

Rakoczy, Nancy

CH 108

March 16, 2015

**A Compendium of History, Miracles, Arabic Influences,  
Divine Chastisements, and Grievances in the Neighborhood of Ninove**

*The Liber un quo habent turvaria miracula patrata de patrocino SS Corenlii et Cypriani, item et varia testimonia* is a compilation of history and miracle stories. It relates the history of the founding of the Premonstartensian monastery dedicated to Saints Cornelius and Cyprian at Ninove at Ghent.<sup>1</sup> It also lists the miracles and healings attributed to the monastery. The Library of Leander Van Ess donated the manuscript to the Burke Library in 1838, and of its collection is the only one to have a Flemish provenance.<sup>2</sup>

The *Liber's* collection of miracle stories, attributed especially to Saint Cornelius, was created by an anonymous canon some time between 1188/1189 and 1199 to enhance devotion to and “commemorate his many miracles.”<sup>3</sup> St. Norbert founded the first Premonstratensian monastery in Pre'montre' in northern France in 1120.<sup>4</sup> This abbey of Ninove was situated in the easternmost part of the county of Flanders, on the border with

---

<sup>1</sup> Milton McCormick Gatch, ed., *'So Precious a Foundation'* The Library of Leander Van Ess at the Burke Library of Union Theological Library of Union Theological Seminary in the City of New York (New York 1996), 150.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid 150.

<sup>3</sup> Arnoud-Jan A. Bijnsterveld, “Conflict and Compromise: The Premonstratensians of Ninove (Flanders) and the Laity in the Twelfth Century” *International Medieval Research* Vol. 6, eds. A. J. Bijnsterveld, Henk B. Teunis, and Andrew Wareham (Turnhout: Brepolis Publishers, 1999), 168-9. online date 2011.  
<http://brepolis.metapress.com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/content/w824w53201680678/fulltext.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Rev. Cornelius J. Kirkfleet, *History of St. Norbert* (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1916), 64.  
<https://archive.org/stream/historyofsaintno00kirkrich#page/64/mode/2up>

the duchy of Brabant.<sup>5</sup> “The parish church in all probability . . . possessed the relics of St. Cornelius, a pope of the early church who died in 253 CE.”<sup>6</sup> The book has fifty-eight chapters, and is divided into three different types of miracles: chastisement (chs. 1-XIV), protection (chs. XV-XXI), and miraculous (chs. XXII-XXXI and L-LXXVI).<sup>7</sup>

The *Liber* is composed of thirty-one pages of parchment written in Latin, with Flemish marginalia.<sup>8</sup> It measures 9.25” x 6.25” and its present brown leather cover is reported to have been rebound in the sixteenth century, with no stiffener or backing.<sup>9</sup> The brown leather cover is still supple, though discolored in places, and when laid open, the inside cover reveals a hem of the same leather glued top and bottom. The parchment pages are written in Latin in the littera minisculat protogothica textualis hand.<sup>10</sup>

Simplicity not complexity is in evidence in the binding: thick threads protrude through the spine used to sew the quires together, with no additional leather used to hide these threads. The casual construction of the *Liber's* binding and decorations suggest it was used only within the monastery, and not prepared as a gift for nobility. “The higher the status of a manuscript and the richer the patron for whom it was made, the more complex would be the process of its production and the large number of techniques and pigments involved.”<sup>11</sup> When the book is opened, more threads poke between the pages.

---

<sup>5</sup> Bijssterveld, “Conflict and Compromise,” 169.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid 169.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid 169.

<sup>8</sup> ArchiveGrid: Liber in quo habentur varia miracula patrata de patrocino SS. Cornelii et Cypriani, item et varia testimonia. Manuscript, 12<sup>th</sup> century. <http://beta.worldcat.org/archivegrid/collection/data/505305350>

<sup>9</sup> Gatch, ‘*So Precious a Foundation*,’ 150.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid 150.

<sup>11</sup> Raymond Clemens and Timothy Graham, *Introduction to Manuscript Studies* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007),

The spine has the number eleven on it, suggesting it was one of a series. At least four different calligraphic hands created the *Liber*. Page twenty-three had a different calligrapher finish the page; the difference in hand is noticeable. There are smaller pages sewn between pages twenty-three and twenty-four: more evidence that the *Liber* was for the monks' use and perhaps in service as a notebook.

The first and last pages which enfold the manuscript are of parchment and inscribed with a modern hand: LIBER MIRACULORUM S. CORNELII NINIVENSIS; next line: TRANSCRIPTUS ET EDITUS; next line: A. W.W. ROCKWELL, MCMXIV. William Walter Rockwell was an associate professor of Church History at Union Theological Seminary from 1917-25, and a librarian during those years as well.<sup>12</sup> He was a scholar of medieval manuscripts, and received his doctorate from the University of Göttingen, in 1914. His 'Inaugural Dissertation,' written in German, was on the *Liber*, called: *Liber Miraculorum S. Cornelii Ninivensis* and published in July 1914.<sup>13</sup> Rockwell's *Liber Miraculorum* provides much source material for Arnoud-Jan A. Bijsterveld's research. On the back of this first page, there is additional writing in Latin. It is open to speculation why Rockwell felt it was permissible to add this additional wrapper of parchment, and write his name and the date on the opening vellum page. Perhaps he felt possessive of it, since he had written his dissertation on the *Liber* and he was Union's librarian as well, which are also reasons to leave it inviolate.

There are many holes in the parchment that were part of the vellum before the pages were inked. The hole on the front and back of page four was there at the beginning

---

<sup>12</sup> *Alumni Catalogue of the Union Theological Seminary in the City of New York, 1836-1936.*  
[https://archive.org/stream/ldpd\\_5998059\\_000/ldpd\\_5998059\\_000\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/ldpd_5998059_000/ldpd_5998059_000_djvu.txt)

<sup>13</sup> W. W. Rockwell. *Liber Miraculorum S. Cornelii Ninivensis*. (Göttingen: Hibert & Co., 1914).

of the production because the calligrapher accommodated it, inking the letters around it; such casualness is another indicator the book was for monastery use. “It is also common to find on some leaves of a manuscript holes that already existed in the skin at the time the animal was slaughtered”<sup>14</sup> Books produced for the nobility or a bishop would have been more selective of their vellum.

Manuscript initials and chapter headings are in red and green, which in addition to one or two lines of red and green script throughout the book provide its only decorations. These two colors were the most commonly used for the time period because they were the simplest and cheapest colors to produce.<sup>15</sup> The size and complexity of the initials in a manuscript are an important indication of a book’s quality. “The higher the status of the manuscript, the larger and more elaborate the initials would be. Sometimes colored initials might include no decoration at all.”<sup>16</sup> The simplicity of the *Liber’s* initials is another clue to its exclusive use within the monastery. On page 1v-2 the green ink of the initial has eaten through the parchment.<sup>17</sup> This is an indicator of “the acidity of the vinegar used in its production”<sup>18</sup>

Marginalia written in Flemish within the wide margins is prominent throughout the book, and should not be looked at as a distraction from the main texts. Schipper notes that marginalia, “frequently comment on and engage in dialogue with the primary text on the page, and those voices have an equal claim on our attention as an integral part of the

---

<sup>14</sup> Clemens and Graham, *Introduction to Manuscript Studies*, 12.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid* 25.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid* 25.

<sup>17</sup> *Digital Scriptorium*. New York, Columbia University, Burke Library at Union Theological Seminary, UTS MS 011. <http://servlet1.lib.berkeley.edu:8080/imgwindow/?url=http://nma.berkeley.edu/ark:/28722/bk0009b2h23&caption=&exten=ff.+1v-2>

<sup>18</sup> Clemens and Graham, *Introduction to Manuscript Studies*, 27.

manuscript page.”<sup>19</sup> Scholars have come to recognize the importance of these glosses as important as the traditional texts. Schipper adds that until recently modern readers assigned a secondary role to the marginalia yet: “medieval books are dynamic objects, the text or texts constantly growing, not static with a fixed textual content . . . margins are as much a part of the book as the text we wrongly privilege over the margins.”<sup>20</sup> We see evidence of its growing nature in pages eleven, twenty, twenty-three, which especially have a great deal of marginalia on the bottom of the pages, and “interact” as Schipper reports to add a ‘modern’ Flemish voice to the Latin text. It is possible that the additions were more contemporary attributions to St. Cornelius’ miracles. The *Liber’s* additions attest to the fact of its role as almost a notebook to gather more facts of the saint’s assistance to the monastery.

The foundation history of the abbey, *De fundatione Ninivensis abbatie*, comprises a sizable amount of the book and, “was written by a second hand after 1199, with additions by four hands writing after 1199, after 1221, after 1232, and around 1252 respectively . . . Chs. XXXII to XLIX and two loose sheets constitute the *De fundatione*.”<sup>21</sup>

At the front of the *Liber* are eleven smaller pages of paper, size 6.25” x 8” inscribed in a markedly different calligraphic hand from the several that had been used to produce the majority of the book. These pages list members of a confraternity of St. Cornelius.<sup>22</sup> Two sources, the Digital Scriptorium<sup>23</sup> and ‘*So Precious a Foundation*’<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> William Schipper, “Textual Varieties in Manuscript Margins” *Space, Text and Margin in Medieval Manuscripts* ed. Sarah Larratt Keefer and Rolf H. Bremmer Jr. (Peeters: Paris, 2007) 26.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid 44.

<sup>21</sup> Bijssterveld, “Conflict and Compromise,” 169.

<sup>22</sup> Gatch, ‘*So Precious a Foundation*,’ 150.

<sup>23</sup> *Digital Scriptorium*.

claim it was bound into the front of the book in the sixteenth century when it was rebound. However, on two pages there are clearly marked dates from the seventeenth centuries. On the seventh page there is a date, “Anno 1616 13 Julu” [July]. On the eleventh page, “1609 13. Jan,” which place these pages in the seventeenth century.<sup>25</sup> A scrutiny of the formation of the number six in the date 1609, and 1616, in these two instances shows a use of Arabic numerals, which “first became known in Spain in the tenth century . . . and became common from the fourteenth century.”<sup>26</sup> The example of the Arabic six in *Introduction to Manuscript Studies*, clearly shows the numbers as similar to those on the pages of the *Liber*, thus placing these eleven pages in the seventeenth, not the sixteenth century.<sup>27</sup> See Plate I.

Unlike the littera minisculat protogothica textualis hand that is typical of the twelfth century, and used throughout the book proper including the marginalia, these eleven pages, (originally twelve, the first page was cut out), the calligraphy is in a much freer style, with bold ascenders and descenders, along with exuberant swashes that point to an Arabic influence. The use of these flourishes doesn't follow the strict conformity of letterforms based in Caroline miniscule, or for that matter, a rigid adherence to the penciled lines seen in the thirty-one pages of the *Liber*. See Plate II.

---

<sup>24</sup> Gatch, ‘*So Precious a Foundation*,’ 150.

<sup>25</sup> *Digital Scriptorium*.

<sup>26</sup> Clemens and Graham, *Introduction to Manuscript Studies*, 91.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid* 93.

An Arabic influence on Europe began in Spain in the eighth century when Islamic forces conquered the native population.<sup>28</sup> By the twelfth century, what emerged in this confluence of cultures was a hybridity, as scholars traveled to Spain to translate Arabic manuscripts into Latin for the European market. Gerard of Cremona, Italy was well known for his Arabic to Latin translations in Muslim controlled Toledo, Spain, and whose career, “already in the late 1130s was attracted to Toledo because he knew he would find there Ptolemy’s *Almagest* in Arabic.”<sup>29</sup> Mutual cultural influence was also seen in the population known as the,

Mozarabs, the ‘Arabized’ Christians who had preserved the liturgy of the Visigothic church and whose numbers were augmented by the Islamic converts. The bulk of the population, therefore, spoke both Arabic and a Romance dialect, and Arabic was the language of religion and culture”<sup>30</sup>

By the time these eleven pages were inserted into the *Libre* in the seventeenth century, Islamic influences were a given; trade routes would have allowed precious Arabic manuscripts to penetrate as far as northern Europe where the manuscript was held.

Arabic calligraphy like its European counterparts had a variety of hands. Among the varieties available two of them, “*Maghribi* and *Andalusi*, were confined to the western part of the Islamic world<sup>31</sup>” and may have been the hands used to inscribe texts

---

<sup>28</sup> Brian A. Catlos, *The Victors and the Vanquished: Christians and Muslims of Catalonia and Aragon, 1050-1300* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 23.  
<http://quod.lib.umich.edu.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=acls;cc=acls;q1=The%20Victors%20and%20the%20Vanquished%3A%20Christians%20and%20Muslims%20of%20Catalonia%20and%20Aragon%2C%201050-1300.;q2=ACLS%20Humanities%20E-Book;op2=and;rgn=full%20text;rgn1=full%20text;rgn2=series;view=toc;idno=heb06699.0001.001>

<sup>29</sup> Charles Burnett, “The Coherence of the Arabic-Latin Translation Program in Toledo in the Twelfth Century” *Science in Context* 14, (2001): 249. doi:10.1017/S0269889701000096.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid 250.

<sup>31</sup> David James, “Calligraphy – The Geometry of the Spirit” *Calligraphy* April 28, 2012  
<http://islamic-arts.org/2012/calligraphy-the-geometry-of-the-spirit/>

that traveled up the trade routes to northern Europe.<sup>32</sup> Plate III shows examples of both the Maghribi and Andalusí hands. It's impossible to determine which Islamic texts the writer of those eleven pages within the *Liber* had seen that influenced his handwriting, but these are samples of what may have been available at the time. Note the dynamism and energy of the rhythmic descenders that go below the line, and the flourishes that lift the text in Plate III. This kind of energy is missing from the Caroline hand; the writer of the eleven pages may have been attempting to interpret these flourishes into his own writing.

The *Liber* provides a window into the twelfth century, and the state of the rancorous relations between the abbey and their neighbors.<sup>33</sup> Bijssterveld believes there was an economic gulf between abbey and its neighbors, which led to constant disputes. This was a time of “political, social, and economic transformation, the expanding and rich abbey of Ninove often incurred the violent envy of its noble, urban, and peasant neighbors.”<sup>34</sup> The miracle stories show that St. Cornelius and God were providing ready protection from the abbey's neighbors who didn't respect the power of the Church when normal means of dispute settlement had been exhausted. “The only sure answer for the canons was to invoke revenge from the world beyond . . . conflicts with laymen were most often solved through divine elimination of the enemy”<sup>35</sup> Chastisements make up

---

<sup>32</sup> David James, “Calligraphy – The Geometry of the Spirit”

<sup>33</sup> Bijssterveld, “Conflict and Compromise,” 169.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid 171.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid 177.



thirty-two percent of the *Liber's* stories, in contrast to twelve point six percent of miracle stories from this time period.<sup>36</sup> Among the stories of divine chastisements:

There are eleven violent deaths, twice preceded by insanity; one instance of a 'shameful and maddening stroke; ruination . . . and one case of paralysis . . . one punishment through fire. A man who had mockingly questioned the saints' intervention in worldly affairs had consequently publicly be-fouled himself, and had been struck with madness and a speech impediment. No longer daring to insult St. Cornelius, he entered a Premonstratensian abbey where he ended his days in peace.<sup>37</sup>

The *Liber* is not only a record of rancor, but includes stories of miraculous healings: "the miracles associated with St. Cornelius are healings, and the manuscript has been regarded as a source for medieval pathological students because of its descriptions of the ailments of pilgrims who sought healing there."<sup>38</sup> The relics of St. Cornelius made the monastery a pilgrimage site, offering a focus for the suffering. Narratives of ongoing healings and bitter disputes no doubt fill the margins, and why the margins were created to be so wide: they were needed to contain the unfolding saga of the monastery and its neighbors. The *Liber* contains a rich and layered story, not only in its construction and the variety of styles, but in its depth of histories both explicit and implicit.

---

<sup>36</sup> Ibid 169.

<sup>37</sup> Bijssterveld, "Conflict and Compromise," 172-3.

<sup>38</sup> Gatch, "*So Precious a Foundation*," 150-1.

## Bibliography

*Alumni catalogue of the Union Theological Seminary in the City of New York, 1836-1936.* [https://archive.org/stream/ldpd\\_5998059\\_000/ldpd\\_5998059\\_000\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/ldpd_5998059_000/ldpd_5998059_000_djvu.txt)

ArchiveGrid: Liber in quo habentur varia miracula patrata de patrocinio SS. Cornelii et Cypriani, item et varia testimonia. Manuscript, 12<sup>th</sup> century.  
<http://beta.worldcat.org/archivegrid/collection/data/505305350>

Bijsterveld, Arnoud-Jan A. "Conflict and Compromise: The Premonstratensians of Ninove (Flanders) and the Laity in the Twelfth Century." *Negotiating Secular and Ecclesiastical Power: Western Europe in the Central Middle Ages. International Medieval Research* Vol.6. Eds. A. J. A. Bijsterveld, Henk B. Teunis, and Andrew Wareham. Turnhout: Brepolis Publishers. (1999): online date 2011  
<http://brepols.metapress.com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/content/W824W5320160678>

Burnett, Charles. "The Coherence of the Arabic-Latin Translation Program in Toledo in the Twelfth Century." *Science in Context* 14 (2001)  
doi:10.1017/S0269889701000096.

Catlos, Brian A. *The Victors and the Vanquished: Christians and Muslims of Catalonia and Aragon, 1050-1300*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2004.  
<http://quod.lib.umich.edu.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=acls;cc=acls;q1=The%20Victors%20and%20the%20Vanquished%3A%20Christians%20and%20Muslims%20of%20Catalonia%20and%20Aragon%2C%201050-1300.;q2=ACLS%20Humanities%20E-Book;op2=and;rgn=full%20text;rgn1=full%20text;rgn2=series;view=toc;idno=hb06699.0001.001>

Clemens, Raymond and Timothy Graham. *Introduction to Manuscript Studies*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007.

*Digital Scriptorium* New York, Columbia University, Burke Library at Union Theological Seminary, UTS MS 011  
<http://vm133.lib.berkeley.edu:8080/xtf22/search?rmode=digscript;smode=bid;bi=22;docsPerPage=1;startDoc=10;fullview=yes>

Gatch, Milton McCormick, ed. 'So Precious a Foundation': *The Library of Leander Van Ess at the Burke Library of Union Theological Library in the City of New York*, New York: Union Theological Seminary and the Grolier Club, 1996.

<http://www.metmuseum.org/collection/the-collection-online/search/456306?pos=124&rpp=30&pg=5&ft=islamic+calligraphy>

<http://www.samfogg.com/catalogue.php?id=583&p=1peach-coloured>

James, David. "Calligraphy – The Geometry of the Spirit" *Calligraphy*. April 28, 2012.  
<http://islamic-arts.org/2012/calligraphy-the-geometry-of-the-spirit/>

Kirkfleet, Rev. Cornelius J. *History of St. Norbert*. St. Louis: B. Herder, 1916.  
<https://archive.org/stream/historyofsaintno00kirkrich#page/64/mode/2up>

Rockwell. W. W. *Liber Miraculorum S. Cornelii Ninivensis*. Göttingen: Hibert & Co., 1914.

Schipper William. "Textual Varieties in Manuscript Margins." *Space, Text and Margin in Medieval Manuscripts*, Edited by Sarah Larratt Keefer and Rolf H. Bremmer Jr. Paris: Peeters, 2007.