

Heidi Thorsen

Dr. Jane Huber

CH 108

16 March 2015

Codicological Paper: Necrology ca. 1400-1499 (UTS MS 060)

This necrology originates from an unnamed Benedictine convent in the diocese of Halberstadt, near Hadmersleben. The convent was affiliated with a double cloister located in nearby Huysburg. Double cloisters, or double monasteries as they are also called, attempted to create a symbiotic relationship between communities of monks and communities of nuns. Women in particular had to rely on ordained men for practical and spiritual needs, from representation in public and financial matters to celebration of the mass and administration of other sacraments (Griffiths 5). Two other necrologies of Hadmersleben are known (Digital Scriptorium). This paper seeks to describe the book that contains the necrology, speculate on its uses, and rediscover the identity of an unnamed community of women who created and stewarded this book for centuries.

The necrology dates from the 15th century with entries up to 1710. It does not stand alone, but is bound together with a martyrology (1v-52) and the Rule of St. Benedict (53v-68)—I will refer to these documents as Part 1 of the manuscript and the necrology as Part 2, which will be the main focus of this paper. However, there are some interesting things to note first about the documents with which the necrology now shares its present binding. Both documents in Part 1 are printed, in contrast to the various styles of handwriting we will find in Part 2. The Digital Scriptorium notes that the martyrology is a defective document, missing its first two leaves (DS). The entire book is heavily worn, with ruffled or torn pages, stains, and various annotations.¹ However, the edges of the pages on the Rule of St. Benedict are noticeably more ruffled, possibly indicating that this section

¹ See Appendix A for images showing the general wear and tear of the book.

was referred to most often by the monastic community. There are numerous examples where the book has been repaired with scraps from a missal printed in red and black. The expense of other text for the preservation of these pages suggests that all the documents in this book, not just the Rule, were of paramount importance among other texts in the convent library. All three documents are written in Latin, including later entries in the necrology; all on paper.

Parts 1 and 2 are joined between elaborate cover boards, hand-stitched together at the binding. The cover is made of stamped vellum over wooden boards, with metal ornaments on the corners and one in the center. Its dimensions are 320 x 220 mm, approximately 50 mm thick. The cover is in poor condition, like the contents. Many of the corner ornaments are missing, the ornaments that remain are rusting, the vellum is peeling, and the binding is fragile.

It is uncertain when the martyrology, Rule of St. Benedict, and necrology were bound together in one book. The Digital Scriptorium dates Part 1 between 1500 and 1599, and Part 2 from 1400-1710 (the latest dated entry in the necrology). I propose that Parts 1 and 2 were bound together in the 16th century shortly after the printed texts of Part 1 were likely acquired by the monastery. The extreme wear of the binding suggests that the book was used a good deal before the latest entry in the necrology (1710). Contemporary Benedictine practice suggests that the Rule, the centerpiece of the book, may have been read from on a daily basis, after Morning Prayer, before a meal, or as part of the spiritual practice of *lectio divina*. The fact that the Rule was bound together with a martyrology and a necrology shows how daily life was intrinsically linked with community—the familial community of past and present nuns, and the cosmic community of saints. There is a gap in the book's history from 1710 to 1804. It was later acquired by Leander van Ess (1772-1847), a relative of Karl van Ess, the prior of Huysburg at the time of its secularization in 1804 (DS).

There is a wealth of information about these communities that we can infer from the necrology, though first I will highlight some of its physical features. The necrology begins its

catalogue mid-January and ends mid-January, 32 pages later. There are six dates listed on each page in red, with space in between for future writers to add in the name, date and any notes about those who have died. The handwriting of these lines is consistent throughout the document. Interestingly, the writer began by writing out the full word for each day of the month (i.e. Fourteenth January instead of 14 January). This early zeal subsides fairly early in the document, as soon as February. Each entry is labeled with a letter in the left margin, A through G in sequential order. These seven letters may have represented seven days of the week, and served as a tool for remembering the anniversary of people's deaths in the daily liturgy.

The organizational system of the necrology is simultaneously meticulous and cryptic. For example, the dates are listed in reverse order down the page (i.e. starting with March 6 and ending with March 1). Although the manuscript uses our familiar Arabic numbering system, the script is antiquated and at times hard to read. For example, the number '5' looks like the number '7', and the number seven looks like an oversized '^'. The numbers only go up to the teens; any date in the 20s or 30s seems to be represented by a lower integer combined with another symbol. There is evidence that I am not the only person to have found this organizational system confusing.² Pages 25-26 exhibit the notations of a later steward of the text. This later writing does not hesitate to write and cross things out in a way that seems atypical of the community that repaired this book with small bits of paper and great care. The writer tries to label the red text dates with more modern Arabic numerals, though they cross out their own text at times for a second guess at what date the red text is actually referring to. It is possible that these annotations occurred while the book was a part of the library of Leander van Ess (1772-1847), following the secularization of the Huysburg monastery. Most of these notations are written in pen, though page 25 also includes a note in graphite, written

² See Appendix B for 24v-25, illustrating the general difficulty of numerology and a subsequent editor's annotations in an attempt to sort out the system.

in Latin. This instance may link the annotator to numerous other little notes in the text, almost all of them non-verbal.

Numbers are even more complicated in the script that was added to the necrology over centuries, recording the names, dates and sometimes details of deaths. Some entries appear to lack a date entirely, though this perception is most likely related to my inability to read Latin. Despite the language barrier, certain characters emerge through the repeated handwriting. A chronology of entries excerpted from different parts of the necrology show that handwriting is consistent during different decades.³ This suggests that the task of adding entries was designated to a particular nun in the community, perhaps the abbess or a scribe. If we suppose the designated writers were scribes, we also have to reconcile the fact that much of the text seems inelegant. Certain later entries appear as though the writer put in too much effort in trying to emulate the monastic scribes of earlier medieval times. We get a glimpse into community profoundly impacted by the invention of the printing press—a humble community whose most precious book included an incomplete martyrology and a necrology with awkwardly monumental handwriting.

Who was this community of women? A huge part of their identity inevitably rests in their relationship with the monastery that supported their existence. Fiona J. Griffiths and Julie Hotchin suggest that a double cloister existing into the 18th century was somewhat of a rarity: “Double monasteries are typically viewed as a short lived institution that thrived only in the first half of the twelfth century, when reform enthusiasm was at its height” (Griffiths 13). How did the convent at Hadmbersleben come to be associated with the double cloister at Huysburg? Was it an offshoot of the female monastic community at Huysburg? Or did they seek affiliation for support from male clergy in administering the sacraments? The necrology contains both male and female names in it. Perhaps these are the names of supportive men, clergy of monastics from Huysburg, who interacted

³ See Appendix C for a survey of entries from different dates, showing repeating handwriting and an evolution of writing styles.

with the convent on a regular basis. I estimate women make up between two-thirds and three-quarters of the names listed. Elsanne Gilomen-Schenkel notes that the necrologies for some double cloisters in southern Germany between 1100 and 1230 began excluding the names of women from joint necrologies (Gilomen-Schenkel 63). Thus, it is not surprising that women sought to keep their own record of deaths in a community. However, it is important to note that women were including men in their necrologies, when men were not necessarily doing the same for women.

For a span of perhaps three centuries the number of recorded deaths seems small, particularly if it includes men who were not a part of the convent community. The spacious gaps between deaths, and the fact that the convent at Hadmersleben remains unnamed with almost no historical record, signify that this was probably a small community. However, even small communities do not exist without influence. Accounts from the women's cloister of Ebstorf record the visit of "the prioress of Hadmersleben" (Winston-Allen 83)—almost certainly the community that produced this necrology. The visit took place ca.1464-70, for the purpose of training the women of Ebstorf in the new liturgy of the Observant reform movement. The sister writes:

On the first Sunday after her arrival, we changed the choral singing and the entire music.

And the women had an enormous amount of work because they often copied out during the day what was going to be sung that night... All the books for the choral singing, as well as the readings, the graduals, and the antiphons had to be discarded. They were cut up and destroyed and new ones copied. (Winston-Allen 83-84)

We can only assume that the entire community at Hadmersleben channeled the same zeal that its prioress was spreading to nearby monasteries.

The Observant movement was a grassroots monastic movement that spread in Augustinian, Dominican, and Benedictine orders on the verge of the Protestant Reformation, responding to many of the same pressures that the Reformation addressed. For Benedictines observance meant strict

adherence to the rule, shared meals, and the revitalization of monastic work. The Observant movement was both empowering to nuns impassioned with reform, and potentially disempowering as numerous double cloisters pushed for strict enclosure of female communities (Winston-Allen 9-10). It seems that the convent at Hadmersleben thrived during this period. The prioress' visit to Ebstorf suggests that the convent did not undergo enclosure at that time, though we cannot know for sure what transpired afterward. It seems likely the convent would have been enclosed after monastic reforms at the Council of Trent (1545-1563). The necrology confirms this emerging picture of a strong female reform community: one entry from May 1659 appears to laud the reformation work of one sister.⁴ Yet this entry is one of the few that is pasted into the book on another piece of paper. What does this feature say about the way she was remembered? Was a less favorable entry replaced with a positive one, to right a historical record masked by tensions with the Huysburg monastery? We are left with only the shadow of a centuries-old community that outlived two phases of reform against all odds, and terminated at some point in the 18th century.

⁴ See Appendix C, May 1659.

Works Cited

Burke Library, Union Theological Seminary. UTS Ms. 60.

Gilomen-Schenkel, Elsanne. "Double Monasteries in the South-Western Empire (1100-1230) and their Women's Communities in Swiss Regions." *Partners in Spirit: Women, Men, and Religious Life in Germany, 1100-1500*. Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2014. Print.

Griffiths, Fiona J., and Julie Hotchin. "Women and Men in the Medieval Religious Landscape." Ed. Fiona J. Griffiths and Julie Hotchin. *Partners in Spirit: Women, Men, and Religious Life in Germany, 1100-1500*. Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2014. Print.

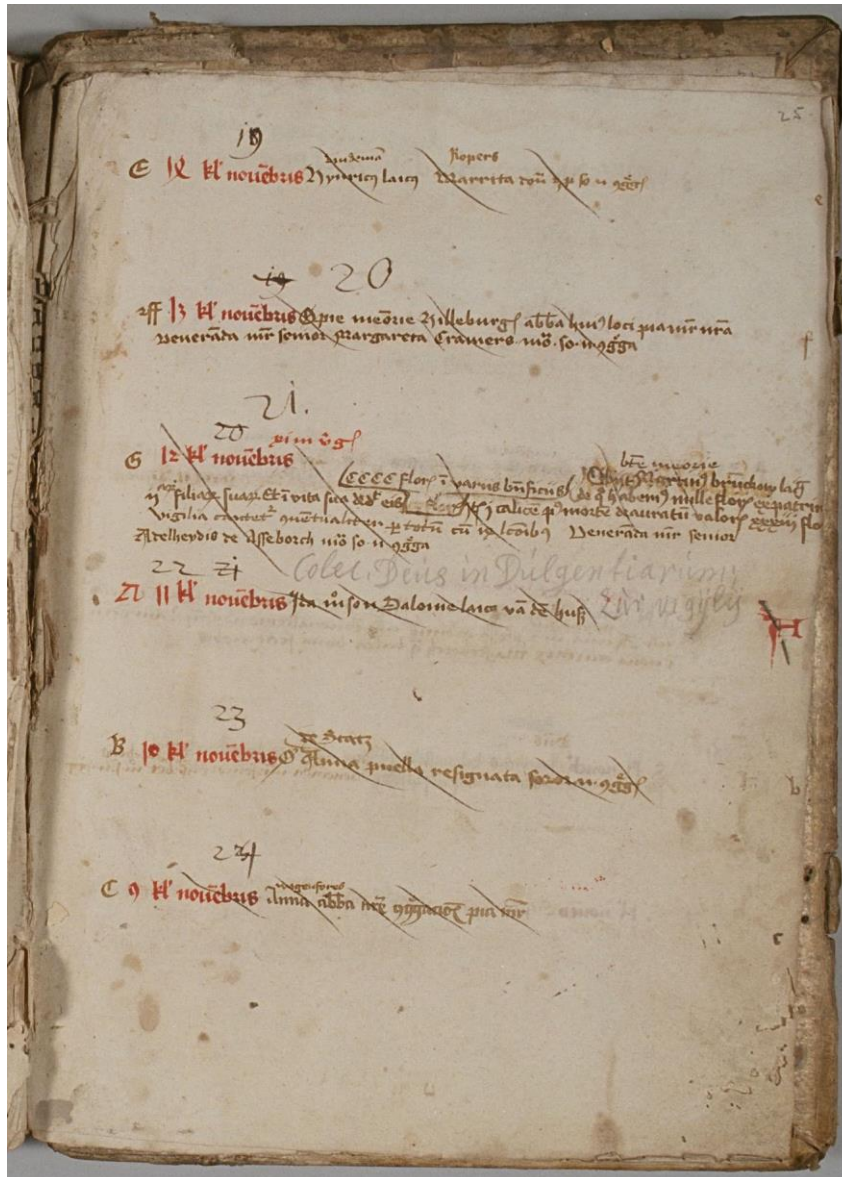
New York, Columbia University, Burke Library at Union Theological Seminary, UTS MS 060. Digital Scriptorium, n.d. Web. 12 March 2015.

Winston-Allen, Anne. *Convent Chronicles: Women Writing About Women and Reform in the Late Middle Ages*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004. Print.

Appendix A

Images showing general wear and tear of the book. Clockwise from the left: cover; hand-stitched binding; ruffling on the edges of pages, including possible evidence of worm holes; evidence of repair using paper from a missal printed in red and black.





D 11^{to} Julij Diderich laic⁹ & Hillegard laica^o obiit / mit de slage des toners
 Walburgis de Globitz in soror nre cōg⁹ / Anno d. 1588
 in die albam m̄is paulo an horā quartā pt meridiana

July 1588

C 6 idus aug^o Opie meōrie vene^o h^o dñs jacobus
 abbas i Husebozch p^o p^o n^o 1588.

August 1598

ff 1 idus april^o Budo epus om̄sus Venerāda n^o senioz Anna in so.
 me 999

April 1599?

6 kl Junij Margaretha donata & pfessa so u cögreg
Deutschen Anno dñi 1629

June 1629

3 nös July Elisabeth Monacha so u gregm
Anno dñi 1634

July 1634

2 idus augusta Bertha abbata h9 loci Katharina donata & professa so. nre. cöreg.
Zabels Anno dñi 1638

August 1638

Schule mitta

6 idus may Gordiani *episcopi* *Alma domina et professa sorore nra*
 Obijt beata memoria Veneranda & Religiosa Domina Elisabetha
 Bibers octava Abbatisa in reformatione & pradilecta Ma-
 ter nostrae Congregationis que nobis laudabiliter profuit maxime
 bellicosus illis temporibus *flor. 1659. eodē die 4*
Körir Pater et Congregatio
 1 idus may *intra 526 Reg. Ho 1666*

May 1659

24
25 **8 idus** *novē* *Obijt* Margaretha donata et professa soror nra
congreg
Obijt *23 october Anno Dni*
1657

November 1657

1 idus may *Obijt* honorabilis Dominus Georgius Professus S. Michaelis
 in Hildelheim pius pater ac Confessor nostrae Congregationis
flor
Ano 1666 8 may

May 1666