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

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.

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\(^4\) 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-452v); 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.