

YOURI DESPLENTER

## THE OLDEST MIDDLE DUTCH TRANSLATION OF THE PSALMS (C. 1275–1400). CONTEXT OF ORIGIN, FUNCTIONS, AND *NACHLEBEN*

### 1. PSALTER TRANSLATIONS BEFORE THE MIDDLE DUTCH PERIOD

The oldest Dutch translation of a biblical text was completed in the late ninth to early tenth century. It emerged in the easternmost region where inhabitants spoke dialects categorized as Old Dutch (Old Low Franconian). Specifically, an interlinear translation of the Psalms was crafted in the region of Krefeld or Xanten, located in present-day Germany. The Old Dutch rendition is referred to as the *Wachtendonck Psalms*, named after Arnold van Wachtendonck († 1605), a canon who owned the early medieval Latin psalter containing the translation during the latter part of the sixteenth century.<sup>1</sup> The interlinear translation was not an original composition; it was purportedly derived from a Central Franconian, specifically Southwestern Moselle Franconian translation, originating in the Old High German region, particularly in the Saarbrücken area (Gysseling, 1980, pp. 43, 51–53). The *Wachtendonck Psalms* have been preserved in a notably fragmentary state: the early medieval Latin psalter containing the Old Dutch interlinear translation has been lost, as well as a copy commissioned by the humanist Justus Lipsius († 1606). Due to Lipsius' keen interest and enthusiasm for the *Wachtendonck Psalms*, certain portions have been preserved. The humanist personally compiled a glossary, and in his correspondence, he

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Prof. Dr YOURI DESPLENTER, Ghent University, Department of Literary Studies; correspondence address: Blandijnberg 2, 9000 Ghent, Belgium; e-mail: [youri.desplenter@ugent.be](mailto:youri.desplenter@ugent.be); ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4076-7356>.

<sup>1</sup> For this translation, see Desplenter (2015a) and Quak (2021). Gillaerts et al. (2015) present a comprehensive overview of Dutch Bible translations spanning from their origins to the contemporary era.

apprised others of the existence of the Old Dutch translation. Consequently, early modern transcriptions of approximately one-sixth of the *Wachtendonck Psalms* have ultimately been retained. In essence, the appearance of both the psalter and the interlinear translation remains unknown. However, it is plausible that it conformed to the conventions observed in contemporary German interlinear Psalter translations, exemplified by the Old Alemannic Psalter Fragments.<sup>2</sup>

Following the composition of the *Wachtendonck Psalms* (c. 900) until the fourteenth century, no extant manuscripts have been preserved containing subsequent Dutch versions of the Psalter. Nevertheless, during that era, endeavours were likely made to render the 150 Psalms accessible for individuals within the Dutch-speaking area who were not proficient in Latin. For instance, in his defence to the Pope against charges of heresy and to justify his own vernacular (French) rendition of the Acts of the Apostles, Lambert le Bègue († 1177), a priest from Liège, made reference to a psalter with glosses. This psalter had been entirely translated into the (Dutch?) vernacular by a contemporary Flemish magister (Moore, 1995, p. 109). Whether there is a connection between this apparently lost translation and the oldest Middle Dutch Psalter version, which initially appears in a manuscript dating from around 1325 and is the subject of this present contribution, remains undetermined. However, it is certain that there is no further continuation of the aforementioned Old Dutch *Wachtendonck Psalms* within the Middle Dutch Psalter tradition.

In this contribution, several facets of the oldest Middle Dutch Psalter translation will be scrutinized, particularly since a heretofore unknown and most remarkable textual witness of that translation has recently emerged. This discovery carries implications for our understanding of the oldest Psalter translation in Middle Dutch. Therefore, this contribution aims to present a new state of affairs, incorporating insights from the newfound textual witness. Central to this exploration are the origins, functions, and *Nachleben* of the oldest Middle Dutch Psalter translation.

## 2. CATEGORIZATION OF THE MIDDLE DUTCH PSALTER TRANSLATIONS

The first categorization of Middle Dutch Psalter translations was undertaken by a Leiden professor of theology, De Bruin (1940). Specifically, he classified them into three “standard” editions and several “mixed” editions. In this classification, he designated the oldest Middle Dutch Psalter translation as the first standard edition. At that time, De Bruin was acquainted with three manuscripts containing this translation. Subsequent research

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<sup>2</sup> See Blom (2017, pp. 141–159).

conducted up until the last decade has identified two more textual witnesses, as discussed below. Nevertheless, the precise structural organization of the cluster comprising five distinctly related Middle Dutch Psalter texts has long remained unclear. These texts, written predominantly in the southern part of the Low Countries—present-day Flanders (and Brussels)—and preserved in manuscripts from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, present a notable challenge in terms of their arrangement. Some textual witnesses originate from the medieval county of Flanders, while others undoubtedly trace their origin to the duchy of Brabant, the region immediately east of the Flemish county.<sup>3</sup> Frequent connections with Psalter translations from the northern part of the Low Countries and German-speaking areas further contribute to the complexity of this cluster. Eventually, the nomenclature ‘Flemish-Brabant Edition of Psalms and Canticles’ was assigned to the oldest Middle Dutch Psalter translation (Biemans, 1984, pp. 45–52).

Much of our knowledge regarding Middle Dutch Psalter translations indeed owes itself to the work of De Bruin. However, his scholarly contributions were situated in an era when medieval texts were predominantly perceived as static, with the author (or translator) regarded as the paramount figure. Notably, in his investigations, the Latin Bible text took precedence. During the 1970s and 1980s, De Bruin and his collaborators produced an extensive series of editions of Middle Dutch Bible translations, wherein they did not strictly adhere to the texts found in the manuscripts but instead adjusted the text to align with the Vulgate.<sup>4</sup> This approach disregarded the manuscript reality, creating challenges for subsequent researchers who, for the past few decades, have employed alternative paradigms. It is now evident, for instance, that medieval texts, especially non-canonical and vernacular ones, underwent continuous and deliberate adaptation, even from one copy to the next. This dynamic nature of adaptation makes it challenging to differentiate between certain traditions, such as Psalter translations, as they were subject to continuous revision and mutual influence among adapted versions. In 2012, it was determined that De Bruin’s categorization was problematic. Moreover, certain textual witnesses previously identified by De Bruin as belonging to the first edition were reevaluated as belonging to a later edition. Lastly, an alternative appellation for the oldest translation was proposed, namely the ‘West Flemish Translation of the Psalter’ (Desplenter, 2012). Indeed, it appears that this vernacular version likely originated in the west of the

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<sup>3</sup> As is widely acknowledged, the term ‘Flanders’ presently pertains to the Flemish Community, encompassing the northern part of Belgium. However, during the Middle Ages, this designation referred to the county of Flanders, roughly corresponding to the present-day provinces of West and East Flanders (and French Flanders, now located in Northern France; see De Vaan 2017, p. 3).

<sup>4</sup> For instance, in the edition of the *Lectionarium Amstelodamense* (MS Amsterdam, University Library, I G 41; 1348), De Bruin (1970, p. viii) omitted the expositions that constitute an essential component of the lectionary due to their non-biblical nature.

Flemish county, possibly in Bruges. From there, it was disseminated eastwards, primarily to the Brussels region, and subsequently, from Brabant, extended to the northern Low Countries and German-speaking areas. This “West Flemish” hypothesis gained additional support through the examination of the oldest Middle Dutch translation of the Hours of the Virgin (see also below).<sup>5</sup>

In summary, the tradition of the oldest Middle Dutch Psalter translation was supported by five extant textual witnesses until recently. With the exception of one manuscript dating from 1480, all of them originate from the first three quarters of the fourteenth century. In 2022, a bifolio was discovered in the city archives of Tongeren, comprising a fragment of a Latin psalter with an interlinear Middle Dutch version that unequivocally belongs to the West Flemish Psalter translation.<sup>6</sup> The Latin text likely dates from the end of the thirteenth century or around 1300, while the Middle Dutch interlinear version was added in the second half of the fourteenth century, possibly even in the last quarter (see below). In this way, the West Flemish Psalter translation can now be found in six textual witnesses:

1. MS Saint Petersburg, Biblioteka Akademii Nauk, O 257 (c. 1325–1350)
2. MS Brussels, Royal Library, 2802 (c. 1300–1350)
3. MS Brussels, Royal Library, 2518 (c. 1300–1350)
4. MS Brussels, Royal Library, 19565 (c. 1350–1370)
5. MS Tongeren, City Archives, Fonds baron de Schaetzen de Schaetzenhoff nr. 2462 (Latin text: c. 1300; Middle Dutch text: c. 1350–1400)
6. MS Toronto, Royal Ontario Museum, MS. 997.158.15 (1480)

### 3. ORIGIN AND DISSEMINATION OF THE WEST FLEMISH PSALTER TRANSLATION

MS Saint Petersburg, BAN, O 257, the same manuscript that houses the aforementioned oldest version of the Hours of the Virgin, contains the earliest textual witness of the West Flemish Psalter Translation.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, it comprises other writings of significant importance for the tradition of Middle Dutch Bible translations, including a Middle Dutch epistolary and the earliest Middle Dutch version of the Apocalypse.<sup>8</sup> The

<sup>5</sup> See Desplenter (2018), (2021), (2023).

<sup>6</sup> The bifolio was brought to my attention by Dr. Theo Coun, to whom I extend my gratitude for providing me with the opportunity to analyse this discovery and publish its first results.

<sup>7</sup> Two manuscripts held in the Brussels Royal Library (numbers 2–3) could potentially be of older origin; nonetheless, they unequivocally feature an advanced rendition of the West Flemish Psalter Translation.

<sup>8</sup> For the contents of this manuscript, see Lievens (1963, pp. 120–125).

manuscript was produced in the second quarter of the fourteenth century. The Psalter translation that opens the manuscript (folios 1r–106r) is composed in a Flemish dialect, whereas the Hours of the Virgin in the same volume (folios 107r–138r) are written in the dialect of Brabant. Since these Hours incorporate 37 translated Psalms, using the same translation as those in the psalter from the initial section of the manuscript, a straightforward comparison reveals that it is indeed the Psalms within the Hours that have been rephrased into another dialect, and not the Psalms in the Psalter.<sup>9</sup> The current hypothesis therefore posits that certain translations of biblical texts, particularly the Psalms, were created in West Flanders and subsequently disseminated to the east, specifically to Brabant. The text in the Middle Dutch psalters in the Brabant dialect (nos. 2–4) is in other words secondary.

In my contributions to the study of the oldest Middle Dutch Psalter translation (cf. References), one of the objectives has been to contextualize the manuscriptal versions. Particularly for such flexible texts, this approach is essential for a comprehensive understanding of textual traditions. However, Middle Dutch manuscripts from the thirteenth century—considered the period of the oldest psalter translation’s creation—are significantly scarce. In order to gain insight into the contextual backdrop of the genesis of the West Flemish Psalter translation, we therefore intentionally bypass the initial stage of Middle Dutch translations of biblical texts and focus instead on the subsequent phase: the works of an individual previously referred to in scholarly literature as the “Bible Translator of 1360”. Since the beginning of this century, consecutive research established that the person who translated various books of the Bible into Middle Dutch around the year 1360 was likely a resident of the Carthusian convent of Herne (present-day East Flanders). I will henceforth refer to this individual as the “Herne Bible Translator”.<sup>10</sup> He stands as the pioneer in the Low Countries in attempting to translate all the books of the Bible into Dutch, presumably at the behest of patricians in the city of Brussels. Everything indicates that he occasionally depended on earlier Middle Dutch versions of biblical texts for his translations (see below). Given that the Carthusian Order adhered to a life of nearly absolute silence and solitude, their primary means of disseminating God’s word during the Middle Ages was through the written form. The Herne convent, in particular, demonstrated remarkable productivity in this regard. Numerous manuscripts originating from this location are still extant, with the majority containing the works of the Herne

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<sup>9</sup> For the Psalms shared by the Psalter and the Hours of the Virgin, see Desplenter (2018, p. 418).

<sup>10</sup> For the Herne Bible Translator, see Claassens (2015). Some peers, including Geert Claassens (KU Leuven), equate this translator with Petrus Naghel, former prior of the Carthusian monastery in Herne. However, there is no consensus in the field on this.

Bible Translator.<sup>11</sup> It would be highly unusual if this Carthusian monk had not produced a (new) translation of the Psalms, given its central role in Latin liturgy. However, there is only one extant psalter manuscript featuring a text that exhibits several characteristics of the translation technique employed by the Herne Bible Translator.<sup>12</sup> Some scholars affirm that the version found in this manuscript is indeed the Psalter translation crafted by him. More importantly for us, it seems evident that the translator of the text in that particular Brabant manuscript was acquainted with the West Flemish Psalter translation, as the text undeniably reflects the influence of the oldest Middle Dutch translation (see below).

In making their own vernacular versions of the majority of the Bible books, the Carthusians of Herne prioritized the collection of as many older translations as possible. This deduction is supported by the extant manuscripts from Herne.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, Herne constitutes one of the keys to accessing older Bible translations, especially given the substantial loss of Middle Dutch manuscripts from the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. In Herne, they owned, for example, the oldest Middle Dutch translation of the Apocalypse, a Flemish text in origin, also present in the manuscript now in Saint Petersburg.<sup>14</sup> We know that this translation was available to the Carthusians in Herne, and through this monastery, it was disseminated to religious communities in Brabant. Consequently, we might posit a similar scenario for the oldest Middle Dutch Psalter translation. The existence of several Middle Dutch psalters written in Brabant during the first half of the fourteenth century suggests that, prior to the active engagement of their Bible Translator, who began his work around 1360, the Carthusians of Herne may have disseminated the West Flemish version in that region. The Charterhouse in Herne, founded in 1314, was the first of its order in the Dutch-speaking region. The monks might have initiated the collection and distribution of older Bible translations before conceiving the notion of creating newer and improved translations themselves in the latter half of the fourteenth century.

Examining the primary relationships between the monastery in Herne and more western regions, the most evident connections emerge with other Carthusian communities. Four years after the establishment of the Herne community, a convent in Bruges of the same order was founded. It is plausible to assume that this convent shared similar objectives and methodologies in disseminating God's word to the laity, whether by

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<sup>11</sup> On the importance of the monastery in Herne for the production of Middle Dutch manuscripts, see Kwakkel (2002).

<sup>12</sup> On the Psalter translation in MS Brussels, RL, 21625 (Brabant, end of the 14th century), see Desplenter (2012, pp. 15–30).

<sup>13</sup> For information regarding the manuscripts written in and/or owned by Herne, see Kwakkel (2002, pp. 200–282).

<sup>14</sup> On the oldest Middle Dutch translation of the Apocalypse, see De Hommel-Steenbakkers (2015).

collecting or producing religious texts in the vernacular. Historical evidence indicates regular interactions between the two Charterhouses, including instances of priors relocating from one establishment to the other.<sup>15</sup> Situated geographically between Bruges and Herne is the city of Ghent, where another Charterhouse was established in the year 1328 (Desplenter, 2012, p. 11). The most recent copy of the oldest Middle Dutch Psalter translation, produced in 1480, originates from Ghent. In examining this particular witness, it becomes evident that it must have been transcribed from a significantly older manuscript (see below). This observation lends support to the hypothesis that the oldest Middle Dutch Psalter translation initially circulated and was disseminated from the three aforementioned Charterhouses. For instance, this could elucidate its occurrence in the aforementioned Saint Petersburg manuscript, which, although written in Brabant, features the Psalter translation recorded in a Flemish dialect just before the same Psalms are presented in a Brabant dialect (in the Hours of the Virgin). Additionally, it may explain the striking resemblance between the West Flemish version of the Psalter and another contemporaneous Brabant textual witness (MS Brussels, RL, 2802; c. 1300–1350).<sup>16</sup>

#### 4. INTERACTIONS BETWEEN THE LATIN AND THE WEST FLEMISH PSALTER TEXT

The oldest Middle Dutch Psalter translation was originally and generally intended to accompany the Latin text, specifically that of the Gallican Psalter. It was largely a “subtle-translation”, as we might designate it, a translation intended to comprehend the Latin text to the fullest extent possible. Only from the fifteenth century onward were Middle Dutch Psalter translations produced to be read immediately autonomously, free from the proximity of the Latin text, irrespective of whether it was concurrently present in the manuscript or recited aloud. This shift occurred primarily within the context of the *Devotio Moderna*, a reform movement that emerged in the northern part of the Low Countries at the end of the fourteenth century.<sup>17</sup> Influenced by this movement, an increasing number of semi-religious communities, especially those comprised of women, were established. In these communities, the obligation to observe the *Officium Divinum* (in Latin) was absent, and their collective prayer was confined to texts in the vernacular (Desplenter, 2004, pp. 128–129). The most widely used Middle Dutch version of the Psalter, which

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<sup>15</sup> On the connections between the monasteries in Herne and Bruges, see Desplenter (2012, pp. 10–11).

<sup>16</sup> On the latter manuscript, see Desplenter (2012, pp. 12–13).

<sup>17</sup> There exists an extensive body of literature on the *Devotio Moderna* or Modern Devotion. For English readers, Van Engen’s seminal study (2008) serves as a commendable starting point, while Dutch readers can find the latest contributions in the work of Dlabáčová and Hofman (2018).

originated within the *Devotio Moderna* movement and represents a distant descendant of the oldest Middle Dutch translation we discussed earlier (see also *Nachleben*, below), could be classified as a “prayer translation”.<sup>18</sup> Its aim was not to adhere closely to the Latin, as observed in a subtitle-translation, but rather to furnish a collection of prayers that could be read and comprehended fluently.

At the end of the thirteenth century and the beginning of the fourteenth century in the southern part of the Low Countries, however, the prevalence of semi-religious communities was relatively modest; the majority of residents were beguines. While it is not entirely implausible that the oldest Middle Dutch Psalter translation was intended for these women, such a conclusion cannot be inferred from the surviving manuscripts. Moreover, beguines were not under any obligation to recite the *Officium Divinum* in Latin (Desplenter, 2023, p. 23). The oldest Middle Dutch Psalter translation is, however, believed to have been made specifically to aid individuals who encountered liturgical texts but lacked proficiency in the language of the liturgy. What can be inferred from the majority of textual witnesses containing the oldest Middle Dutch Psalter translation is that the interaction between Latin and the vernacular could manifest in diverse ways. A more detailed examination of these manuscripts will demonstrate this.

First, however, we will examine how the translation under scrutiny appears in the Saint Petersburg psalter, as it likely preserves a version that closely aligns with the original text and intention. It will be combined with the version found in the psalter created in 1480 (MS Toronto, ROM, MS. 997.158.15 [‘Tor.’]), as this particular witness includes a text likely dating back to the fourteenth century, probably the first half (see below).<sup>19</sup>

#### Psalm 77<sup>20</sup>

40 *Quotiens exacerbaverunt eum in deserto in ira  
concitaverunt eum in inaquoso*

43 *Sicut posuit in Aegypto signa sua et prodigia  
sua in campo Thaneos*

MS Saint Petersburg, BAN, O 257,  
fol. 52r–v

40 Hoe dicken vertorenden sine in der woestinen;  
in torne vertorenden sine in den watre [Tor.  
onwatreghen]

43 also hi sette in Egypten sine tekene ende  
sine vortekene in den velde van Thaneos [Tor.  
campothaneos]

<sup>18</sup> On this later Middle Dutch Psalter translation, see Desplenter (2015b).

<sup>19</sup> On this particular Middle Dutch Psalter, see Desplenter (2006), Wilson Ruffo (2024), and below.

<sup>20</sup> To avoid alterations and influences from other translations, Psalm 77 (Vulgate number) will be cited (the spelling of Middle Dutch quotations in this article is subtly adjusted to conform to present norms, and punctuation is added where necessary). It is evident that during the copying process, Middle Dutch Psalter texts were frequently modified, particularly with regard to regional dialect, in the first 10 or so Psalms, but less so in the subsequent ones. Furthermore, Psalm 77 is not part of a specific series, such as the Penitential Psalms. It is apparent that, at least in the Middle Dutch tradition, these were translated more extensively and in different ways than the Psalms found in complete psalters.



49 *Misit in eos iram indignationis suae indignationem et iram et tribulationem inmissionem per angelos malos*

51 *Et percussit omne primitivum in terra Aegypti primitias laborum eorum in tabernaculis Cham*

49 Ende hi zende in hem den toren sire onwerden, onwerde ende toren ende bedroufnesse, in sindinge over [Tor. by] de quade inglen

51 Ende hi slouch al dat eerste geborne in der erden [Tor. dat lant] van Egypten, alle deerste arbeide [Tor. ghifte haerre aerbeyde] in den tabernaclen Cham

From these examples, we can infer that while the word order remains close to the Latin, it has been adapted according to Dutch syntax when necessary (e.g. v. 43: *posuit* => ‘hi sette’ [he put]; *signa sua* => ‘sine tekene’ [his signs]). The translation is in fact successful in combining accessibility to the Latin text with the construction of coherent sentences according to Dutch grammar. In this respect, translations like this one marked the initial departure from strictly interlinear versions of Latin texts, where there was only a vertical relation between the vernacular and Latin words, lacking a horizontal connection among the vernacular words. The previously mentioned *Wachtendonck Psalms*, like the Old Alemannic Psalter, were (most probably) a representative of the latter type.

When examining the manuscripts of the West Flemish Psalter translation from another perspective, it becomes evident that the initial intention of aiding the reader, in his or more likely her understanding of the Latin text, is, in some cases, further enhanced. This enhancement is achieved in various ways. In MS Saint Petersburg, BAN, O 257, for instance, this is evident from the inclusion of the Latin incipit of each verse in the margin.<sup>21</sup> While it is not uncommon in Middle Dutch psalters for each Psalm to begin with a rubric featuring the Latin incipit, the provision of the Latin incipit for each verse is a rare occurrence. This detail emphasizes that this particular psalter specimen was intended for use in close proximity to the liturgy. In the oldest Middle Dutch version of the Hours of the Virgin, as previously mentioned, present in the same manuscript, the verses are not accompanied by the Latin incipit. In these Hours, more or less one third of the same translated Psalms occur, and there, mostly, but not always, only the indication ‘psalm’ or an abbreviation opens the Psalm translation at most, without any clear reference to the Latin originals. Nevertheless, the Hours of the Virgin must have been used in the proximity of the Latin prayer as well (Desplenter, 2023, p. 23): some translations of especially small texts such as antiphons or collects are very hard to understand without the Latin original.

A manuscript from roughly the same era (c. 1300–1350), produced in Brabant with the Psalter translation already adapted to the regional dialect (MS Brussels, RL, 2802),

<sup>21</sup> See the three photographs in the edition of this Psalter (Heymans, 1973, between pp. 66 and 67, between pp. 82 and 83, and between pp. 138 and 139).

exhibits distinct characteristics that indicate its intended use in proximity to the Latin liturgy.<sup>22</sup> The text itself closely resembles that of the Saint Petersburg manuscript, and in this case, not every verse is accompanied by the Latin incipit, but only the opening of each translated Psalm, in the rubric. However, at the beginning of the manuscript (fols. 2r–3r), there are instructions in Middle Dutch specifying which Psalms should be read during each of the canonical hours, following the secular cycle rather than the monastic one. The guidelines do not mention other periods of the year or specific feasts.

The next manuscript, dated to the first half of the fourteenth century (MS Brussels, RL, 2518), was previously attributed to Flanders due to the presence of a calendar intended for Ghent.<sup>23</sup> However, upon examining the dialect, numerous linguistic forms characteristic of the Brabant dialect are observed. We could propose that this manuscript was crafted in Brabant but intended for a client in Ghent. Diverging from other manuscripts of the West Flemish Psalter version, this particular one features both the Latin text and the Middle Dutch text presented side by side. The Latin text undoubtedly held primary significance, given that the Dutch text contains several errors. Furthermore, the Dutch text underwent adaptation to align each Latin verse and its corresponding vernacular verse (more or less) on the same line. Achieving this required modifications to the Dutch translation, at times quite substantial, as evidenced in the following verses from Psalm 77:

|   | MS Saint Petersburg, BAN,<br>O 257  | MS Brussels, RL,<br>2518  |
|---|---|---|
| <i>Et eduxit aquam de petra et deduxit tamquam flumina aquas (v. 16)</i>        | Ende hi leedde ut twater van den stene ende leedde ut die watre als ene vloet (fol. 51r)    | Ende hi leedde water vanden steene, ende leeddese als .i. vloet swaters (fol. 6orb) |
| <i>Panem angelorum manducavit homo cibaria misit eis in abundantiam (v. 25)</i> | Dat brood der ingle heift geetten die mensce spise sende hi hem in overvloeingin (fol. 51v) | Broet der engle at de mensce spise sendi hem in vervultheden (fol. 6orb)            |

Prepositions and articles were left out (v. 16: ‘leedde ut’ [*eduxit*; brought forth] => ‘leedde(se)’; v. 25: ‘dat brood’ [*panem*; the bread] => ‘broet’), verb tenses were altered (v. 25: ‘heift geetten’ [*manducavit*; has eaten] => ‘at’ [ate]), words were contracted (v. 25: ‘sende hi’ [*misit*; he sent] => ‘sendi’), and phrases were paraphrased to express the same meaning more concisely. The phrase *deduxit tamquam flumina aquas* is translated as closely as possible in MS Saint Petersburg—‘leedde ut die watre als ene vloet’ [led the

<sup>22</sup> On this particular Middle Dutch psalter, see Desplenter (2012, pp. 12–13).

<sup>23</sup> On this particular Middle Dutch psalter, see Desplenter (2012, pp. 13–15).

rivers away as a flood]—with ‘watre’ and ‘ene vloet’ in the accusative form, mirroring the Latin counterparts (*aquas, flumina*).<sup>24</sup> In the manuscript currently kept in Brussels, it is paraphrased as ‘als .i. vloet swaters’ [like a flood of water], with a semantic difference when compared to the Latin (genitive construction). This not only indicates that the text in the Brussels manuscript is secondary but also underscores the prominence of the Latin text in this psalter, suggesting the probable utilization of this manuscript in close proximity to liturgical practices.

The same undoubtedly holds for the recently discovered bifolio with some (fragmentary) Latin Psalms accompanied by an interlinear version in Middle Dutch. This bifolio currently constitutes the cover of a collection of statutes dating back to the seventeenth century, originating from a small village in the eastern part of the province of Limburg, near the present-day border with Germany (now: MS Tongeren, City Archives, Fonds baron de Schaetzen de Schaetzenhoff nr. 2462; Figures 1–4). The decoration on the medieval cover conforms to the typical style of Latin psalters produced in the latter half of the thirteenth century, not in the eastern part of present-day Flanders, where the bifolio was discovered, but in the western region, more specifically in the county of Flanders.<sup>25</sup> Between approximately 1240 and 1275, Bruges was the centre of psalter illustration in thirteenth-century Flanders (Carlvant, 2012, p. 7). This distinctive tradition later extended to the city of Ghent, where it persisted until the early fourteenth century; notably, Ghent also produced psalters of comparatively lower quality within this tradition (Carlvant, 2012, p. 95), as found on this bifolio. The textualis script of the Latin text strongly indicates the period spanning the end of the thirteenth century to the beginning of the fourteenth century. The textualis of the Middle Dutch text appears considerably more recent and should be dated to the end of the fourteenth century, possibly around 1400.<sup>26</sup> The dialect of the translation can be confidently identified as Flemish, representing the Middle Dutch dialect spoken in the medieval county of Flanders—the very region in which the Latin

<sup>24</sup> ‘[V]loet’, however, unlike the Latin, is in the singular form.

<sup>25</sup> This hypothesis was confirmed by Patricia Stirnemann (e-mail dated 29 March 2023), scientific advisor to the Illuminated Manuscripts section of *L’Institut de recherche et d’histoire des textes* (part of the French *Centre national de la recherche scientifique (CNRS)*). I noticed similarities with the decoration on a Latin psalter leaf, made in Flanders around 1275, in March 2024 still for sale in London (<https://www.maggs.com>), and on a leaf from an undated medieval manuscript psalter, in Latin, on vellum, made in Flanders (Museum Wales [*Amgueddfa Cymru*], MS 2005.6H/6; <https://museum.wales/collections/online/object/c80e0795-a815-3b6f-a39c-394c3a19fbef/Medieval-manuscript>; last consulted on 25 March 2024). Mrs. Stirnemann saw an additional connection with the decoration in the Latin psalter MS Arras, Bibliothèque Municipale, 527 (c. 1250–1275, Flanders; cf. Carlvant, 2012, pp. 301 and 317).

<sup>26</sup> Given that the writing lacks characteristics typical of the period before c. 1350 (see Biemans 1997, pp. 189–195), it is highly probable that the Middle Dutch text dates from the second half, and possibly the last quarter, of the 14th century. This observation received provisional confirmation from Erik Kwakkel (University of British Columbia; in Oxford, 19–20 May 2023).

psalter was produced. In essence, the circumstances surrounding the creation of the Latin psalter and the subsequent addition of the Middle Dutch translation most probably have no connection to the context in which the bifolio is found today.<sup>27</sup>

The two leaves are likely from a complete psalter, distinguishing it from other (para) liturgical books, like breviaries or books of hours. The visual examination of the Latin bifolio suggests it was not part of a prayerbook either, a conclusion supported by the surviving Psalms. The bifolio contains both Latin and Middle Dutch texts of Psalms 11:3–13:3 and 19:6–21:2, essentially covering only two complete Psalms, namely Psalms 12 and 20. These are not part of a specific Psalm cycle, such as the Penitential Psalms commonly found in prayerbooks, or of other devotional texts. The bifolio, in other words, constitutes the remnants of a complete Latin psalter, presumably accompanied by a comprehensive interlinear translation in Middle Dutch.

For our analysis of the functions of the West Flemish Psalter translation, the discovery is indeed noteworthy. Glosses and interlinear versions of the Psalms are typically associated with the early Middle Ages (Blom, 2017), as evident from the brief examination of the Old Dutch *Wachtendonck Psalms*. Regarding the extensive German tradition of Psalter translations, Schöndorf's study (1967, p. 114) only acknowledges one complete interlinear psalter version produced after the twelfth century: it was created around 1500 in the Cistercian community of Medingen, featuring an interlinear version in Middle Low German (MS Weimar, Landesbibliothek, 35). In the Middle Dutch Psalter tradition, the newly discovered bifolio constitutes the earliest preserved instance of such utilization. It differs however significantly from the psalter in Medingen, where a strict one-to-one translation is employed: above each Latin word, the German equivalent is provided. In other words, in the Medingen psalter, there is no horizontal relation between the interlinear words, resembling the structure of early medieval interlinear Psalter translations, where vernacular words correspond vertically to the Latin words they are situated above (Blom, 2017, pp. 136–140). The Middle Dutch translation on the bifolio is not a direct one-to-one translation akin to the Medingen Psalter. It is written between the lines, not entirely in a random manner with regard to the Latin text, but certainly not with a strictly vertical relation. This applies to the entire translation; therefore an excerpt from it (Psalm 12:2; folio 1r) may suffice to clarify this point (see Figure 1):

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<sup>27</sup> The process by which and the timeframe during which the bifolio was repurposed as a cover for a collection of statutes in another part of the Dutch-speaking region remain however unclear.

|            |               |          |        |       |       |                |
|------------|---------------|----------|--------|-------|-------|----------------|
| hoe langhe | salic stellen | raden in | mine   | ziele |       | ende droufheit |
| Quamdiu    | ponam         | consilia | in     | anima | mea : | dolorem        |
| bi den     | daghe in      | mine     | herte  |       |       |                |
| in corde   | meo           | per      | diem . |       |       |                |

In the first half of the verse, there seems to be a vertical relationship between the Latin text and the Middle Dutch translation after all: only the equivalents of smaller words such as *in* and *mea* are not positioned directly above the Latin. In the second half, however, none of the Middle Dutch words align with the corresponding Latin word.<sup>28</sup> The translation was nevertheless not inserted between the lines haphazardly: without exception, the Middle Dutch translation of each Latin verse begins with the first word of the latter, even if the words do not correspond (as is the case in most instances).<sup>29</sup> Its functionality must therefore have been a different one from the interlinear versions that do have a strictly vertical relation.

Moreover, different from the Medingen psalter, this almost lost psalter and interlinear translation was not an integrated project: many decades after the Latin psalter was made, an existing Middle Dutch translation—in this case a version of the oldest one—was inserted between the Latin lines, as well as could be.<sup>30</sup> This makes the find all the more remarkable.

The reason why the scribe of the translation chose not to write the words in a continuous flow—there being no strictly vertical relation to the Latin text—and instead left substantial space at some points (cf. Figure 3), giving it more or less the appearance of a classical interlinear translation, remains unclear at this moment. Nevertheless, the function of this interlinear translation appears to be entirely different from the one in Medingen. Since the German text was not intended to be read horizontally, due to the word order mirroring that of the Latin text, its purpose must have been to gain a deeper insight into the (syntax and semantics of the) latter. On the other hand, the Middle Dutch interlinear translation on the bifolio was evidently added by the end of the fourteenth century for someone with little or no understanding of the Latin words. We could assume that at that time the manuscript from which the bifolio originates was utilized by an

<sup>28</sup> Otherwise, the Middle Dutch text would have read “in herte mine bi den daghe”.

<sup>29</sup> E.g. Ps. 11:9: *In circuitu* => ‘Die onghenadighe’ [The wicked]; Ps. 12:1: *Usquequo* => ‘o heere’ [O Lord]; Ps. 13:3: *Ommes* => ‘sij helden’ [they leant]; Ps. 19:7: *Impleat* => ‘die heere’ [the Lord]; Ps. 20:9: *Inveniatur* => ‘dijne hand’ [thy hand].

<sup>30</sup> At the time of the creation of the Latin psalter, there was no intention to include an interlinear translation. This is evident, for example, from the absence of any writing above *mea* (Psalm 12, verse 2; folio 1r, last line, Figure 1); there simply wasn’t sufficient space available. The spacing between the lines is not excessive and is similar to that found in other Latin psalters (without an interlinear translation) of this tradition (see the plates in Carlvant, 2012, pp. 391–537).

individual capable of following the words of the Psalms when they were spoken aloud during a liturgical service, yet required a vernacular version to comprehend the content of the biblical songs. The translation of each Latin verse started at the beginning of that verse—not necessarily with that of the first word of the verse—ensuring that the user could at least grasp the content, even if he or she was unable to comprehend the Latin words individually. At least for the moment, it is impossible to determine by whom it was commissioned.

Belonging presumably to the third quarter of the fourteenth century is a very small convolute (105 × 70 mm) evidently designed for portability, including, among other contents, a Middle Dutch translation of the Psalms (MS Brussels, RL, 19565).<sup>31</sup> The text of the translation, while generally comparable to the one found in the Saint Petersburg manuscript, appears to have undergone some evolution within the Brabant region. Certain variants can only be found, for example, in MS Brussels, RL, 21625 (Brabant, end of the fourteenth century), which contains the aforementioned Middle Dutch Psalter Translation occasionally attributed to the Herne Bible Translator. Therefore, it is plausible that the translator of the text in that manuscript had access to a version of the West Flemish Translation similar to the one found in MS Brussels, RL, 19565, rather than the more original version in the Saint Petersburg manuscript.<sup>32</sup> The evolved West Flemish version eventually seems to have been distributed to the German-speaking region.

In MS Brussels, RL, 19565, the Psalms are primarily introduced by their Latin incipit, but otherwise, there is no apparent connection to liturgy. While its form may not differ significantly from the other psalter we discussed, which had Latin incipits at the beginning of each Psalm (MS Brussels, RL, 2802), this small manuscript lacks, for instance, a list of Psalms with their use in the liturgy. Furthermore, 11 psalms are preceded by somewhat peculiar and unique rubrics. Before the translation of Psalm 42 for instance, it states: “die wandelen wilt daer hi hem ontsiet, hi lese desen salm: Iudica me deus et discerne cau[sam]” [The one who intends to confront his fears should read the Psalm *Iudica me deus et discerne causam*] (MS Brussels, RL, 19565, fol. 154v).<sup>33</sup> We could therefore conclude that the Psalms in this manuscript were likely noted down first and foremost for their value as private prayers and their spiritual significance. In the late fifteenth century or the early sixteenth century, MS Brussels, RL, 19565 most probably belonged to a beguine (Simons, 2004, pp. 104–105); whether this applies to the initial client for whom the book was made

<sup>31</sup> On this manuscript, see Desplenter (2012, pp. 21–22).

<sup>32</sup> The dependence of the translation in MS Brussels, RL, 21625 on the oldest Middle Dutch Psalter Translation is evident (cf. also De Bruin, 1978, p. viii).

<sup>33</sup> Or, before Psalm 70: “die in hem ghevoelt macht van den duvele hi lese dit: In te domine speravi” (fol. 199r) [Those who sense the power of the devil within themselves should read this: *In te domine speravi*]. Other Psalms with similar rubrics are Ps. 53, 54, 56, 58, 66, 68, 69, 78, 87, and 89.

as well, is uncertain. However, it would confirm the hypothesis that the manuscript was not used as a means to better understand the liturgy, as beguines in the Low Countries are not known to have prayed the *Divinum Officium* (Simons, 2004, pp. 106–109).

## 5. NACHLEBEN

The Middle Dutch translation in the recently discovered bifolio, written down between the Latin text at the end of the fourteenth century, exhibits no influence from a conversion to the Brabant dialect or from other Middle Dutch Psalter translations. In essence, it represents a version of the West Flemish Psalter translation that has undergone only minor evolution within the same region where the translation was initially crafted.<sup>34</sup> In other words, the text on the bifolio was part of the original tradition of the oldest Middle Dutch Psalter translation, albeit possibly toward its end.

In Brabant, the West Flemish translation likely arrived as early as the first half of the fourteenth century, and underwent subsequent alterations and developments, extending its influence further to the east, not only within the Low Countries but also into present-day Germany. Evidence of an evolved version is discernible, for instance, in the psalter of the so-called *Kölner Bibel*, a Low German Bible version printed in 1478/1479 (Desplenter, 2012, pp. 35–38). Additionally, the West Flemish Psalter translation must have been embraced by the Modern Devotion (Desplenter, 2012, pp. 31–34). Two distinct adaptations of an evolved West Flemish Psalter version were identified within the context of that religious reform movement. The first adaptation emerged in the eastern region of Rhine and Meuse (c. 1400), while the second, likely somewhat younger one (c. 1400–1425), took root in the north western region of Utrecht and Holland. The former was used by regular canonesses and consistently accompanied the Latin text. In certain instances, glosses—brief annotations—were appended to the translation. The text maintained a close alignment with the Latin original and was evidently designed for practitioners of the *Divinum Officium* seeking a translation to enhance comprehension and insight into these liturgical texts. Presently, this version is extant in only a limited number of manuscripts. The second adaptation was used by Franciscan tertiaries—women who did not engage in the *Divinum Officium*. This significantly adapted iteration of the oldest Middle Dutch translation departed from the Latin text more liberally compared to the first translation originating within the Modern Devotion (MD). Approximately 80 or even more manuscripts featuring the second MD-translation are still extant, reflecting

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<sup>34</sup> Further analysis of the text is required to elucidate its precise relationship with those found in other manuscripts within this tradition.

the presence of over 150 communities of Franciscan tertiaries in the northern part of the Low Countries.<sup>35</sup> Notably, discernible influences of this second MD-translation are evident in later fifteenth-century psalters written in the southern part of the Low Countries (Desplenter, 2012, pp. 39–49), attesting the dissemination of the Modern Devotion in present-day Belgium. These later southern Middle Dutch psalters contain truly hybrid versions, anchored by the oldest Psalter translation but also shaped by influences from the Herne Psalter translation and the second translation associated with the Modern Devotion.

The final and most recent testament to the significance of the West Flemish Psalter translation, MS Toronto, Royal Ontario Museum, MS. 997.158.15, is remarkable in several regards. Firstly, it dates from 1480, around 150 years after the manuscript now in Saint Petersburg, the oldest textual witness of the West Flemish Psalter translation, was created. Secondly, its abundant decoration contrasts sharply with the fairly modest manner in which the other specimens of this translation were crafted. It can even be considered one of the most luxurious Middle Dutch psalters overall. Lastly, in contrast to the other psalters we have discussed thus far, we can precisely identify the patron and initial owner. Unlike the intended users of the other psalters, who were women leading an institutionalized religious life in most cases, it was a worldly noblewoman residing in Ghent who commissioned this sumptuous psalter.

We know quite a fair deal about this lady, as the manuscript contains an extensive colophon (fol. 210v).<sup>36</sup> From the added miniature (fol. 3r), we could even deduce what she more or less must have looked like. The woman's name was Anthonine van Masseur, widow of a knight named Martin Vilain.<sup>37</sup> The colophon particularly specifies the villages, hamlets, and manors owned by her and her family. Her husband belonged to one of the oldest Flemish aristocratic dynasties, which held significant influence in the Ghent region. A few years after returning from a journey to the Holy Land, he died in 1466. After his demise, Antonine lived for another 30 years. Over a decade after Martin's death, she commissioned the creation of the psalter that is currently the focus of our attention.

In the Low Countries, as evident from other instances, women occasionally received an opulent vernacular psalter when opting for a religious life and joining a convent.<sup>38</sup> However, this was not the scenario for Anthonine, as clarified by the miniature on the

<sup>35</sup> Goudriaan (1998, pp. 241–244) published a list of 166 convents that followed the third rule of Saint Francis in the medieval Diocese of Utrecht.

<sup>36</sup> A transcription of the colophon can be found in Biemans (1984, p. 50).

<sup>37</sup> For further information on Anthonine and Martin, and pictures of the colophon and miniature, see Desplenter (2006, pp. 130–132) and Wilson Ruffo (2024).

<sup>38</sup> One example is MS Utrecht, University Library, 1039, a Middle Dutch lay breviary comprising translated liturgical hours and a translated psalter (c. 1453; Utrecht). According to the colophon, it was presented by a mother to her two daughters upon their admission to an enclosed tertiary convent (cf. Biemans, 1984, pp. 274–275 and Desplenter, 2008, pp. 235–236).



initial folio of the manuscript. It depicts her alongside her then already deceased husband, both kneeling before an altarpiece illustrating Christ carrying the Cross, the crucifixion, and the resurrection of Christ. This psalter exhibits several characteristics indicating little or no connection to the liturgy. The Psalms are organized in their biblical sequence and bear the Latin incipit as a rubric. Liturgical references are absent. At the manuscript's outset, the Psalms are enumerated from 1 to 150, accompanied only by their Latin incipits. This listing was likely of limited utility within a liturgical context. Upon initial inspection, the placement of a number of miniatures could suggest a connection to the liturgy after all. Since the early Middle Ages, ferial psalters were commonly divided into eight sections corresponding to the *Divinum Officium*.<sup>39</sup> Subsequently, miniatures were placed at the onset of these eight sections, aligning with the Psalms designated for Matins on Sunday (Ps. 1), Matins on Monday (Ps. 26), and so forth. Preceding the initial Psalm for Vespers, Psalm 109, an eighth miniature was introduced. However, Anthonine's psalter lacks four miniatures, and it can be inferred that the four remaining miniatures primarily served a decorative purpose.<sup>40</sup>

The fact that Anthonine owned a Middle Dutch psalter as a book of devotion is remarkable for several reasons. Firstly, from the southern part of the Low Countries, fewer than a handful of psalters written in Middle Dutch remain; from the northern part, thanks to the influential *Devotio Moderna*, we still have 80 Middle Dutch psalters or more. Moreover, noblewomen in the Low Countries seem to have typically commissioned books of hours, not psalters. Finally, the nobility in Flanders, especially, was primarily francophone, so the choice for a Middle Dutch book was unusual. Even Latin books of devotion were preferred over Middle Dutch ones. Therefore, Anthonine's choice for a Middle Dutch psalter is surprising, especially considering that the text is practically identical to the manuscript now in Saint Petersburg, a book that is around 150 years older, with words that had already become archaic and fallen out of use by the beginning of the fifteenth century.<sup>41</sup> It appears that someone discovered a very old specimen of the oldest Middle Dutch Psalter translation, presumably in one of the religious houses in Ghent, and simply copied it or had it copied without any adaptation. Consequently, we could assume that the text was not genuinely intended for reading and use in Anthonine's

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<sup>39</sup> On the ferial Psalter (*psalterium feriatum*) and its decoration, see Desplenter (2013, pp. 156–157 and references there).

<sup>40</sup> A picture of the miniature preceding Ps. 1 in this manuscript can be found in Wilson Ruffo (2024, p. 172); see Claassens (2015, between pp. 128 and 129) for a picture of the miniature preceding Ps. 52.

<sup>41</sup> For instance the subordinating conjunction 'bedi' [because] disappeared in the course of the Middle Dutch period (Willemyns and Van der Horst, 1997, p. 225), and was replaced by 'want'. Only the Psalter translation in MS St. Petersburg has also consequently 'bedi'; the Brabant manuscripts all have the modern 'want'. MS Toronto, however, which dates from 1480, still has 'bedi'. See also Desplenter (2006, pp. 135–136).

private prayer. Instead, the manuscript likely served as a luxurious book with devotional content, primarily functioning as a richly decorated container for the portrait of her and her late husband, commemorating the times when they were still together. The fact that the folios are still almost immaculately white could support this hypothesis. The text in Anthonine's psalter does in other words pertain to the West Flemish Psalter translation from a philological standpoint, but it was not integrated into the active text tradition. This likely ceased around 1400. The recently discovered bifolio could then be considered one of the last extant functioning textual witnesses of the West Flemish Psalter translation.

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THE OLDEST MIDDLE DUTCH TRANSLATION OF THE PSALMS  
(C. 1275–1400). CONTEXT OF ORIGIN, FUNCTIONS, AND *NACHLEBEN*

Summary

This article presents a new perspective on the oldest Middle Dutch translation of the Psalter. The region of origin of this influential translation has remained uncertain for a long time, but current assumptions suggest that it likely originated in the western part of the medieval county of Flanders, probably in the last decades of the thirteenth century. A recent and noteworthy discovery, discussed here for the first time, comprises a bifolio from a Latin psalter dating from the late thirteenth century, featuring an interlinear version of the oldest Psalter translation added in the late fourteenth century. This introduces a new use for the West Flemish Psalter translation, in addition to those already known and briefly discussed in this article. Furthermore, this finding sheds light on the likely end of the textual tradition associated with this specific Psalter translation. By the first decades of the fifteenth century, newer or hybrid versions emerged, suggesting a decline in the influence of the West Flemish Psalter translation during that period.

**Keywords:** Psalter; interlinear translation; medieval; Latin; Middle Dutch; liturgy; prayer; manuscript

NAJSTARSZE TŁUMACZENIE PSALMÓW NA ŚREDNIONIDERLANDZKI  
(OK. 1275–1400). KONTEKST ŹRÓDŁOWY, FUNKCJE I *NACHLEBEN*

Streszczenie

Niniejszy artykuł przedstawia najstarsze tłumaczenia Psalterza na średnioniderlandzki z nowej perspektywy. Rejon powstania tego ważnego przekładu przez długi czas pozostawał nieznan, ale najnowsze wnioski sugerują, że pochodzi prawdopodobnie z zachodniej części średniowiecznego księstwa Flandrii i datowany jest na ostatnie dekady XIII wieku. W artykule omawiam po raz pierwszy ważne odkrycie poczynione ostatnio, kiedy to odnalezione zostało bifolio z Psalterza łacińskiego datowanego na późny wiek XIII, zawierające interlinearny tekst najstarszego tłumaczenia dodany w wieku XIV. Odkrycie to jest dowodem na wykorzystanie zachodnioflamandzkiego tłumaczenia Psalterza w zupełnie nowej roli, obok tych już znanych, które także krótko omówię. Ponadto odnalezienie tego tekstu rzuca światło na prawdopodobny koniec tradycji tekstowej związanej z tym przekładem. Do początku wieku XV wyłoniły się już nowe lub hybrydowe tłumaczenia, co sugeruje spadek wpływu zachodnioflamandzkiego przekładu Psalterza w tym okresie.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Psalterz; tłumaczenie interlinearne; średniowieczny; łacina, średnioniderlandzki; liturgia; modlitwa; manuskrypt

Author's bio

Youri Desplenter is a professor of Historical Dutch Literature (Middle Ages) at Ghent University since 2010. He is actively involved in teaching, covering a range of subjects including Middle Dutch literature, codicology, theory and methodology of the history of literature, and Old Dutch, in addition to Dutch teaching methodology. His research focuses on Middle Dutch religious literature, particularly late medieval prayer literature, Bible translations, and mystical writings.

FIGURES

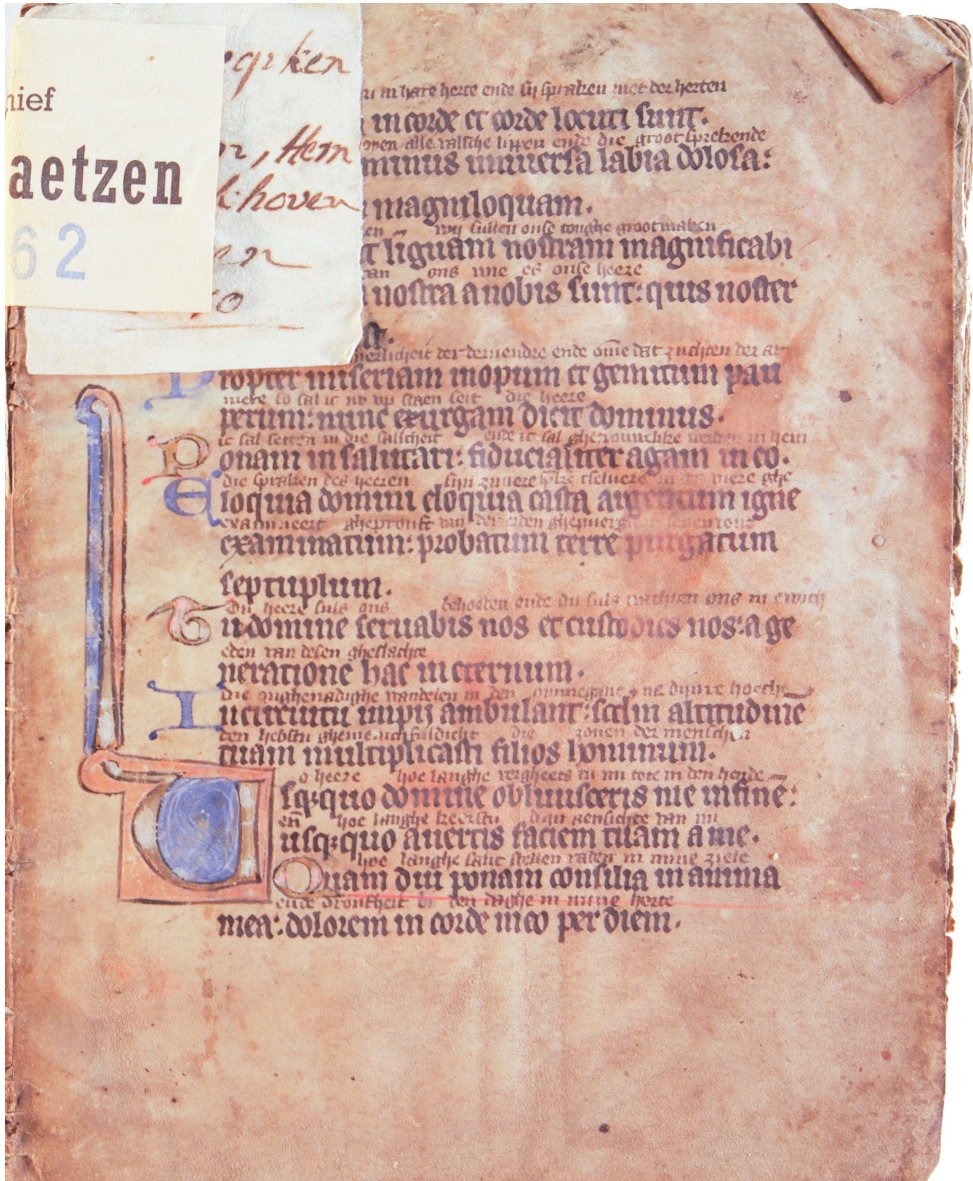


Figure 1. Fol. 1r of MS Tongeren, City Archives, Fonds baron de Schaetzen de Schaetzhoff nr. 2462

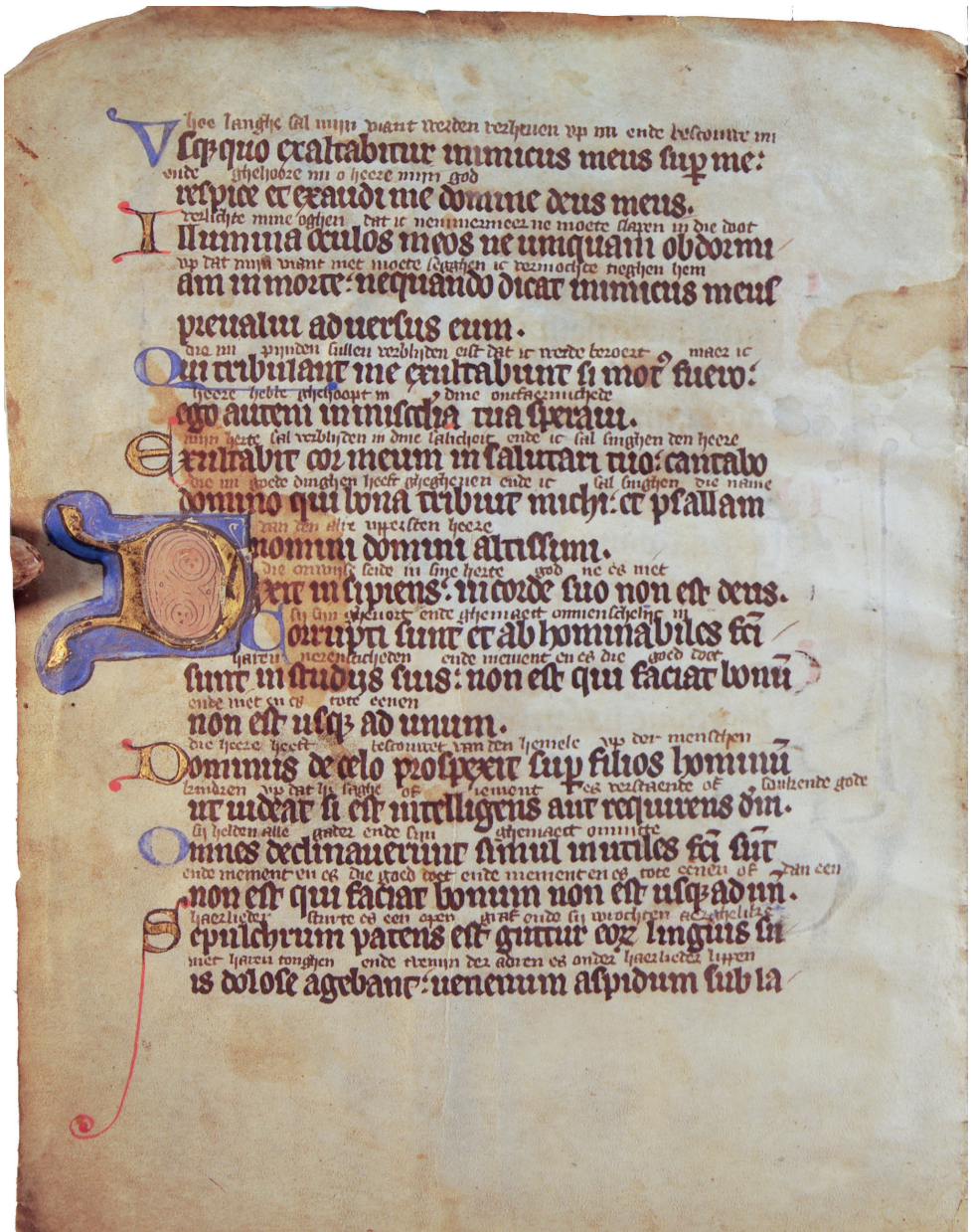


Figure 2. Fol. 1v of MS Tongeren, City Archives, Fonds baron de Schaetzen de Schaetzenhoff nr. 2462

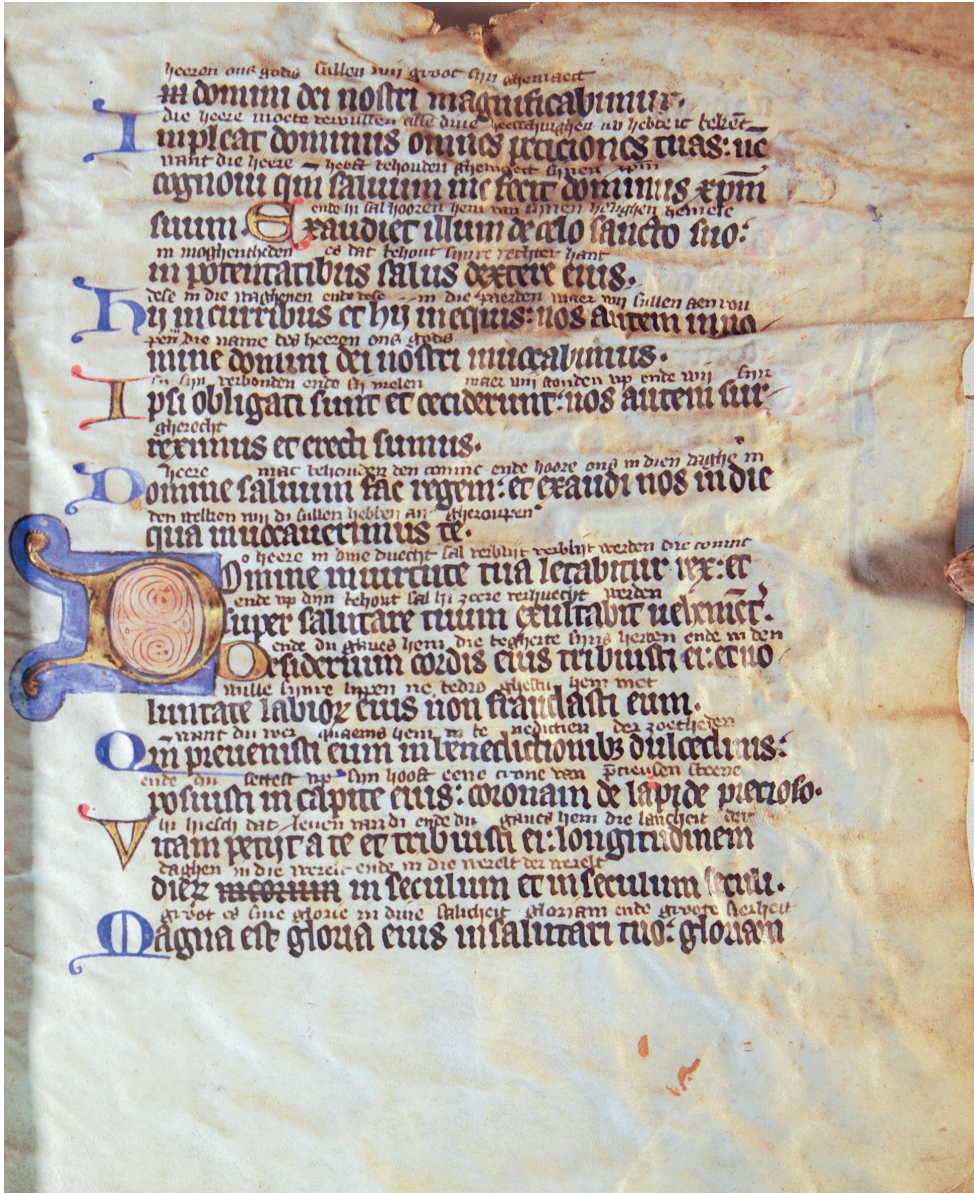


Figure 3. Fol. 2r of MS Tongeren, City Archives, Fonds baron de Schaetzen de Schaetzenhoff nr. 2462

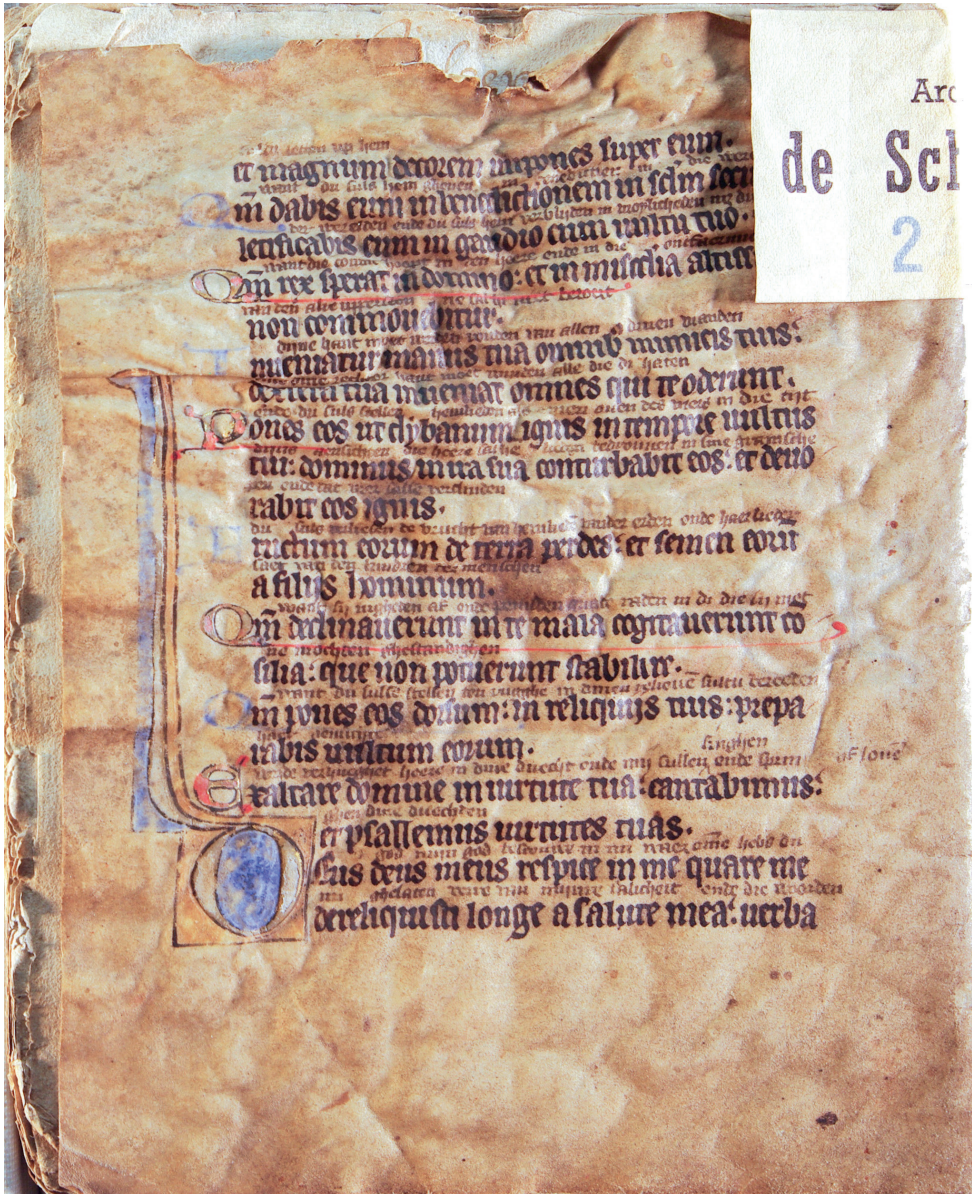


Figure 4. Fol. 2v of MS Tongeren, City Archives, Fonds baron de Schaetzen de Schaetzenhoff nr. 2462