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Two Carthusian Histories, Their Authors and Audiences
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Two Carthusian histories, the first, Fasiculus Temporum, by Werner Rolevinck, printed in Cologne in 1474, and the second, an unpublished manuscript, (shelf mark: e Museo 160 Bodleian Library) finished in 1518, written in Northern England by anonymous Carthusian, are examples of the creation of pastoral texts within the Order. Both texts were written in the tradition of the Order which recognized that, "From early in its history, that withdrawal from the temptations of the world did not eliminate the need for pastoral care of those in its communities," (Gillespie 164) or even those outside the cloister. These two texts illustrate the Carthusian interest and concern with the development of individual spirituality and catechetical instruction, both for the members of the Order and those beyond its walls.

The first text, Fasiculus Temporum, a Latin history, by Rolevinck, was used by the English Carthusian author, as he compiled his own history in Middle English twenty-five years later. A comparison of the two works reveals a variety of interesting points about Carthusian notions of spirituality and pastoral instruction of the late fifteenth century. Such a comparison is especially fruitful because, while the two writers were working under the same directives about literary composition in their Order, their texts illustrate widely differing intents, written for different audiences. Both texts were concerned with the care of souls, a concern of the Carthusians, who exercised their pastoral duties through the medium of the written word.

Werner Rolevinck, the author of Fasiculus Temporum was a member of Charterhouse of St. Barbara in Cologne from 1447 until his death of plague in 1502 (Holzapfel 13). He was the author of a number of works, including history, sermons, local histories and devotional works. His work was highly regarded by his contemporaries, and enjoyed a wide circulation via the printing press in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century. The Fasiculus Temporum, first printed in Cologne by Arnold Thei Hoernen, was reprinted over fifty times in various countries in the succeeding fifty years. The name of the Carthusian monk who wrote the e Museo 160 history is unknown and his history is still unpublished. The copy of the manuscript, dated 1518, is in the Bodleian Library bound in with two plays, Christ's Burial and Christ's Resurrection, two romance fragments and the beginning of an English translation of a meditation, all written in the same hand. The author was from Yorkshire, a member of either the Mount Grace or Kingston-on-Hull Charterhouse.

On first inspection the two works seem quite different. The Fasiculus Temporum is written in Latin prose while the e Museo 160 history is in Middle English verse. The author of the e Museo 160 history had a printed copy of Rolevinck's history as he composed his own. He acknowledges his debt to Rolevinck about half way through his text when he writes:

'It is to be knowene that this last hundredth yere, which I call the xvi(1500) hundredeth, is not complete after the boke callit Fasiculus Temporum for that endes in the yere of our lord (1474) mcccck trescor and fourteyne (e Museo 160 f. 92r).

Rolevinck has also used sources: he cites all the major authors associated with history of the medieval period, Eusebius, Augustine, Orosius, Bede, Isidore, and others. He is more formal in his acknowledgments of sources than the e Museo author. At one point, as he is explaining which sources he has followed in his chronology, he says:

'Further in the sixth age we follow the chronology of Martin and Vincent who proceed in an abbreviated way up to their own time. After them further through the years 200 I follow a remarkable book, a certain one whose author I do not know who is extended almost to his own time. (f. 7r)

He also cites within his text, giving references to the various authors as the history unfolds; unlike the e Museo author, while noting names in the margin of his manuscript, he is basically presenting the work without the scholarly apparatus of citations. This variation in the method of acknowledging the authors points out the difference in the audience for whom the works were created.

Both authors have perceived the need for an accessible history, but for different purposes. Rolevinck has created his "little bundle of the things of history" in the same tradition that goes back to St. Augustine, who in his De Catechizandis Rudibus, emphasized the need for a narrative of history to be taught to new converts and outlined a plan for teaching all of human history, from Genesis through the last judgment (Horrall 97). Rolevinck also says in his prologue to Fasiculus Temporum that he writes for "the clerics and those who have the governing of the ecclesiastical polity" because they "... need to raise up their eyes to the histories of things done" in order "that they may learn, while enjoying good fortune, from good examples of worthy men, to pursue worthy works and in bad fortune to avoid the rocks of perditon" (f. 6v). He clearly intends his work to be sent out into the world for a larger audience than would be found in the convent.

Rolevinck is responding as did other writers of the time to the general dictum of Jean Gerson who commented that a significant part of the writer's role is his support for the church and its institutions and ministers (Gillespie 176). The church, says Gerson, is enriched by books and they contribute
to improving the animam, arm the church for the fight against heresy and preserve it from error (Gillispie 176). It is clear from the comments that Rolevinck makes in his prologue that he has intended his book for the education of those who are not able to study all the original sources and earlier histories, but still need this information in order to govern the church and educate the members of the faithful.

Rolevinck recognizes that he is doing a service to those who cannot spend hours reading and has made, as he says, "history much like a painting, embracing the whole image of humankind in a single book, therefore giving authority to those who have labored before us, we have entered in our own little way sprinkling here and there what we have been able to." (Rolevinck f.7r). And he has also explained that he realizes that the available histories are just too time consuming for busy clerics. He says: "But unless the valuable be separated from the less valuable, the reader will drown in a headlong rush, so the useless accumulation of things, the unnecessary and trivial, such as superstitions, fables and interminable genealogies which are not important to the matter at hand have been cut off" (Rolevinck f.6v). He has produced in about ninety-seven pages a rendition of the history of the world, complete with pictures and diagrams. But the cutting off of useless things is not the only service Rolevinck has rendered his reader.

Though his text is in Latin, its vernacular syntax and catalog like arrangement, while demanding a certain level of education, is well within the reach of the parish priest, educated lay person, or university student. He has also carefully constructed a time line starting at the beginning of the text, giving a running chronology of the passing of history, and its reverse counting back from the birth of Christ. He says: "Moreover I have fitted together sufficiently with toll the line of Assyrian and Roman and others from diverse histories...and have portrayed in the center of the leaf, circles with the proper name of the persons for whatever the time, and under and over two lines of which the top one with its numbers, descend from Adam to Christ...and the second line which is lower, ascends in a reversed order from the birth of Christ to the creation of the world that the very thing might be known easily...because this year is most revered by us and needs to be found most quickly" (Rolevinck 7r). So his history is laid out in a form that aids the reader with its visual cues to the passing of time, and is an ideal text for pastoral use. It was indeed most popular, and enjoyed the status of a best seller in the early days of printing, and was the universal history until it was replaced by the Nuremberg Chronicle and later Renaissance histories.

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The e Museo 160 devotional history, so called because it hasn't even been accorded a title, has languished in almost total obscurity since its creation. It is an interesting manuscript, which begins very much like an emblem book, but ends up as a summary of history. It appears that the author began, as he says in his brief prologue, to create an emblem book of Old Testament figures, but, perhaps as he has received a copy of Rolevinck’s history sometime in the process of creating the emblem work, he switched to a presentation of verse history.

In his preface he explains his plan: "Now in this present treyte ar made into englishe metre a prayere to ychon of the said holy faders, patriarches, prophets, (wt a pictor of the sam) contenynge a part of their nobill dedes & holy lyves" (e Museo 160 f.1r). For the first forty-three folios he has even left the top half of the page blank with a ruled off box for the promised pictures. However, only the first two pages have been illustrated. He presents his Old Testament figures, but by the time he has reached New Testament times, he shifts his mode of presentation. In the final folios, forty-four to one-hundred and eight, his presentation is chronological rather than topological. He divides history into hundred year periods for 100 AD to 1518. His focus is considerably widened because of the diversity of material he includes in his section. Everything is grist for his mill: he presents popes, kings, martyrs, saints, historical events, both trivial and great, battles, invasions, persecutions, heretical movements, crusades, comets, rivers of blood, and miracles.

Despite this diversity of material, the general outline for each century is the same. The author opens with a five to ten line prayer to Jesus, then gives a verse summary of the times which may extend from five to ten pages, and finally closes with a prayer to the saints and popes of the century followed by a list of their names. The pattern of information that is offered in the text gives the reader or listener an accessible and undemanding summary of history and teaching the reader how to use history as devotional aid. This pattern,
repeated over and over, throughout the text points as does the information in
the prologue to the audience for whom the history is intended.

While "... determining lay readership of printed religious books" may be
a complex and difficult task (Driver 230), determining the readership for a
manuscript that exists in a single copy only, written by a cloistered monk in
the wilds of early sixteenth century Yorkshire is nearly impossible. However,
the author does give clues within his text. First, the choice of the vernacu-
lar points to an intended audience. "In the upper houses, the function of the
Prior in relation to the other monks was of "the first among equals," but in
the lower houses, the Prior's function in the exercises of the pastoral
ministry was more comparable to that of a priest in a secular environment
(Gillespie 166). The lower houses in many monasteries consisted of various
groups of lay brothers and domestics and were dependent on the monks of the
upper house to provide catechetical and spiritual guidance. As early as 1156
Prior Basil in his Consuetudines expresses the need for books for instruction
and private prayer in the vernacular for these members of the house. (Gillespie
166).

The significance of this dictum, which was repeated in 1432, was that
the Carthusian Order had direct experience of vernacular instruction of a
pastoral and catechetical nature (Gillespie 166). And, since the Charterhouses
of Mount Grace and Kingston-on-Hull, like other English Charterhouses, were
centers for the production and transmission of texts, specifically vernacular,
devotional writings, (Keiser "To Knowe God Almyghtyn" 105), it is not surprising
that the e Museo 160 text is of this type.

The author in the prologue explains very specifically what the function of
his text is for the reader. He indicates that those with the learning and
leisure will be already acquainted with the material he is presenting. As he
writes, "unto this intent that alyf they be well enough knouwen to tham that
rede the hoole bibill," (f. 1r), he eliminates the group of readers who have
a knowledge of the course of holy scripture which god graunt at his
pleasure" (f. 1r). How great a contrast is this modest claim to the one that
Rolevinck makes for those who could read his text! Rolevinck explains that
the reader of his history, by contemplating the things of "human industry,
shewing through these things and infinite other things by means of certain wings
of internal contemplation, not only of the past and present, but of the future,
will move from similar things to similar things, progressing, if of good will
conjoined, from a certain boredom to rise up to God for the purpose of first
praising and finally to the desire to be dissolved and be with Christ for
eternity" (Rolevinck f. 6v). This is certainly an exalted promise, but fits
into the Carthusian vision of the use of any text, which was finally to move the
reader to union with God. This use of a text as a basis for meditation and
finally contemplation was basically reserved for the monks who had the time and
training to do so.

The two histories, one Latin prose and the second in Middle English verse,
illustrate the range of readers for whom the Carthusian authors created their
texts. Undoubtedly the learned and pious Rolevinck envisioned his readers as
capable of understanding the intricacies of time, history and theology. The
anonymous English Carthusian who penned the e Museo history aimed his work at a
different audience who would be captured by the vision of acquiring a simplified
outline of history linked in nearly every line with prayer and moral instruction.
The theological and scholarly dimension so present in Rolevinck, is subordinated
to the devotional aims of the author of the e Museo text. But both authors
were driven ultimately by the same desires, to witness to their vision of God's
providential plan in the frame of human history and explain this vision in
terms of intellectual, moral, spiritual development to their readers.

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