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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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*Cover illustration:* Gothic Brass Fountain at the Convent of Lüne (14th century). Photo and rights: Convent of Lüne.

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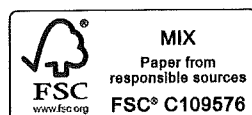
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*In memoriam* Timothy McFarland

1936–2013

University College London

A wonderful friend and inspiring colleague  
to whose encouragement we owe a great deal

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## PREFACE

The editors of the volume are very grateful to the British Academy for the award of a small research grant which made it possible to bring the contributors together from Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands, the USA and the UK. The three lively days of constructive and productive discussion have meant that the volume is richer and more coherent. Besides the authors, the other participants at the workshop in Newcastle were Ulla Bucarey, Mary Fischer, Stephen Mossman, Rianne Mus, Friedel Helga Roolfs, and Timothy McFarland to whose memory this volume is dedicated; he not only put Dorothea of Montau on the map of mysticism but throughout the process was a lively partner for all our discussions. Thanks go also to the Faculty's "Medieval and Early Modern Studies Group" and to the School of Modern Languages at Newcastle University for enabling the group to be inspired by a trip through ecclesiastical Northumbria.

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 Roolfs, Frauke Thees and Gabriele Wright; for critical reading to Rabia Gregory, Jeffrey F. Hamburger, Silvia Ranawake, Ann Marie Rasmussen, Annette Volting 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.

Special thanks go to Brill: to Julian Deahl for his initial reaction to the presentation given at Leeds in 2008 which set the whole project in motion, to Christopher M. Bellitto as editor of the series, to the typesetters and cartographers, who dealt with the demands of charting the ever changing region of northern Germany, and to Ivo Romein and Karen Cullen for their sustained interest and good humour during the production process.

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).<sup>1</sup> 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 *frunde*—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.<sup>2</sup> 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).<sup>3</sup> 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 vilis/ sensus et manus puerilis;/  
penna nihil valuit/ dicit qui bene scribere nescit./

<sup>1</sup> Röckelein, "Bairische, sächsische und mainfränkische Klostergründungen im Vergleich (8. Jahrhundert bis 1100)" (2008), 23–55.

<sup>2</sup> Schlotheuber, "Familienpolitik und geistliche Aufgaben" (2009).

<sup>3</sup> Klosterarchiv Lüne, 'Handschriftentruhe' ('manuscript chest' referred to as 'MsC' in the following text) ms. 15, ms. 30 and ms. 31; cf. Nolte, *Quellen und Studien zur Geschichte des Nonnenklosters Lüne bei Lüneburg* (1932), 26f.

Whoever wishes to laugh should look at these writings: The quill was useless; 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. (Klosterarchiv Lüne, 'MsC' ms 15, Appendix 14b).

The little poem concludes a long letter written around 1490 by the "young girls", the *iuniores domine* who had not yet professed, in the Benedictine convent of Lüne to their provost, Nicholas Graurock (1457–1493). The whole community had sent a lavish feast to the Provost and the clergy for Palm Sunday, and both nuns (Appendix 14a) and girls (Appendix 14b) had composed a letter to accompany it. The couplet does not occur anywhere else and is possibly an original composition.<sup>4</sup> One should not, however, be fooled by the humorously humble verse with which the girls conclude their lengthy communication. This letter is not only composed in fluent Latin, but is rhymed and contains sophisticated subject matter on the topic of Palm Sunday. The male supervisors, the recipients of the nuns' generosity, are each named in turn and honoured by a short phrase. The letter expresses the wish that the Provost and those who share his meal might take pleasure in partaking of the nuns' gift and share some with their Father Confessor Henry, "encourager of our souls" (*zelator animarum*), with Master Arnold, the nuns' servant, with the bell-ringer Master John (giving the learned etymology of his name as "the grace of God"), and so forth. All of the male supervisors are listed in like manner, down to the *claviger*, or master of the keys, Ludolf. Then the schoolgirls list the convent, the nuns and the lay sisters in the order of their place in the hierarchy, thereby presenting and honouring the entire convent community through this literary reflection of it. In this humorous and richly allusive vein the girls continue to describe and interpret both the order of events on Palm Sunday and the feast prepared for it.

Running throughout the whole text is the metaphor of the vineyard (used to symbolize the convent), culminating in a spiritual interpretation of the various varieties of medieval wine in the order of their place in the hierarchy of significance. Together with the virgins, the Provost might drink the threefold wine of repentance, humility, and fortification through the sacrament, in order to receive the sevenfold wine of recompense (Appendix 14b). First, the Provost would drink the "chalybeate wine"

<sup>4</sup> *Colophons de manuscrits occidentaux des origines au 16e siècle. Colophons lieux-anonymes*, ed. Bouveret (1982), Nr. 22835, 436: *Penna fuit vilis et scriptor nimis puerilis*; Nr. 22839, 436: *Penna non valuit, dicit, quia scribere nescit*.

(*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 clar-etum*) 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).<sup>5</sup> 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

<sup>5</sup> Reinhardt, "Lüne" (1984), 377–402.

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 Halepaghe, Vicar of Buxtehude.<sup>6</sup> They undertook a revival of spiritual life in line with the Bursfelde Reform and subjected the convent to interrogation.<sup>7</sup> Although no serious malpractices or misdemeanours were ever established,<sup>8</sup> the prioress and former sub-prioress 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 Lucae ewangeliste quod illo anni [!] fuit super feriam quintam. Sex virgines et una conversa venerunt hic de Ebbekestorpe pro reformatione et una ex illis nomine Sophia de Bodendike eligebatur in priorissam huius monasterii super sabbatum. Eodem die eligebatur una ex illis in subpriorissam nomine Gertrudis de Eltzen.<sup>9</sup>

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, Gertrud of Eltzen, 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.<sup>10</sup> 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

<sup>6</sup> Nolte, *Quellen*, 127f.

<sup>7</sup> Schlotheuber, *Klostereintritt und Bildung. Die Lebenswelt der Nonnen im späten Mittelalter. Edition des "Konventstagebuchs" einer Zisterzienserin von Heilig-Kreuz bei Braunschweig (1484–1507)* (2004), 58–66; Riggert, *Frauenklöster*, 325.

<sup>8</sup> Nolte, *Quellen*, 127.

<sup>9</sup> Klosterarchiv Lüne, 'MsC' Ms. 5, fol. 1<sup>r</sup>–1<sup>v</sup>. Nolte, *Quellen*, 127 n. 4.

<sup>10</sup> Nolte, *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.<sup>11</sup> 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

<sup>11</sup> Ehrenschwendtner, *Die Bildung der Dominikanerinnen*; Schlotheuber, *Klostereintritt und Bildung*.

the transmission and reception of vernacular literary culture.<sup>12</sup> Research into the 15th century suggests education in the vernacular—education, that is, that went beyond the elementary standard needed for normal daily purposes—was located not in the Latin schools or universities but in the convents of religious women.<sup>13</sup>

Aside from the general desideratum of further research into the world of nuns' education, two specific aspects deserve greater attention: first, whether monolingualism really characterized the late-medieval convents to the extent that nuns could only access scholarly traditions in mediated form (→ Hellgardt; Lähnemann), and, second, whether religious women can be referred to exclusively as the mere recipients of texts. Scholars broadly agree in describing convents as monolingual. Not only did the most famous German mystic manuscripts originate in these convents, but so, too, did literature in translation, of which there was a veritable explosion in the 15th century, with translated works not infrequently intended for nuns or even commissioned by them.<sup>14</sup> Scholars thus tend to ascribe scant knowledge of Latin to religious women. The accuracy of this picture could be improved by using literary evidence from within the convents, such as records produced by the nuns for their own community. Hitherto, these have barely been recognized as an independent genre; but as an expression of internal communication they are perhaps best suited to providing information about the women's general linguistic competence.

We are, for example, dealing with normative texts such as the translation of religious rules that had to be made accessible to the community,<sup>15</sup> or with written reflections on daily life in the convent. The culture of writing in convents could differ considerably, depending on whether the foundation was in northern or southern Germany. These differences can be observed

<sup>12</sup> Hasebrink, "Tischlesung und Bildungskultur im Nürnberger Katharinenkloster: Ein Betrag zu ihrer Rekonstruktion" (1996), 187f.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Williams and Williams-Krapp, *Die 'Offenbarungen' der Katharina Tucher*; Williams-Krapp, "Frauenmystik und Ordensreform" (1993), 301–313. Grubmüller, "Geistliche Übersetzungsliteratur im 15. Jahrhundert. Überlegungen zu ihrer literaturhistorischen Bedeutung" (1994).

<sup>14</sup> Grubmüller, "Übersetzungsliteratur," 65–74. Ehrenschwendtner also concludes that the southern German Dominican nuns were monolingual. See Ehrenschwendtner, *Bildung*, 119f.; see also Schromm, *Die Bibliothek des ehemaligen Zisterzienserinnenklosters Kirchheim am Ries. Buchpflege und geistiges Leben in einem schwäbischen Frauenstift* (1998); cf. also Eisermann, "Rezension zu Schromm" (2001), 475–478; and Signori, "Berühmte Frauen oder gelehrte Jungfrauen?" (2002).

<sup>15</sup> Lehmijoki-Gardner, *Writing Religious Rules*, 660–687.



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.<sup>16</sup> The *Geschicht-Buech* of the abbesses of Frauenchiemsee,<sup>17</sup> begun in 1468, and the "Hausbuch" of the Birgittines of Maria Mai near Augsburg provide further examples.<sup>18</sup> 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 Altenhohenau (1509–1515)<sup>19</sup> 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 Altenhohenau 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.<sup>20</sup> As books in both languages were acquired in equal measure, the nuns' passive knowledge of Latin must have been at least sufficient,<sup>21</sup> especially as this knowledge was indispensable for the performance of the liturgy.

<sup>16</sup> Schindele, "Die ordenung, die daz. Capitel von Zitel... hat gemacht", 79–122. Cf. also Crean, "The Altenburg Rule of St Benedict" (1992), and Crean, "Scriptural Adaption and Accommodation in the Altenburg Rule of St. Benedict: Abba pater or Frau Mutter?" (1994).

<sup>17</sup> Hauptstaatsarchiv Munich, Frauenchiemsee KL 88, *Geschicht-Buech* of the abbess Magdalena Auer (1467–1494). The first part was written on her commission by her chaplain, Peter Franck. Cf. Schlotheuber, *Klostereintritt und Bildung*, 325f.

<sup>18</sup> Staatsarchiv Augsburg, Maihingen KL 1, *Das Hausbuch des Birgittinklosters Maria Mai (Maihingen/Ries 1522)*; cf. Nyberg, "Das Hausbuch des Klosters Maihingen" (1971); Nyberg, "Der Ritus der Äbtissinnenweihe im Birgittinkloster Maria Mai, Maihingen/Ries" (2001).

<sup>19</sup> Hauptstaatsarchiv Munich, Altenhohenau KL lit 12. On Altenhohenau Ehrenschwendtner, *Bildung*, 311–316; for general reference Schiewer, "Literarisches Leben in dominikanischen Frauenklöstern des 14. Jahrhunderts: Das Modell St. Katharinental bei Diessenhofen" (2004).

<sup>20</sup> Hauptstaatsarchiv Munich, Altenhohenau KL lit 12, fol. 505<sup>r</sup>–506<sup>r</sup> (Latin texts), fol. 507<sup>r</sup> (new acquisition in German).

<sup>21</sup> The most recent publication on this topic: Schlotheuber, "Bücher und Bildung", 241–262.

Interestingly, in 1496 Altenhohenau 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*.<sup>22</sup> 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 Pirckheimer (1467–1532), known as the *Deutsche Chronik*.<sup>23</sup> This title is, however, rather misleading, as the text is, in fact, a translated and annotated collection of documents from the convent.<sup>24</sup> 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 Herzebrock (16th century) also belong in this context.<sup>25</sup> 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,<sup>26</sup> 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 supervisors<sup>27</sup> (→ Bollmann).

<sup>22</sup> Hauptstaatsarchiv Munich, Altenhohenau KL lit 12, fol. 505<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>23</sup> Vosding, "Schreib die Reformation von Munchen ganz daher"; Schlotheuber, "Humanistisches Wissen und geistliches Leben. Caritas Pirckheimer und die Geschichtsschreibung im Nürnberger Klarissenkonvent" (2005), 89–118.

<sup>24</sup> Munich, Bayerisches Nationalmuseum, ms. 1191, original text of the "German Chronicle" from the Poor Clares in Nuremberg (Parchment, after 1503); Staatsarchiv Nuremberg, Kloster St Klara, Acts and Volumes Nr. 1, Concept of the "German Chronicle" of the Nuremberg Poor Clare Convent (produced around 1490, with numerous additions until 1503).

<sup>25</sup> Flaskamp, "Chronik des Klosters Herzebrock" (1967) and Flaskamp, "Anna Roedes spätere Chronik" (1970). Gleba, *Reformpraxis und materielle Kultur*, 44f.

<sup>26</sup> Miller, *Die Söflinger Briefe und das Klarissenkloster Söflingen im Spätmittelalter* (1940); Frank, *Das Klarissenkloster Söflingen: ein Beitrag zur franziskanischen Ordensgeschichte Süddeutschlands und zur Ulmer Kirchengeschichte* (1980); most recent publication: *Ulmer Bürgerinnen, Söflinger Klosterfrauen in reichsstädtischer Zeit*, ed. Reinhardt and Schulz (2003). Cf. also Signori, "Meine in Gott geliebte Freundin" (1995).

<sup>27</sup> *Schwesternbuch und Statuten des St. Agnes-Konvents in Emmerich*, ed. Bollmann and Staubach (1998).

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.<sup>28</sup> 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 adherence 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.<sup>29</sup>

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 Wöltingerode, Derneburg, Wienhausen, Isenhagen, and Heilig-Kreuz near Brunswick are in Latin. Furthermore, their libraries consisted mainly of books and treatises in Latin.<sup>30</sup> 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,<sup>31</sup> and the whole convent obviously possessed a good active knowledge of Latin: it was self-evident that, in her book of office, the *sacrista* at Lüne should note details of the daily liturgical ritual of the convent, as well as the ritual on feast days, in elegant Latin.<sup>32</sup> 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.<sup>33</sup> 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.<sup>34</sup> 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 *celleraria* 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 1500 and transferred in a careful Gothic *textualis* to a manuscript that was later given the title of the *Lüne Chronicle*.<sup>35</sup> 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 reveal a remarkable level of reflection. In contrast to the Benedictines at Frauenchiemsee and the Birgittine nuns at Maihingen, 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 (liturgical routines, *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

<sup>28</sup> Van Dijk, *De constituties der Windesheimse vrouwenkloosters voor 1559*.

<sup>29</sup> Mischlewski, *Monastisches Ideal*, 462.

<sup>30</sup> Schlotheuber, *Klosterertritt und Bildung*, 272–296.

<sup>31</sup> Klosterarchiv Lüne, 'MsC' Ms. 14 (Latin statute book, 1481–1500).

<sup>32</sup> Klosterarchiv Lüne, 'MsC' Ms. 23 The sacrist's book of office (end of the 15th century–1512/13).

<sup>33</sup> Nolte, *Quellen*, 127–128. For the connection between monastic reform and writing in general see Proksch, *Klosterreform und Geschichtsschreibung*; Willing, *Literatur und Ordenreform*; Roth, *Literatur und Klosterreform*.

<sup>34</sup> Klosterarchiv Lüne, 'MsC' Ms. 24 Records concerning the election of the prioress Mechthild Wilde (1504–1535); cf. also Schlotheuber, "Die Wahl der Priorin" (2005).

<sup>35</sup> Klosterarchiv Lüne, 'MsC' Ms. 13. A chronicle of the convent (1481–1530).

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: *Datis [...] raptissime manu propria feria quinta post Letare anno etc. XCIII solito sub signeto* ("Written in my own hand on the Friday after Laetare Sunday in the year [14]94 with the usual seal"):

Bertoldus dei gratia episcopus Hildensemensis et administrator Verdensis ecclesiarum. Sincerissima in Cristo affectione premissa, religiose et dilectissime in Cristo filie, religiosam conversationem laudabilemque vitam vestram, dudum nobis perspectam, rerum magistra effecit experientia, hodie vero quis in doctrina fructus, in colligendo modus, in scribendo stilus, in dicendo ornatus personis vestris ornatissimis discipline studio accesserit, novissime hee [!] littere docuerunt, unde non possumus merito non letari tante vestre probitati, que in aperto est, sanum intellectum sacrarum scripturarum, quantum satis est, multas dulcedines et consolaciones attulisse, quod quia rarum est vestro sexuique [!] insolitum, nisi venerabilis prepositus vester veritatem persuasisset vix credere pre admiratione licuisset, 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 daughters, his most heartfelt affection. 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 material, 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 [...].<sup>36</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Klosterarchiv Lüne, 'MsC' ms. 15, sixth quire, fol. 21<sup>r</sup>–21<sup>v</sup>.

The Bishop of Hildesheim calls the nuns at Lüne *doctae personae* and honours them with a rhetorically polished reply. Their fluency in Latin enabled the nuns to communicate independently with high-ranking clergymen in their region, which meant they could actively participate in scholarly correspondence and written debates on topical religious themes. Linguistic competence therefore afforded them the ability to emancipate themselves from their own Provost, who, as the Augustinian Canonesses in Memmingen sadly discovered (cf. p. 352), was not always an entirely reliable intermediary.

The books belonging to a community form an integral part of its intellectual horizon. In the course of the 15th-century reforms, the convent libraries were often almost completely restocked. They show us which authors were regarded as important and authoritative in the new religious climate, and which aspects of the wide-ranging and multifaceted theological tradition were to be called upon. As far as we can tell, 13th- and 14th-century mystics were accorded an astonishing degree of relevance in this new context. It is not infrequently this reforming generation's interest in the mystics that we have to thank for the transmission of their writings.

While the convent libraries of Lüne, Walsrode, and Medingen have only come down to us in fragmentary form, the late-medieval library at Ebstorf has been unusually well preserved, with 51 surviving codices, for the most part still held there.<sup>37</sup> They date almost exclusively from the reform period<sup>38</sup> and the four surviving breviaries show the influence of the Bursfelde Reform.<sup>39</sup> An almost entirely new library was created to ensure that the texts regarded as important for the intellectual penetration and absorption of the reform and for understanding the catechism, spiritual devotion, prayer, and worship were rendered accessible to the convent. Its holdings can be divided according to the three steps necessary for the nuns' achievement of spiritual perfection: works to aid the learning of elementary linguistic skills; texts of preparatory instruction on the mass and the central tenets of the faith; and texts leading to

<sup>37</sup> Giermann and Härtel, *Handschriften des Klosters Ebstorf* (1994); Härtel, "Die Klosterbibliothek Ebstorf. Reform und Schulwirklichkeit am Ausgang des Mittelalters" (1996); most recent publication: Schlotheuber, "Ebstorf und seine Schülerinnen in der zweiten Hälfte des 15. Jahrhunderts" (2004), 169–221.

<sup>38</sup> Heinrich Rüthing reaches the same conclusion for the library of the Cistercian convent at Wöltingerode, Rüthing, "Die mittelalterliche Bibliothek des Zisterzienserinnenklosters Wöltingerode" (1994), 194f.

<sup>39</sup> Convent Archives Ebstorf, Mss. IV 2, IV 3, IV 8 and IV 10. Cf. Härtel, "Die Klosterbibliothek," 247. For liturgical reform cf. Häußling, "Liturgiereform," 1–32.

the spiritual centre of convent life in prayer.<sup>40</sup> 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 Augustine hermit Heinrich of Friemar the Elder († 1340).<sup>41</sup> 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 Sterngassen (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

<sup>40</sup> Härtel, "Die Klosterbibliothek," 245f.

<sup>41</sup> Giermann and Härtel, *Handschriften*, Mss. VI 5, VI 6 and VI 19.

in Latin, ms. IV 4, from the 14th century and a prayer book,<sup>42</sup> 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.<sup>43</sup> 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.<sup>44</sup> 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 Lichtenthal, near Baden-Baden, the nuns' knowledge of Latin eventually became so inadequate they could neither read nor understand the commentated rules, table readings, or the liturgical texts vital to everyday convent life. A Cistercian nun, Sister Regula, sent to Lichtenthal 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.<sup>45</sup> 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.<sup>46</sup> 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

<sup>42</sup> Ms. IV 16. On the lost library of the 14th and 15th centuries, Härtel, "Die Klosterbibliothek," 257f.

<sup>43</sup> Giermann and Härtel, *Handschriften*, Ms. IV 14.

<sup>44</sup> Schlotheuber, *Klostereintritt und Bildung*, 111–120.

<sup>45</sup> Stamm, "Klosterreform und Buchproduktion. Das Werk der Schreib- und Lesemeisterin Regula" (1995), 67f. Schindele, "Der Beitrag der Lectio Divina zur monastischen Erneuerung. Zum 500. Todestag einer Lichtenthaler Schreib- und Lesemeisterin am 20. Mai 1978" (1978).

<sup>46</sup> Schlotheuber, *Klostereintritt und Bildung*, 111f.

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).<sup>47</sup> 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 scolastici rigore sufficienter instructe*), "the prioress [could] humbly petition the provost to allow them to leave the school".<sup>48</sup>

From the Latin essays by the Ebstorf schoolgirls, it emerges that the abbess personally examined the candidates' Latin *dictamina* before they took perpetual vows.<sup>49</sup> 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 scolastici*)—the provost preached a sermon for the candidates and convent in the chapter house.<sup>50</sup> 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

<sup>47</sup> Schlotheuber, *Klostereintritt und Bildung*, 141f.; for more examples see 148 n. 136.

<sup>48</sup> Klosterarchiv Lüne, 'MsC' Ms. 14 (Statute book) fol. 20v.

<sup>49</sup> Convent Archives Ebstorf, Ms. V 4, fol. 48v–49r.

<sup>50</sup> Ebd. fol. 21r–21v.

so important at Lüne that in 1507 three nuns, although permitted to take their perpetual vows, had to remain at school for another year.<sup>51</sup>

### *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)<sup>52</sup> 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 1481, 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.<sup>53</sup> 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

<sup>51</sup> Schlotheuber, *Klostereintritt und Bildung*, 150f.

<sup>52</sup> Bauer, "Herzklosterallegorie" (1981/2004).

<sup>53</sup> 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 infanzia*); 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 vicariate 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 Dalenborch 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 vicariate, 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 Dorothea 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 1518 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*.<sup>54</sup> 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, domesticæ dei ac sponse 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.<sup>55</sup> 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

<sup>54</sup> Klosterarchiv Lüne, 'MsC' Ms. 13, fol. 78r. On the rite of investiture Schlotheuber, *Klostereintritt und Bildung*, 134–146.

<sup>55</sup> Schlotheuber, *Klostereintritt und Bildung*, 134–146.



(→ Bollmann) for women in particular as, unlike male theologians, the path of rational knowledge of God taught in the cathedral schools and universities remained closed to them.<sup>56</sup> For this reason, provided the nuns received an appropriately literate education, their communities formed an ideal sounding board for meditation and reflection upon the challenging thought of the mystics and the application of it to their own spiritual lives.

On this special occasion, the Abbess presented her nieces with a jug and a glass, a veil, and a small icon depicting Mary, for, as she said to the girls, "[You] should now choose Mary as your mother, because she can best intercede for you with her Son, your bridegroom" (Appendix 14c). The investiture also symbolized the fact that Dorothea Elvern and Anna Schomaker had legally and formally left their family circle to join that of the convent and its community. Elisabeth congratulates the girls on "their wedding day," greets them, and brings the letter to a close; it was written on 16 March 1518 at a late hour and with tired eyes (Appendix 14c).

\* \* \*

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.<sup>57</sup> 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

<sup>56</sup> Schlotheuber, *Klostereintritt und Bildung*, 104–111.

<sup>57</sup> Hamm, *Frömmigkeitstheologie am Anfang des 16. Jahrhunderts. Studien zu Johannes von Paltz und seinem Umkreis* (1982); Hamm, "Normative Zentrierung im 15. und 16. Jahrhundert. Beobachtungen zu Religiosität, Theologie und Ikonologie" (1999).

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.

TEXTUAL APPENDIX  
INTELLECTUAL HORIZONS:  
LETTERS FROM A NORTHERN GERMAN CONVENT

14a) *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. 8r/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 *sperneatis*. f *omnes*.

Ista sequens littera est missa domino nostro preposito Nicolao Grawerock

The following letter has been sent to our master, Provost Nicholas Graurock.

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

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

Precordialissime pater. Honestati vestre regratiamur totis precordiorum medullis pro omnibus bonis nobis a vobis multociens exhibitis, quas nunc litteris vel verbis exprimere non valemus. Conditor omnium, qui scit<sup>a</sup> preterita, presencia et futura, miro modo divina ordinacione vos elegit ante mundi constitutionem sibi in fidelem famulum, nobis in pium patrem, ut vineam suam que<sup>b</sup> pene perierat corroboraretis XXXIII palmitibus, quas in vineam suam presentem plantastis. Gaudere enim potestis gaudio magno, quod tam magnam catervam sub pastoralis cura habetis.

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.

Diligimus<sup>c</sup> vos in tantum quod nescimus dicere quantum.

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

Testante scriptura probacio dilectionis exhibitio est operis. In signum vestre dilectionis mittimus<sup>d</sup> vobis ferculum et rogamus humiliter, ut hoc non spernat<sup>e</sup>, sed omnibus<sup>f</sup>, quos in mensa vestra presentes habetis, particularia frusta tribuatis etc.

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.

14b) *Latin Verse Letter from the Young Nuns to the Provost*

Letter from the young nuns (*iuniores 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-12v. "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 *pocioribus*. d *tollentur* deleted after *cordium*. e *cui*. f *plane primogenitas*. g *layt* deleted. h *Chrispium*. i *lapiendo*.

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

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

Venerabili domino, domino preposito, prelato, patri, pastori ovium monasterii Lunensis, archidiacono, canonico, domino, domino preposito Lubicensi<sup>a</sup>.

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.

Transmittunt ovicule et filie xenia vel munuscula/  
que prepotens non spernat, quia vilia et paupercula/  
sed recipiat pro affectu intime caritatis/  
filialis dilectionis et paterne affinitatis./

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.

Prandeat inde gaudiose cum suis edalibus/  
in prandio vel cena semper suis commensalibus./

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 domino Hynrico, nostro confessori/ honorabili presbitero et animarum zelatori./	May he also give a portion of it to Master Henry, our confessor, the venerable priest and lover of our souls.
Reficiatur eciam (fol. 9v) dominus Arnoldus, servitor noster primogenitus/ et oret sedulo, ut propicietur nobis dei unigenitus./	May Master Arnold also be invigorated with it, our oldest servant. May he pray diligently that the only begotten Son of God have mercy on us.
Reportet inde mensuram bonam dominus Hennignus, provisor sancti Bartholomei fidelis/ ut mereamur omnes veniam ab eo, qui habitat in celis./	May Master Hennignus, the faithful provisor of Saint Bartholomew, also receive a good portion, so that we may all receive forgiveness from Him who lives in Heaven.
Recreetur eciam dominus Johannes, qui <sup>b</sup> sonat Dei gratia/ ut per eius precamina scandamus celi pallacia./	May Master John also be refreshed, he 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 intercession on our behalf.
Recipiat inde partem dominus Bernardus, antiquus noster cappellanus/ et oret assidue, ut cetus noster serviat deo sanus./	May Master Bernhard, our old chaplain, also receive part and may he constantly pray so that our contented congregation may serve the Lord.
Tribuat is frusticulum iterum Johanni, qui est vester cellarius/ ut prediam nostram nobis numquam vacuam remittat vel rarius/ sed bonis pocionibus <sup>c</sup> repleat usque ad summum/ ut pro hoc re (fol. 10r) cipiatur post hanc vitam eternitatis munium./	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.
Non obliviscatur Ludolphus, claviger noster bonus/ ut in quadragesima sit in diluculo ad ecclesiam pronus./	Ludolf, our good Warden, shall also not be forgotten, so that he may be close to the kitchen at dusk during Lent.
Distribuat is micam non nobis notis aliis vestris servitoribus/ qui ornant ecclesiasticum officium suis clamoribus./	You may wish to give crumbs to other of your servants, unknown to us, who adorn the divine office with their clamour.

Epulantibus igitur in voce exultacionis/ vinum deesse non debet spiritualis iubilacionis/ quod tempore presenti in ecclesia calcatur/ et in vineis devotorum cordium <sup>d</sup> torculatur/ pro denario diurno laborancium/ et creatorem corde et ore laudancium/ precipue in vinea Paradisi claustralis/ utriusque sexus vite spiritualis/ quam colit (fol. 10v) agricola et vitis Christus vera,/ qui <sup>e</sup> complantavit et congregavit in caritate sincera.	May those, therefore, who dine with the voice of joy (Ps 117,15) 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 (Jo 15:1), who with us has planted and gathered in, in His pure charity.
Honesta maturitas domini, domini Nicolai nostri, pii patris palmites non paucos/ad serviendum deo paratos/ iungens mistica membra vero capiti Christo/ quibus preest more patris familias in tempore isto:	The venerability of our lord, Master Nicholaus, 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:
In primis honorabiles antiquiores per obedienciam conducens quasi primo mane/ Et paulo post hora tertia in professione X dilectas primogenitas plane <sup>f</sup> / Item hora sexta exiens vocans XVII in annuli subarracione/ (fol. 11r) atque hora nona totidem iterum in professione Demum hora XI vocans eciam operarios/ palmites XXXV licet tempore et etate varios,/ videlicet habitus <sup>g</sup> layci in spiritualis mutacione/ quibus omnibus presit pie pro dei miseracione,/ ut pius pater et pastor bonus/ ut sibi relaxetur peccatorum onus/ et in dei placito amore et timore ita vita presenti vivamus,/ quatenus unanimes a deo impetrare valeamus/ Pacem tricipitem tempori presenti/ que nobis assit omnibus cordi, ori et menti/	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 lay 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



*Ik hebbe vormerket uth den scriften venerabilis ac pie domine matris vestre, dat gy am to komenden sondaghe werdet muterende habitum vestrum unde anthende dat kleyd der gheystlicheyd, dat mynen herten is en grot fronde unde frylicheyd, dat gy god sy gelovet, so verne komen syn an dat older, dat gy iuwen leven utherkoren brudegamme mogen van daghen to daghen mer nalen, de iuw heft utherkoren de mundo, ut eatis et fructum afferatis et fructus vester maneat<sup>58</sup> unde iuw in sancto collegio Christi also in enen wyngarden heft geplantet tamquam vivas plantaciones gude fruchte to dreghende.*

*Worumme sprecke ik ny myt iuw illud propheticum canticum 'Gaudens gaudebo in domino et exultabit anima mea in deo meo',<sup>59</sup> de de iuw wert kleydende 'vestimento salutis, in vestimento' religionis et indumento iusticie circumdabit vos<sup>60</sup> (Is 61:10). Dat gy de rechtmidicheyt alle stedes schollen an iuw hebben gevende enen isliken, dat em tobehort, also iuwen oversten horsam und underdanicheyt iuwen evenliken leve und fruntlicheyt alle iuwen leven gheystiken matribus, othmodicheyt unde bedenscrafticheyt. So vormane ik iuw uth grantliker leve mynes herten, wo wol nicht van noden were, wente ik twifele nicht iuwe utherkoren leve.*

*I have noticed from the letters of that venerable and pious Lady, your Mother Superior, that on the coming Sunday you will change your attire and will put on the garment of spirituality, which brings my heart great joy and happiness, that you, God be praised, have now reached the age at which you can draw closer to your dear chosen bridegroom every day, He has also chosen you "from the world so that you may go and bear fruit and that your fruit may remain" and, in the holy college of Christ, has planted you in the vineyard as living shoots to bear good fruit.*

*For that reason I say with you now the words of the prophet: 'I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God', He who will cloth you 'with garments of salvation, in the robes of faith and who may array you in a robe of righteousness'. So that you should always act justly and render unto each man his due: your utmost obedience and the submissiveness, your constant love and friendliness towards all your dear spiritual mothers, humility and willingness to serve. To these things I urge you, from the profound love in my heart that desires your best, though it is, doubtless unnecessary, as I do not doubt your dedicated love.*

<sup>58</sup> Antiphonale, Commune sanctorum: *Non vos me elegistis sed ego elegi vos et posui vos ut eatis et fructum afferatis et fructus vester maneat*. René-Jean Hesbert, *Corpus antiphonalium Officii*, Nr. 7233.

<sup>59</sup> Is 61:10: Introitus for the Immaculate Conception, 8 December: *Gaudens gaudebo in domino et exultabit anima mea in domino meo, quia induit me vestimentis salutis, et indumento iustitiae circumdedit me quasi sponsam ornatam monilibus suis*.

<sup>60</sup> Responsorium 3, Holy Saint Agnes's Day (In primo nocturne): *Induit me Dominus vestimento salutis, et indumento laetitiae circumdedit me: Et tanquam sponsam decoravit me corona*.

*Domina mater und iuwen anderen matres iuw rede wol vlitighen exhortert hebben, dat gy andencken vocacionem vestram, wo iuw god inter mille milia hominum heft utherkoren an syne ewighe uthewelde brüd, up dat he iuw wel de leveste wesen und gy allen trost, vronden unde soticheyt und allent, dat gy begheren in eme moghen vinden. Den schollen gy boven alle dingh beleven unde eme myt vlite denen und boven alle timoren domini in iuw hebben, quia ubi timor ibi salus,<sup>61</sup> uppet dat gy mogen bloyen levende unde hir voren vitam angelicam in (fol. 129<sup>r</sup>) terris,<sup>62</sup> dat gy na dessen levende moten warliken werden sorores et concives angelorum, unde moten dar komen, dar gy entfanghen dat grote lon, quod preparavit deus diligentibus se, unde myt deme gheystliken kleyde hir nu also gekleydet werden, veste immortalitatis in superna patria.*

*Demum, carissime amite, transmitto vobis pro signo innate caritatis malk en kleyne kroeseken, en gleseken, en roth vormalet vetken, en wumpel, enen luchterken unde en kleyn hilghen bledeken, in quo continetur effigies beate Marie virginis, de scholle gy nu eligeren in matrem, quia ipsa est, de iuw beste kan spreken apud filium suum sponsum vestrum, darumme solle gy dar gherne iuwe devocien vor hebben unde beghere gy myner ok nicht willen vorghetlik wesen apud deum an iuwen bruddage.*

*Your Mother Superior and the other mothers have already exhorted you diligently, so that you may be mindful of 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, 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.*

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

<sup>62</sup> Quotation from the Antiphones of Laudes (OSB) applied to the Confessors, but also Vita prima sancti Bernardi, PL 185, Sp. 225–466, Sp. 237 *vitam angelicam geren in terris*.

*Ick will iuwer wedder andechtich syn in oracionibus meis, utinam devotis salutum<sup>b</sup> desidero nomine meo venerabilem dominam matrem vestram unde beghere ante omnia et super omnia gy er to willen, behorich unde horsammich syn, so gy des plichtich syn, wente se iuw van herten belevet so ik anders nichtis spore und ok sorge unde moye nachtes unde dages umme iuwe willen dricht.*

Salutetis eciam matres vestras G Hkem et Ermgardis Tzerstede ex parte mea necnon et sororum vestrarum.<sup>63</sup>

Scripsi repentino cursu dormitantibus oculis de sero ipsa die Ascensionis domini.

Elisabet abbatisa inmerita in Medingh amita vestra dilecta

*I shall think of you in my prayers and I 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 be—since she loves you with all her heart as I sincerely believe and takes care and toils for your wellbeing both day and night.*

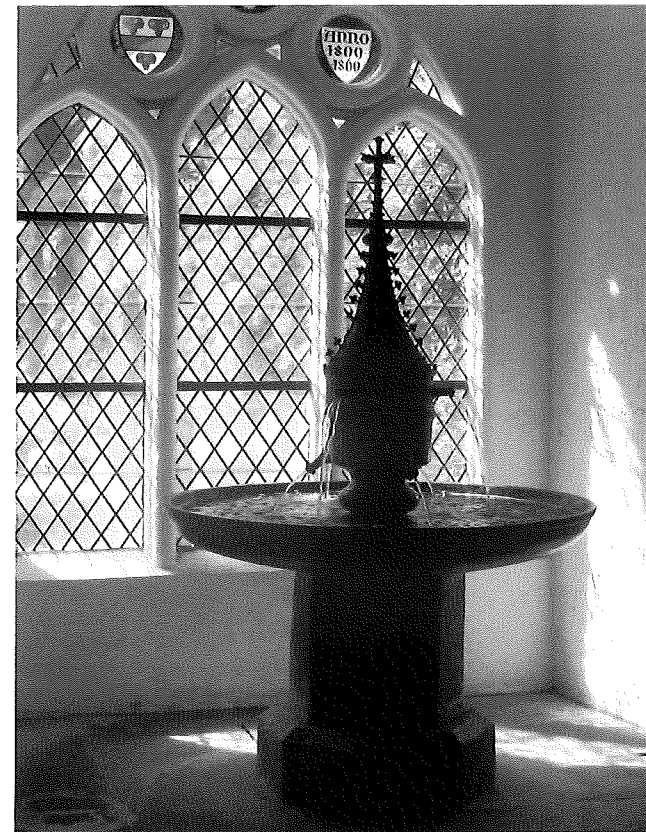
Please also convey greetings on my behalf to your mothers, Gertrude Hemke and Irmgard Tzerstede and also to your sisters.

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

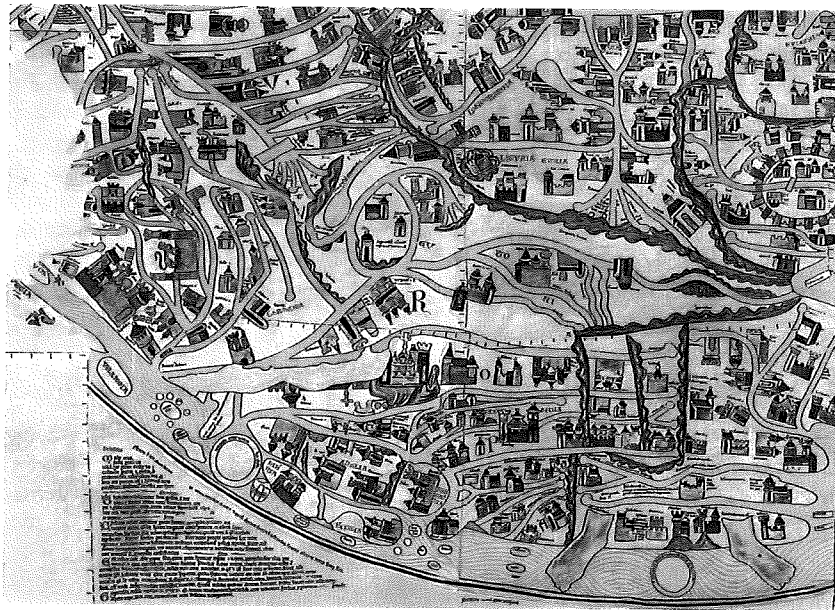
Elizabeth, the unworthy Abbess of Medingen, your beloved aunt.

<sup>63</sup> G HKem = Gertrud Hencke (a nun in Medingen 1505); Ermgardis Tzerstede is not recorded as in Medingen; only Anna Tzerstede is named, 1505.

## ILLUSTRATIONS

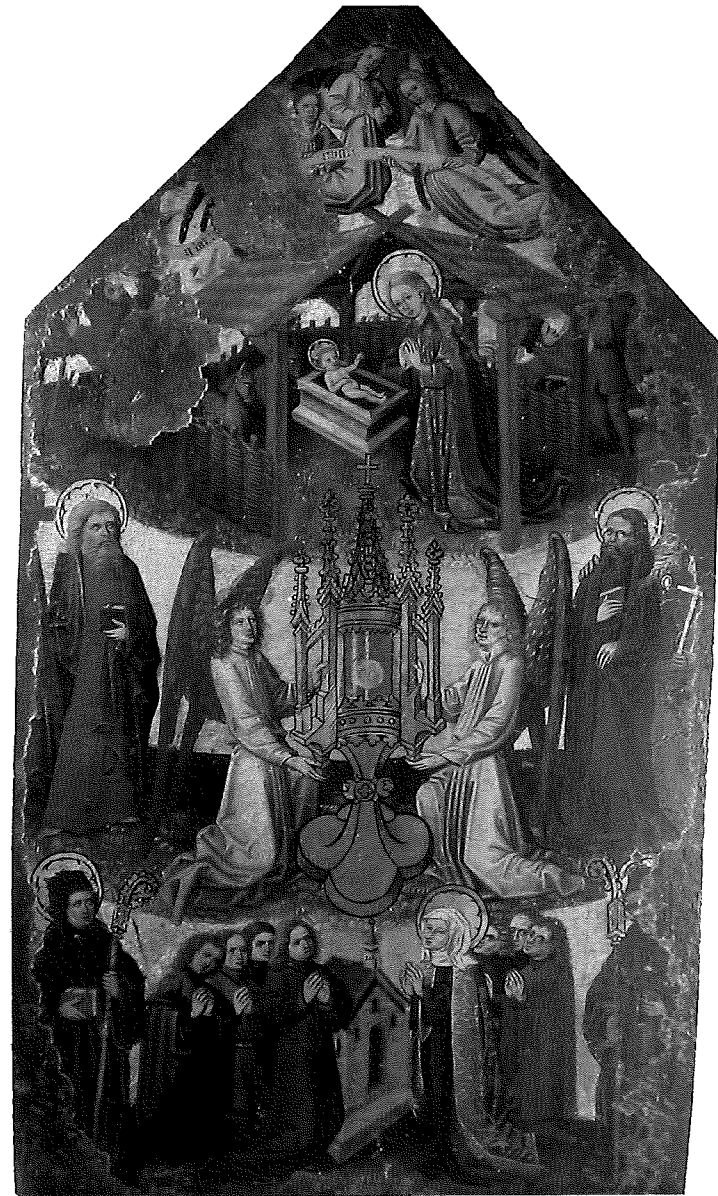


1. Mystical Transmission: Gothic Brass Fountain at the Convent of Lüne  
The Gothic Brass Fountain is to be found in the Convent of Lüne, which belonged to the Lüneburg convent network. For the last 700 years every visitor to Lüne has been greeted by the sound of running water flowing into the "Handstein" (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 4:10), indispensable for any religious house, has been imbued with meaning beyond the practical use.



## 2. Foregrounding the Region: Northern Germany on the Ebendorf Map

The 13th-century world map found in Ebendorf, 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 30 goatskins sewn together, making it the largest world map from the Middle Ages. It shows Christ, with His head at the top of the map in the east, 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 Ebendorf (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 Ebendorf 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 ceremonials 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 (→ Schlottheuber).



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 (→ Bärsch, 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.



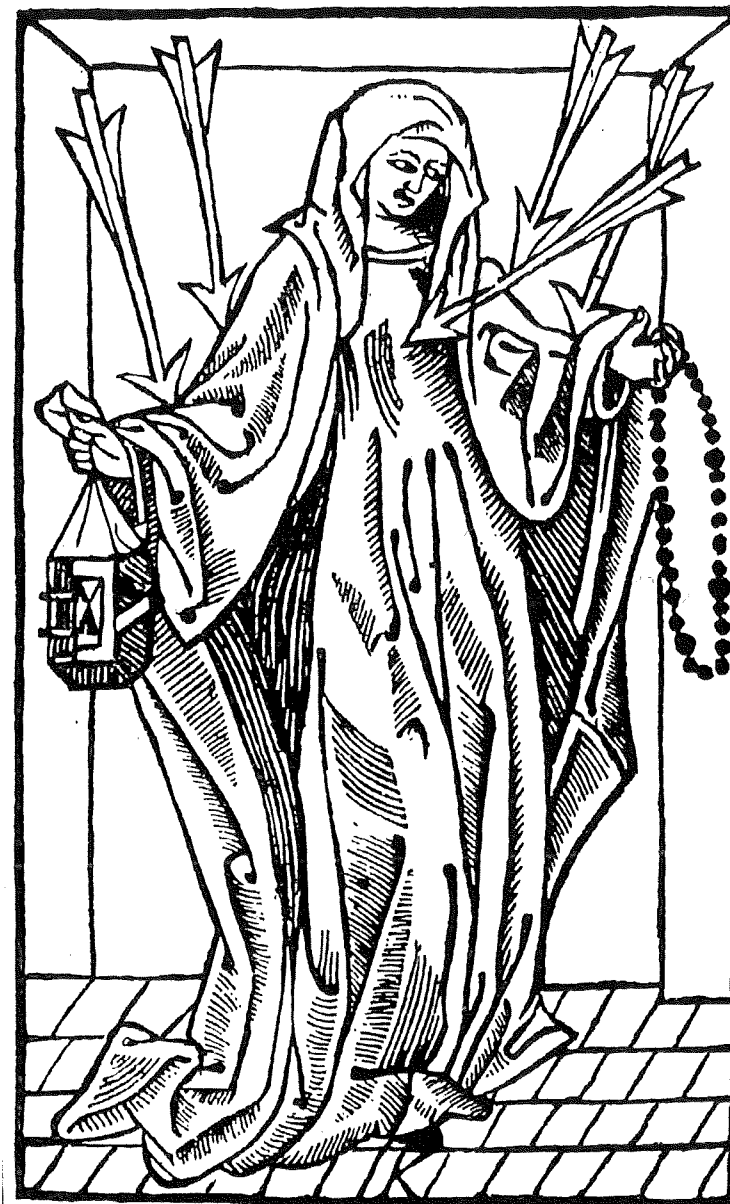
Das .i. blat  
Die vorrede in das buch. der vbum  
gē gotforchtiger vnde andechtiger  
menschen.



**D**as buch geistlich  
er gnadē. ader der offenwa  
rügen. der selichē iugfrawē  
Mechthildis. etwan closter  
iugfrawē. des closters helf  
fede im lande zu sachsen.  
bey Eißlebē gelegē. ist vnde  
wirdt. von vil trefflichen ge  
larten vnde erfarnen in der  
heyligē schrifft. gelobet. das solch buch. nicht alleynē  
in guttlichem glawbē. zu gedulden sey. sondern es were  
auch würdig. das es mit guldenē buchstabē. geschrib  
ben wurde. dan es beschleust in sich. vil sonderliche  
vnde aller eren würdigē. lere vnd punct. doch seindt  
die furnemlichstē stücke. vnde nutzlichstē leren. die do  
gleich. als der kern disses buchs. geachtet sein. außge  
zogē. vnde in ein klein buchlein zusamē getragen. do  
mit es die gotforchtigē vnd andechtigē menschen. als  
zu einer teglichē vbunge stets bey der hant habē mo  
gē. Doch ist disses buchlein nicht noch der ordenūge.  
des originals. ader vrsprunglichen buchs. geistlicher  
gnadē. geordnet vnde gemacht. Sondern so vil man  
sich hat duncken lassen. das es zu der andacht dynen  
wolle. dan offte die dinge. die in dem letzten buche. ad  
in der mittel. gemelts originals geschriben sein. vorn

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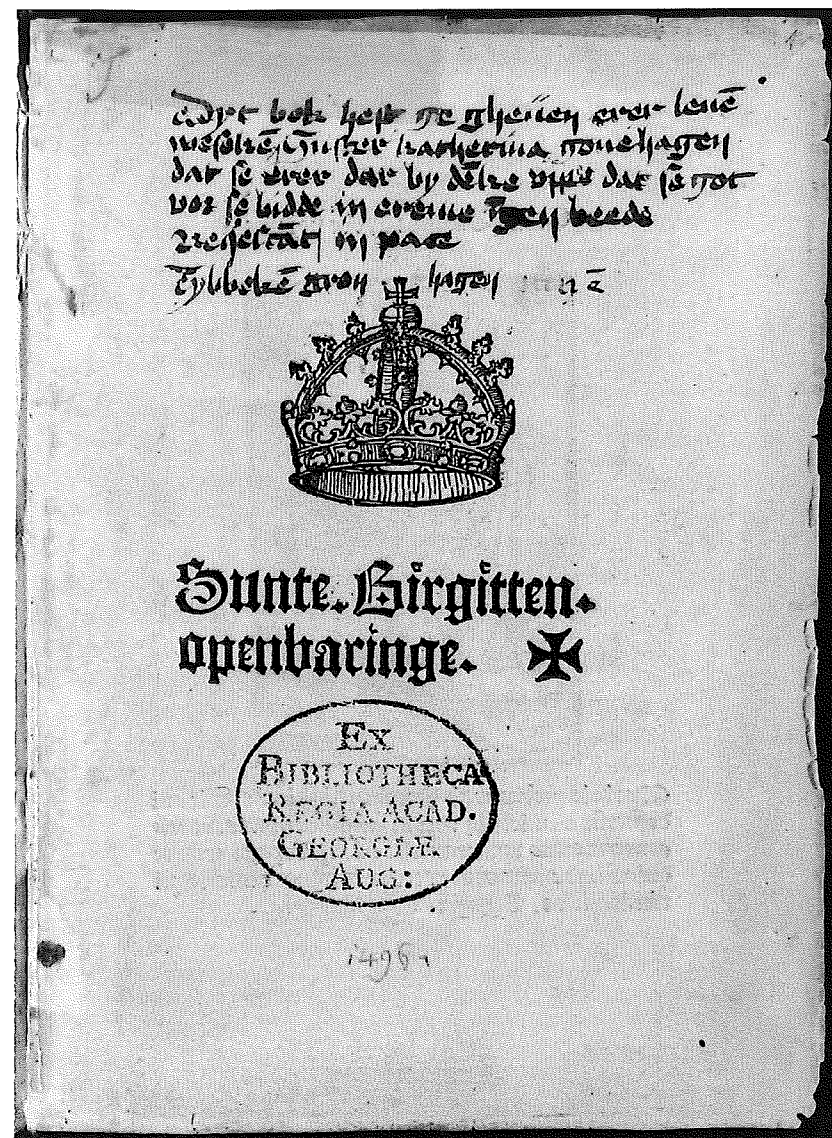
4. Translating Mysticism: An Early German Print of Mechthild of Hackeborn  
The first text page praising the devotional value of Mechthild of Hackeborn's writing in the Leipzig print of 1508 is representative of the manifold transmission processes which the texts discussed in the volume undergo. The 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 Mechthild 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 frawen Dorothee clewsenerynne yn der thumkyrchen tzu Marienwerdir des landes tzu preußen* ("The Life of the Blessed Lady Dorothea, Recluse in the Cathedral Church of Marienwerder in the Country of Prussia"). It was printed in Marienburg by Jacob Karweysse on 13 March 1492.

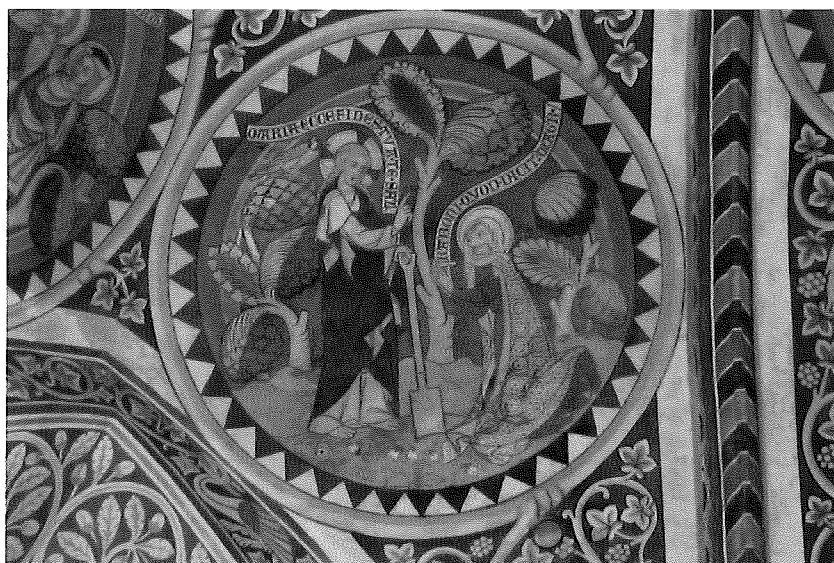


6. Birgitta of Sweden as Saint: Woodcut for *Sunte Birgitten Openbaringe*  
The iconic image of Birgitta of Sweden does not capture a historical moment but rather aspects of the history of transmission. Birgitta sits writing in the conventional pose of the author, familiar from depictions of the Gospel writers and the Church Fathers (→ Andersen, p. 220); the caption addresses her as “bride of Christ”, asking for her intercession (→ Introduction, p. 13). Lübeck: Mohnkopfdruckerei, 1496, fol. 9v.



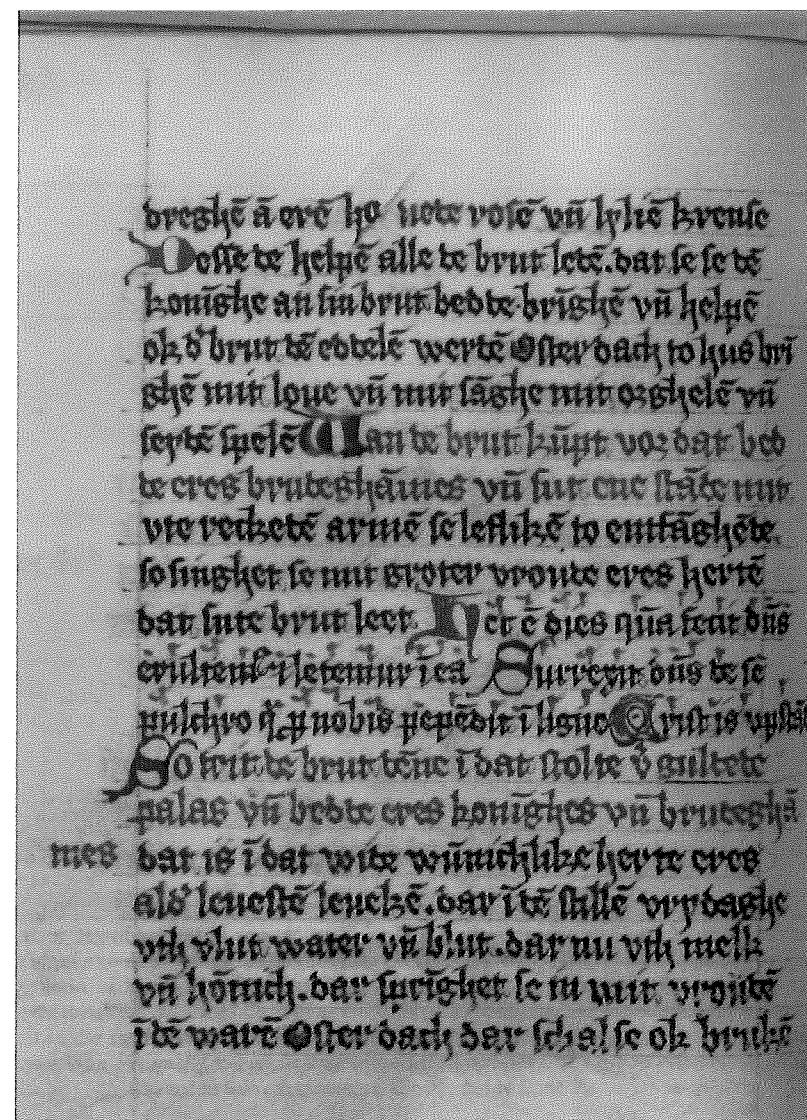
7. Passing on Devotional Reading: the Göttingen *Sunte Birgitten Openbaringe*  
That Birgitta's revelations were used as devotional reading can be seen from the inscription in the Göttingen copy of *Sunte Birgitten Openbaringe* (→ Andersen, p. 221), SUB Göttingen, 8 H E SANCT 176/33 INC, fol. 1r.





#### 8. Visualizing Easter: The Ceiling of the Wienhausen Nuns' Choir

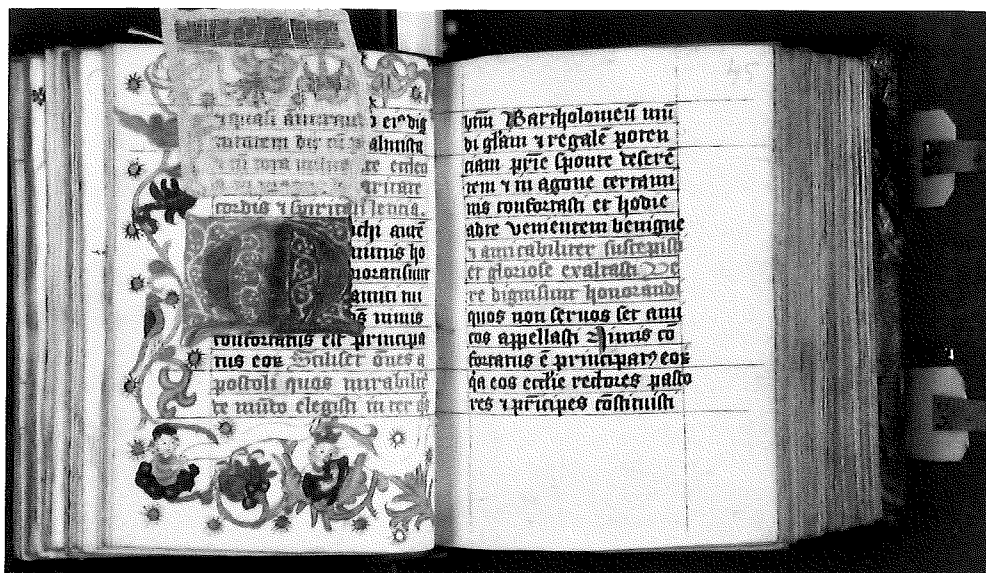
Beyond devotional reading there was a wealth of images available especially for the nuns in the Lüneburg convents; the Wienhausen nuns were surrounded by representations of biblical scenes painted on the ceiling of the nuns' choir, among them prominently the *Hortulanus* scene. Reading and meditating 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

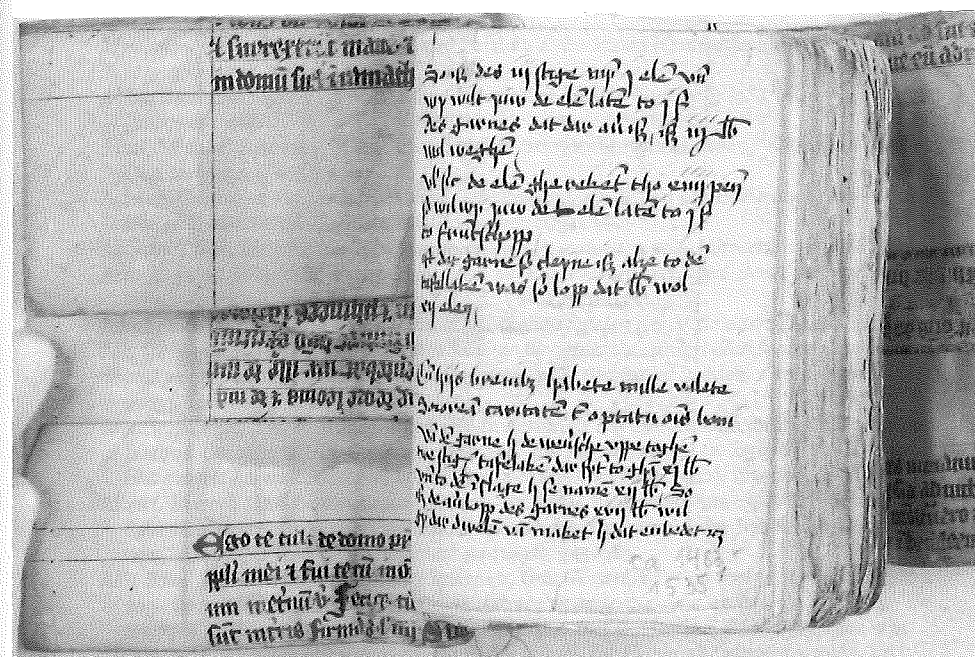
The musical notation, frequent in the northern German prayer books, is another visual reminder of devotional processes that encourage "singing with the heart" (→ Hascher-Burger). The extract is that printed in Appendix nb where at the bridal bed the *Leise* "Christ is Risen" is sung, Trier, Bistumsarchiv, Hs. 528, 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. 331, Appendix 13a/b) reinforces the role of music in lifting devotion to a higher level. The small prayer book (10.5×8) was written by Elizabeth 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 sown 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 (→ Schlottheuber, 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.