Some Notes on the History of the Manuscript of the Life of Maria Petyt by Michael of St. Augustine

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Every book has something unique. Each says something about the author and the content, the publisher, the printing, the distribution and the various outlets, the readers, imagined or expected, or unexpected or unsuspected. All of this goes to tell the story of that particular book. A fifteenth edition does not have the same value or importance as a first edition; a translation has a value of its own. We could continue in this vein ... but all of this is seen to be even more true if the book in question is a manuscript. In this case it has a uniqueness all of its own. A manuscript, even when it is a copy of a text, and not the first copy, is always something unique. No two pages are the same, even the errors are distinctive; every copy has a history of its own.

That is why it is possible to tell the story of the codex that contains the *Life* of the venerable Maria of St. Teresa Petyt, in a way that is analogous to the way in which we might tell the story of a person.

We begin with its physical appearance. The codex, identified by the number 'Post. III 70', measures 175 × 243 mm. It has 452 folios, numbered in pencil in the upper right-hand corner. This page numbering seems to have been inserted, if not before, at least in 1950.¹ Probably Pius Serracino Inglott, responsible for the Carmelite General Archive, decided to have the codex restored, given that its pages were in poor condition as a result of the passage of time, and other causes especially the damp, and were now held together by paper glue, containing synthetic ingredients, and covered by plastic film. Albert Deblaere affirms that this restoration was made by the Vatican Library's laboratory: '*ou plutôt, il y a été sauvé de la destruction totale*'.²

Perhaps Pius Serracino Inglott, or the general librarian Leo van Wijmen, in the course of re-ordering the Postulation Archive, which he was doing at the

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- 1 Deblaere (1962) 15–22 Deblaere says that he found the manuscript in the archive of the Collegio S. Alberto, Ord. Carm., Via Sforza Pallavicini in 1951. At this moment the new page numbering was already inserted.
 - 2 Deblaere (1962) 3–76: 13. This article was to be continued, as affirmed at its end, but the following part never appeared in *Carmelus*.

same time, gave a new number to the work. The new number (Post III 70) replaced the previous number (Post III 118), by which the work is often referred to, even in recent studies. This may be because the codex lost, or perhaps never had, on the back, the new label with the new number. This new number, however, is to be found at the upper right-hand corner of the first end paper. Here the number 118 was crossed out with a pen and the new number 70 was put in. The new numbering is also confirmed by the inventory made by Leo van Wijmen.

The binding is done with hard cardboard, covered with parchment, with two endpapers. On the back, in capital letters the title of the codex is printed:

VITA VENERABILIS
MATRIS MARIAE
A S. TERESIA

followed by a flower with four stylised petals. Lower down the older paper label is still to be found. It has a blue octagonal form on a rectangular base, and the former number. The new label, unless it got detached in some way, seemingly, was never attached.

The codex was probably compiled for a printed edition, but it does not seem prepared in order to be used for a canonization process.³ The text shows many different hand-writings and is a compilation of seven different parts:⁴

- fol. 1r: Design of the titlepage for the printed edition.
- fol. 2r-5r: General Preface to the whole book prepared for the printed edition.

3 I must thank Elisabeth Hense and Edeltraud Klüeting, who studied and anatomized the codex and gave me more essential information for the description of the codex. See E. Hense & E. Klüeting, *Maria Petyts Visionen über den Holländischen Krieg*. Einige Bemerkungen zu Codex Post III 70 im Archiv des Postulators O.Carm. zu Rom, Via Giovanni Lanza 138. In: *Der Rabe des Elija*, 2013, 9–13.

4 E. Hense and E. Klüeting suggest that there were three main writers at the beginning of the codex, indicated as A, B, and C. The writer A copied fol. 2r-5r (Praefatio), 30r-33v, 38r-41v (Dutch War) and 118r-129v (section of the Second Part of the Vita); writer B wrote the beginning and the end of the *Index* (fol. 6r/v und 9r-15v; 28r-29v) remaining part of the history of the Dutch War (fol. 34r-37v; 42r-49v) and of the Second Part of the Vita (fol. 164r-177v, 250r-257v, 355r-372v, 377r-380v, 387r-428v, 437r-452r); writer C copied the remaining part of the *Index* (fol. 16r-27v), whereas the fragment of the *Index* (fol. 7r-8v) could be written by anyone other than the three writers.

- fol. 6r-29v: Two tables of contents by three different hands; two folios (7r-8v) are not bound with the others and contain a fragmentary list of chapters 56–158 of that known as the *First Part of the Life*. The main part of the Table of Contents (fol. 6r-v; 9r-29v), written by two different hands, shows the 911 chapters of the *Second Part of the Life*, indicated by chapter numbers, a short summary and the page numbers, but they do not correspond to the actual pagination.
- fol. 30r-49v: Text of the visions received by Maria of St. Teresa about the Dutch War⁵, written by two hands.
- fol. 50r-117v and 200r-216v: *First Part of the Life* by the same one hand and original foliation (5–89) not complete, while the first four folios are lacking.⁶
- fol. 118r-199v and 222r-230v: *Second Part of the Life* by various hands. The numbering 1A-20V on the fol. 118r-199v is referred to the pieces or *quaterniones*, as on the fol. 222 there is the number 21 and from fol. 230r the numbers indicate the single folios and not the sections; chapters 51–56 are lacking. The summaries in this part do not refer in fact to the codex division (pagination is different). Perhaps they could be written for an original draft of this copy of the manuscript.
- fol. 217r-221v and 231r-452r: is a continuation of the *Second Part of the Life*, written by different hands. Also in this part the summaries and pagination do not refer to the codex division in the Table of Contents.

The fol. 1r has at the top, in the centre, the monogram, 'M', above which there is a small stylised crown and underneath, an ornamental design. In fact, each of the folios of the codex begins with the name of Mary or the monogram 'M', written in different ways, with or without additional ornamentation, in the centre of the page, at the top; these monograms help in identifying the hand of the writer.

On fol. 1r the full title of the codex is given as:

Vita Venerabilis Matris Marię s S.ta Teresia

Tertiarię Ordinis B.mę Virginis Marię

De Monte Carmelo

Mechlinię defunctę kalendis novembris

Anno 1677

Ab ipsam ex obedientia et instinctu domino conscript[a]

⁵ Thanks to Esther van de Vate for her suggestions about this section of the book.

⁶ In fact this part begins with the end of ch. 11 of the printed Dutch *Leven*, Petyt (1683/1684).

Et
 Auctarium vitę illius
 Ex eius scriptis collectum et compositum
 per R.dum Adm. P. Michaellem a Sto Augustino
 eiusdem Ordinis Provincialem Provincę Flandro Belgicę
 dictę V. Matris per 31 annos directorem spirituaalem

There follows a biblical verse:

Mirabilis Deus in Sanctis suis Ps. 36

Then comes a drawing of a heart pierced by an arrow, the heart is crowned and inside the monogram 'MR' is written⁷.

On fol. 1r and 2r two small strips of paper were attached at the top on the left, each measuring around 50/65 × 11 mm, bearing the following instruction, '*Titulus generalis præfigendus initio totius libri*' (fol. 1r) e '*Prefatio generalis præfigendus <sic> toti libro*' (fol. 2r).

Michael of St. Augustine, the spiritual director of the venerable Marie of St. Teresa Petyt, wrote the General Preface (fol. 2r-5r) before the 24th of April, 1680 (fol. 5r), going by the date and signature (fol. 5v).⁸

Fol. 6r-29v contain the two indices.⁹ In fact fol. 6rv and 9r to 29v carry the exact and almost complete index of the content of the second part of the codex. Fol. 7r-8v carry in large part the index of the chapters (from chap. 56 to the incomplete chap. 158) of the First Part of the Life of the venerable woman, that is fol. 50r to 117v. These two fol. 7r-8v are loose, and they are inserted incorrectly between fol. 6 and 9 and there are perhaps two leafs still missing, with the indication of the initial and final chapters of the autobiography itself, which must have had 186 chapters as Michael himself wrote in the General Preface: '*pro ut hic per 186 capita, deducta sequitur*' (fol. 4v, l. 35).

As rightly suggested by Rijklof Hofman and Veronie Meeuwssen,¹⁰ the fol. from 30r to 49v were probably paginated incorrectly; it is possible that the codex lost its numbering and the sections at the beginning were taken apart, and whoever put them back together again might not have understood the original sequence, that may be reconstructed in this way: fol. 38r-41v – fol. 30r-33v –

⁷ The design is partially lost because the sheet is damaged in the lower section.

⁸ The preface is not an autograph of Michael of St. Augustine.

⁹ We will indicate the folios following the modern numbering system in pencil and, if necessary and possible, pointing out the old numbering system in pen ink.

¹⁰ I would like to thank Rijklof Hofman and Veronie Meeuwssen for their suggestion.

fol. 42r-49v – fol. 34r-37v. It is not clear why there are these few misplacements (fol. 30r-49v and 7r-8v) while almost the great part of the codex is continuous. It is difficult to understand why these pages, without any original numbers in pen ink, has been placed at the very beginning of the codex as an addition, before the section made up of fol. 50r-117v.

This section of the manuscript, by a single hand but not by Michael himself, turns out to be in the correct order, both because they are numbered in pen ink at the top right-hand corner¹¹ and because the chapters follow the order that is indicated in fol. 7r-8v of the index, even if they do not reach the number of 186 chapters as announced in the summary. The original numbering continues at fol. 200r-216v (fol. 200r has the original number 73), while the fol. 72rv is crossed out with a diagonal stroke in pen ink right through it.¹² The continuous pagination of these sheets suggests that there was a previous manuscript;¹³ preparing the entire text for printing it was reorganized with the insertion of the Preface to the Second Part (fol. 118r) and the first 142 chapters of the Second Part of the Life.

The '*Praefatio in vitam Mariae a Sta. Teresia Tertiaria Ordinis B.mę Mariae de Monte Carmelo*' (fol. 118r) opens the Second Part of the Life. The manuscript is now by different hands. This section begins with 19 *quaterniones* (four sheets) identified by numbers and letters 1 A-19 T put at the bottom of the first page until fol. 193v. Then there is a *sesternio* (six sheets), which begins with a wide sheet (fol. 194rv, which has only the monogram 'MR' on the back) and the numeration 20V is on fol. 195r. The sequence is interrupted by the insertion of the chapters of the First Part of the Life, as we saw before. Chapter 50 ends at fol. 151v, with only seven lines; then follows fol. 152r (a new *quaternio* 10 K) where chapter 57 begins. Chapters 51–56 are lacking.

The examination made by E. Hense and E. Klüeting revealed that:

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- 11 The page numbering is sequential and goes from 7 to 72.
 - 12 All the folios have a 'spy' word in the bottom right-hand corner, which repeats the first word of the following page, which is very useful for checking the sequence of the text and possible interruptions or displacements, which, however do not seem to be there, except in the first few folios as we indicated earlier. The 'spy' word on this fol. is 'Maria' which does not help us much, since every fol. has the name or the monogram of the Blessed Virgin on it. The original 'spy' word of fol. 200v was 'rationalem' erased and changed with 'Maria', but it does not help much more.
 - 13 However, it is strange that these chapters are a translation of the chapters 150–181 in vol. 2 of the Dutch *Leven*. This sustains the conclusion that there should have been a previous manuscript of the Codex.

The codex is a compilation from at least two previous manuscripts. Michael decided to limit the *Life* to 186 chapters, so he had to put a new '*Praefatio*' at fol. 118r.

The section on the Dutch War (fol. 30r-49v) does not appear in both indices. We do not know why Michael thought this part was so important to be preserved if it was not intended for printing; it is possible that he feared reaction from the readers as he himself wrote at fol. 30r.

The person who bound the codex was conscious that fol. 7r-8v did not follow fol. 6rv; so he did not bind them with the rest of the codex, but left them loose as supplementary sheets between fol. 6v and 9r.

The sequence of the folios is precise for the part destined to be printed (the First Part and the Second Part). The section not destined to be printed does not have such an accurate pagination (the table of contents and the document on the Dutch war).

Having described the physical appearance of the codex, we might look now at the rather scant information that we have about its history.

Stefano Possanzini, in discussing the literary production of Michael of St. Augustine, affirms: 'Finally, in 1683, one year before his death, he published in Gent the *Life of the Venerable Maria of St. Teresa, Carmelite Tertiary*. This life, published in two volumes, in Flemish, was then translated by him into Latin and up to the present day the manuscript has been kept in the archive of the General Postulation.'¹⁴

This affirmation, however, needs correction, on the basis of the date that is at the end of the preface of the same manuscript (fol. 5r): '24th of April, 1680'. What do we think happened? Valerius Hoppenbrouwers gives us a suggestion toward resolving the problem when he uses some texts taken from the codex in his work on Marian devotion in Carmel. After a brief introduction to Maria Petyt, he then gave some information about the time when the codex was written.¹⁵ This is what he said:

Michael of St. Augustine asked his directee under obedience to write her autobiography. He wanted to publish it along with his own spiritual annotations, but he was afraid that he might not have the freedom to do so because the Belgian bishops might not have given their permission. Therefore he set about translating the work into Latin, with the help of a few of his confreres – the same ones perhaps who helped in the copying

¹⁴ Possanzini (1998) 32, where he cites Cosmas de Villiers (1752) vol. 2, 446.

¹⁵ Hoppenbrouwers (1960) 403.

of the material in the text? – and he sent it to Rome in the hope of getting around the ban on publication. However, things did not work out that way, because the work was published in Gent between 1683 and 1684.¹⁶

From some letters sent by Michael of St. Augustine to Seraphinus of Jesus and Mary from Brussels, now kept in the General Archive of the Order in Rome,¹⁷ one could argue that Michael of St. Augustine himself sent the manuscript to the General Curia. In fact, these few letters contain some references to the *Vita*. The first one was of the 23rd of September 1679 from Brussels. In it (lines 3–4) Michael spoke about his desire to finish the redaction of the *Vita 'venerabilis Matris Mechliniensis'*. He came back to this argument in the letter of the 7th of October, writing that he intended to send the manuscript on the occasion of the General Chapter, as in fact happened.

In the letter of the 24th of February 1680 there is a paragraph about the folios on the Dutch War. Michael confessed his concern about the political opportunity of publishing the memoirs of Maria Petyt's position in the conflict. In this same letter there is also a post scriptum, in which Michael suggested that he would allow another copy of the *Vita* to be made in case the first copy had not been written out in an intelligible way. Michael wrote again on the 9th of March of 1680.

Three years later, on the 1st of April 1683, Michael asked again the help of the Order to obtain support from the confessor of the Pope. The most plausible reason would seem to be the one suggested by Hoppenbrouwers, namely that he was afraid of being turned down if he asked the Belgian bishops for the imprimatur.¹⁸ At the end of the 17th century the anti-mystical currents and suspicions regarding the mystics, especially women mystics, were spreading everywhere.¹⁹

It seems very clear to me that the translation was carried out between 1677 and 1680, and more than likely before the 24th of April, 1680 and the codex probably reached Rome in that same year or not long afterwards. Perhaps it was occasioned by the General Chapter of June 1680, when Sebastian of St. Paul, as procurator of the Provincial, Michael of St. Augustine, together with

¹⁶ Petyt (1683/1684).

¹⁷ Rome, Arch. Gen. Ord. Carmelitarum, *I.I. Prov. Flandro - Belgica, commune provinciae 1675–1698*, II C.O. II 4 (1).

¹⁸ Cfr. the article of Esther van de Vate, p. 92–118.

¹⁹ Cfr. the article of Esther van de Vate, p. 92–118.

the two *socii provinciae*, Mark of the Resurrection and Jacob of Saint Antony, came to Rome.²⁰

It is possible that the manuscript was given to Seraphinus of Jesus and Mary who lived at that time in Rome. We do not know where it was placed, whether in the library of the *Studium generale* in Traspontina, in the General Archive, or elsewhere.²¹ At a certain point (perhaps when the General Archive was reorganized in the 1960s?), the codex ended up among the documents of the Archive of the General Postulation, from which everything else followed.

As Hoppenbrouwers rightly points out, its contents are still useful and necessary for the reconstruction of the human affairs of Maria Petyt, in line with a more precise and detailed chronology. Reading it in conjunction or in parallel with the Flemish version printed in Gent, may offer us a series of interesting additions and useful clarifications regarding the entire experience of the mystic from Mechelen, the account of whose life is obviously filtered through the writing and reworking of Michael of St. Augustine. Once again, it is somewhat difficult to separate the stories and the experiences of these two: Marian and mariaform mysticism is probably the product of both and both gave it flesh.

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20 Cfr the letters mentioned above and Wessels (1934) vol. 2, 130f. The General Chapter confirmed Michael of St. Augustine as Prior Provincial: cfr. *ibid.*, 165.

21 Cosmas de Villiers (1752) vol. 2, 354, wrote about the manuscript of the *Vita Ven. Mariae a Sancta Theresia*: 'quam suo in g. Codice Ms. retinet R. P. Seraphinus Potenza, Carmelitarum Aedituus S. Mariae Traspontinae in Urbe'.

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