christ is Risen” is sung. Trier, Bistumsarchiv, Hs. 548, fol. 110v.
10. David as Cantor: Marginal Illumination in a Medingen Prayer Book
The popular depiction of David as cantor in the marginal illuminations of the Medingen manuscripts (→ Lähnemann), p. 299, Appendix 13a/b) reinforces the role of music in lifting devotion to a higher level. The small prayer book (10,5x9) was written by Elisabeth Elebeke, nun at the convent of Medingen (active 1481-1525), for her personal use. She combined prayers to her personal apostle St. Bartholomew and to the patron saint of the convent, St. Maurice; the veil was sewn in to protect the golden initial for the main prayer on the apostle feast day. SUB Hamburg, Cod. in Scrin. 209, fol. 44v.

11. Devotional Networking: Letter from the Convent of Lüne
The letter collections from the convent of Lüne (→ Schlothüber, p. 347) are an example of devotional networking; they contain copies of the letters written by the nuns to the bishop, local clergy, the Lüneburg City Council, family members, neighbouring convents and other institutions. This first of three volumes contains letters from circa 1483 to 1535; it was bound in the convent into a parchment cover made from a discarded folio manuscript. Klosterarchiv Lüne Hs 15, fol. 1r.