

COMMUNICATING IDEAS AND EMOTIONS IN THE LONG SIXTEENTH CENTURY: THE SPECTACLE OF THE SAINTS, THEIR RELICS AND SOUVENIRS IN THE NORTHERN LOW COUNTRIES

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ABSTRACT

In the long sixteenth century, knowledge about the saints was disseminated not only through hagiographical texts, be they in Latin or the vernacular, but also through visual images, both in churches and in (urban) secular public spaces, through souvenirs such as pilgrims' badges, ephemeral printed texts in the vernacular, and printed images. Examples from the northern Low Countries of the various media that played a role in the veneration of the saints, more particularly those that were to be encountered by pilgrims at the feasts of these holy men and women, are presented, and, whenever possible, descriptions by contemporaries will be used. This allows the links between hagiography, via sermons and miracles, with the festive occasions on which saints and believers met, to be established.

Keywords: hagiography; sermons; pilgrimage; media; emotions; (popular) religion

THE MIDDLE AGES did not have a concept that covered the modern concept of 'literature'. There were many kinds of written texts, penned in various languages. Some of these written texts, though by no means all of them, were considered by contemporaries as more, or less, successful.¹ In some cases we are dealing with written texts which, in modern eyes, can be studied as 'literature'. Such texts more often than not were transmitted in the form of a 'book', 'a mobile text, an artefact produced to transmit a text in whatever form – manuscript or printed, clay tablet, roll or codex'.² In the Middle Ages the medium chosen was most often that of a manuscript in the form of a codex. There were, however, also other types of 'mobile texts': texts might be stored in a person's physical memory, and be recalled to render them by way of a performance, just as they could be read silently or aloud from books.³ Reading aloud could be similar to an oral performance. Through such performances, listeners could appropriate a text even if they were incapable of reading the written text themselves. Obviously, for this to happen, it was necessary that the

text, if it had been written in a language which the listeners did not know, was given voice in a language with which they were conversant. In the northern Low Countries this often meant that a text in Latin or French had to be translated into the mother tongue. Such a text could, in translation, be edited to fit performances of reading aloud or recital, and thus become part of the textual universe of the listeners.

This textual universe comprised both written and oral texts; texts in foreign languages as well as texts in one's own language; texts which were appreciated as word art both for their contents and for their style; texts that were read silently or read aloud, and passed on orally or by copying because of the value of their content and what one could accomplish through their subject matter. In this textual universe written texts played an important role, and written texts in the form of codices played leading parts. But codices were not the only material forms taken by texts, nor even their commonest form.

Texts that have merited a place in Dutch literature and culture of the Middle Ages could be carved on slate, be used as decoration on shoes, or even be represented, transformed into visual art without a caption on a corbel of Bruges town hall or on the beams of Brussels town hall. Scenes could be immortalized as frescoes, more extended texts could be mounted on boards in churches, and performances of plays could form the subject matter of paintings.⁴ Sometimes such material manifestations of 'literary' texts still have some link to phases of their written transmission. Remnants of texts have been kept on wax tablets or have emerged latterly as padding in a cope, and their authors could be depicted in three dimensions.⁵ Often, however, the visual derivatives of texts occur divorced from the written word. Appealing stories could be immortalized in gable stones, and scenes were depicted on enamelled spoons.⁶ Objects that could be associated with saints to whom texts had been devoted, or relics of those saints, called to mind the stories that were told about them.⁷

Material manifestations of texts helped readers and listeners to locate themselves in the textual universe. Those visual images that have been preserved often reference written texts that we can still identify. Insofar as these images were placed in public spaces, it would have been possible to get spoken information about what had been depicted or what was written as a caption.⁸ Where distinctive clothing or objects were concerned, the public must have had some idea about what was referred to – and if not, others in the circle of their acquaintances might possibly have helped them. In this way material manifestations of texts could be an occasion for the telling of stories; stories played a role comparable to that of written texts in book-form. Only when we understand to which text such an object referred does its role become clear to us; the message of an object which has since become mute may nevertheless have been heard loud and clear by the artefact's contemporaries.⁹

Although there are good reasons to study written and oral texts together with the objects that refer to them, little research has been done so far into such objects and their roles in the medieval Low Countries. In 1984, the archaeologist Herbert Sarfaty published his study of the right-hand part of the upper of a slipper, which

depicts the orchard scene from the story of Tristan and Isolde.¹⁰ Fifteen years later, he was followed by Joris Reynaert, who concluded from his own study of the functions of a number of texts transmitted in the so-called Geraardsberg manuscript that they had been meant as inscriptions on objects, walls, boards or loose leaves.¹¹ A few years earlier, Dini Hogenelst and Frits van Oostrom had published a number of images of material traces of (mainly Middle Dutch) 'literary' texts.¹² Apart from a study of an inscription from 1480 in Ghent town hall, however, I know of no other recent research into the role of objects relevant to the study of the medieval textual universe in the Low Countries.¹³

The veneration of the saints

In the remainder of this article I would like to offer an exploration of part of this subject, to wit the texts and objects that have to do with the veneration of saints. Latin and Middle Dutch texts and relics, but also other objects, played a role. These texts and objects referred to one another and reinforced the message they were meant to spread individually. The number of sources for such an exercise proves more than sufficient. I will confine myself to the veneration of the saints in what is now the Netherlands, although it will be necessary also on occasion to take into account examples from areas bordering the Netherlands to the south and east.

It is to be expected that in the study of the veneration of the saints, hagiographical texts will take centre stage. However, although hagiography renders certain services to the veneration of the saints, this veneration is not wholly dependent on hagiographical texts. Relics are known to have been present in the Northern Netherlands at the time of the region's Christianization. The Venerable Bede reports how Willibrord, the archbishop of the Frisians, brought back from a voyage to Rome, apart from the pallium legitimating his status as Primate, relics of the saints which were meant to find a place in the altars of churches that had not as yet been provided with relics.¹⁴ Relics, such as (fragments of) the bones or other remains of a saint, were deemed to embody all of the saint's power, as if a relic was a *pars pro toto* for the saint. They became cult objects, sometimes kept in beautiful shrines. Objects that had belonged to a saint could stand in as 'contact relics' for the saint to be venerated. In the case of Jesus Christ, the miracles done through the host, the holy blood, or fragments of the wood on which He had suffered, could be very effective in bringing about veneration. Other saints held their own with the Son of God when it came to working miracles through their relics.¹⁵ As we will see, souvenirs of the saints and devotional items such as pilgrims' badges could keep alive the veneration of the saints, and thereby also the texts about them.

Stories about the lives and deaths of the saints, and about the miracles they performed during their lives on earth or after death, could play a useful role in the saints' veneration. As to what was the essence of a hagiographical text, however, contemporaries and modern readers seem to disagree. In the twelfth century, the monks of Marchiennes thought nothing of copying different, mutually exclusive, traditions about their monastery *in the same manuscript*.¹⁶ In this way pilgrims from

different groups could be edified by different stories. Everything was fine as long as the text served the veneration of the saints by the pilgrims. This could also be done equally well by using texts in Latin or the vernacular. As long as the texts concerned the saints, one could learn from them, and about the saints' virtues.¹⁷ Just as even the minutest particles of a saint's body contained all the power of the saint, so too could any event from the life of a saint invite veneration. That is why, for the liturgical readings during Matins, often the beginning of a text was chosen, and one simply stopped after the first 1200 words (after four lessons of approximately 300 words each). In this way one did not advance beyond stories about the youth and early adulthood of the saint.¹⁸ In the case of martyrs especially, then, one did not reach the most interesting subject matter. Twelfth-century monks do not seem to have minded that. They were clearly not interested in narrative strategies and other matters that modern medievalists think are worth investigating.

Issues preoccupying modern scholars interested in the period starting around 1200, such as the choice of Latin or the vernacular, turn out to have been less important to medieval people than one might otherwise expect. In their study *Collecties op orde* Karl Stoker and Theo Verbeij studied the Middle Dutch manuscripts from monasteries and so-called 'semi-religious communities' in the medieval Netherlands. Of 1,358 manuscripts, only 43 date from before 1400. This suggests that, until 1400, Latin remained the most important language in the cloisters. Of those 43 Middle Dutch manuscripts, nine contain hagiographical texts in the vernacular. The oldest manuscript, of c. 1274, from Saint-Trond, contains a copy of Willem of Affligem's *Life of St Lutgard*.¹⁹ Apart from another *Life* of Lutgard, by Brother Geraert (c. 1280–1290)²⁰ and the so-called Oudenaardse Rijmboek of c. 1300,²¹ we possess no other copies of this life from the thirteenth century.²² Apparently, in the monasteries Latin texts were at this time sufficient, even in the matter of the veneration of the saints. Some 100 of the most important places of pilgrimage in the northern Netherlands were established in the period up to c. 1400. In the fifteenth century, a further 80 others would join them.²³

Saints and places of pilgrimage

Which saints were venerated in the northern Netherlands can be deduced from the martyrologies indicating which were to be honoured in each diocese.²⁴ Veneration could take place in any church which possessed a relic of a saint, or other cult objects associated with them, or texts. Let us concentrate, however, on those places which attracted visitors from elsewhere. These places of pilgrimage were dedicated to saints who could be found on the ecclesiastical calendar anywhere, but also to saints with a special association with the Netherlands. This latter group of saints included important ones, such as St Servatius, the fourth-century Bishop of Tongeren who had died at Maastricht, where he was venerated as early as the sixth century.²⁵ Or Boniface, the Anglo-Saxon missionary who was killed at Dokkum in 754,²⁶ or his predecessor as missionary among the Frisians, Willibrord, who was venerated in smaller towns and villages such as Heiloo, Westkapelle, Oss and Overasselt.²⁷ But

there were also almost unknown saints, such as Gangulf, a Burgundian nobleman who had joined the mission among the Frisians at the time when the Frankish bishop Wulfram was trying to convert them. Gangulf was considered to have worked miracles in the city of Haarlem between 1460 and 1561.²⁸ And everywhere there was veneration of Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary.

Texts about commonly known saints can often be found elsewhere. One could, for instance, use the *Legenda aurea* of Jacobus de Voragine (1228/30–1298), three Middle Dutch translations of which existed.²⁹ To the original text, these translations added the lives of regionally known and venerated saints.³⁰ In the Netherlands themselves, 96 hagiographical texts from the Middle Ages survive, mainly devoted to regionally known saints.³¹ Most of them were written in Latin; yet no fewer than 33 were written in Middle Dutch.³² It is remarkable that of this hagiographical production, ten texts have as their subject saints who have never benefited from a major cult – for instance, a number of Utrecht saints who had to compete with other more popular saints.³³ There were also some Frisian saints and others from Groningen who did get their saint's life, but no important cult.³⁴ Geertrui of Oosten, a fourteenth-century Beguine from Delft, likewise did not make much of an impression; Wiro, an Insular missionary associated with Sint-Odiliënberg near Roermond, at least became the object of a cult after the Middle Ages.³⁵ There were also all but unknown saints who did get a cult, but no saint's life, such as Sura, who was ordered by the Virgin Mary to act as financier of the building of the main church of Dordrecht. She was venerated from the end of the fifteenth century onwards.³⁶ The Utrecht bishop Bernoldus (or Bernulphus), who in the eleventh century brought into being the so-called Utrecht *kerkenkruis* (a group of churches that forms a cross on the map), also belonged to this somewhat dubious group of saints.³⁷

Sometimes, stories about miracles connected with objects are mentioned without the names being cited of any saints instrumental in bringing the miracles about. Such stories did not necessarily inspire separate texts to be written about them. Consider the miracle cult of a petrified loaf of bread, which originated in Leiden during the famine of 1316.³⁸ The story is mentioned, however, in the chronicle of the *Clerc uten Lagen Landen* (1404–1409) and by Jan Gerbrandszoon of Leiden (first redaction 1467–1469). It is remarkable that, despite the presence in Leiden of the petrified bread itself, important differences exist between the two recorded stories.³⁹ At Dokkum a similar story was told about petrified loaves; here, the story was connected with the person of St Boniface.⁴⁰ Petrified loaves of bread were by no means the only objects that played a role in the cultural universe in which the cult of the saints was embedded. We will now consider some of these other forms of evidence for the veneration of the saints, going beyond hagiography alone.

Keeping the veneration of the saints alive: Stories, objects and memorable events

Stories about saints, whether they were told in Latin or in the vernacular, whether they were told in individual or in composite texts, and whether they were imprinted upon the minds of their listeners by the presence of relics or contact relics of the

saints, needed to be told again and again if they were to remain part of the cultural universe. Often sermons were used to this end. Alcuin (c. 730–804) wrote the first life of Willibrord.⁴¹ This text was apparently used in the cult of this important saint, as no texts are known to have been written in the Low Countries that might have taken over this role from texts written elsewhere about Willibrord. Alcuin had been considerate with his audience: he wrote not only a life in prose, but also a version in poetry, meant for the monastic schools, and a short sermon, meant for the pilgrims who came to Echternach to pay homage to the saint.⁴²

Outlines of other such sermons survive as well. At the beginning of the eleventh century Abbot Florentius of Saint-Josse-sur-Mer wrote a short summary of the life of Jodocus, in which he addressed the faithful who were present on the saint's feast day. Their presence would be rewarded by Jodocus, and the Abbot was happy to see so many pilgrims come from distant parts.⁴³ Other sermons for pilgrims are known from the southern Netherlands. Always the solemnity of the occasion is stressed. The public is addressed, and sometimes it is emphasized that they are merely laymen without expertise in matters saintly.⁴⁴ Next, the virtues of the saint are mentioned, in ways that hardly distinguish between the individual saints. It is as if the preachers are more interested in edifying their public than in telling the story of the saint. Possibly this was acceptable in the eleventh century. In the late Middle Ages, however, the sermon could be encapsulated in a multi-medial spectacle (Figure 1). Philippe de Vigneulles, a citizen of Metz, describes his visit to Maastricht in 1510 as follows:

Tres en Aillemaigne [...] est l'une des belles et bonnes grosses villes que l'on pouroit trower, là où se montrent les jueux cy aprez escripts. Premier se monstre le chief st Servay, son bourdon, sa crosse, son calice et sa platine et deux où [sic] trois dignes drapz, c'est assavoir ung drapz que les anges aportirent du ciel et avec d'autres; item, ung denier croisié que st Luc donnit à nostre dame, lequel elle le pourtait entre ses mamelles plusieurs années, et le bras st Thomas et la clef du dit st, qui lui fut envoyée du ciel comme on dist et ung vaissiaux pour boire, qui lui fut envoyé du ciel, que on ne sct quelle pierre c'est et dest [sic] de plusieurs coullours. Et arivames à la dite ville proprement à l'heure que l'on monstroit les juaulx devant dit; car on ne les monstre jamais que à chacun jour une fois, le pardon durant, et les monstre – on sus des allées faictes à claire-voye que sont sus le cuer de la grande église à la moude et façon qu'ils font à Ayx et preche-l'on à chacun juaulx qui se monstre. Et là en grant plaice em bais derrière le dit cuer y avoit tant de puple que c'estoit merveille, et puis on sonnoit les cloches; les menestres de la ville cornoient aissez près des dits juaulx et relicques et tout le puple buissoit de leurs cornets, qui est une merveilleuze chose à oyr et à croyer et n'y avoit guere de gens que les lairmes ne luy venissent à l'eul.⁴⁵

[Maastricht in Germany [...] is one of the most beautiful and finest big towns one could find, where the treasures to be described are exhibited. First is exhibited the head of St. Servatius, his pilgrim staff, his cross, his chalice and his paten, and two or three worthy cloths, that is, a cloth which the angels brought from heaven, with others, in addition to it, a cross-shaped medal that St. Luke gave to our Lady and which she bore between her breasts for several years, and the arm of St. Thomas and his key, which was sent to him

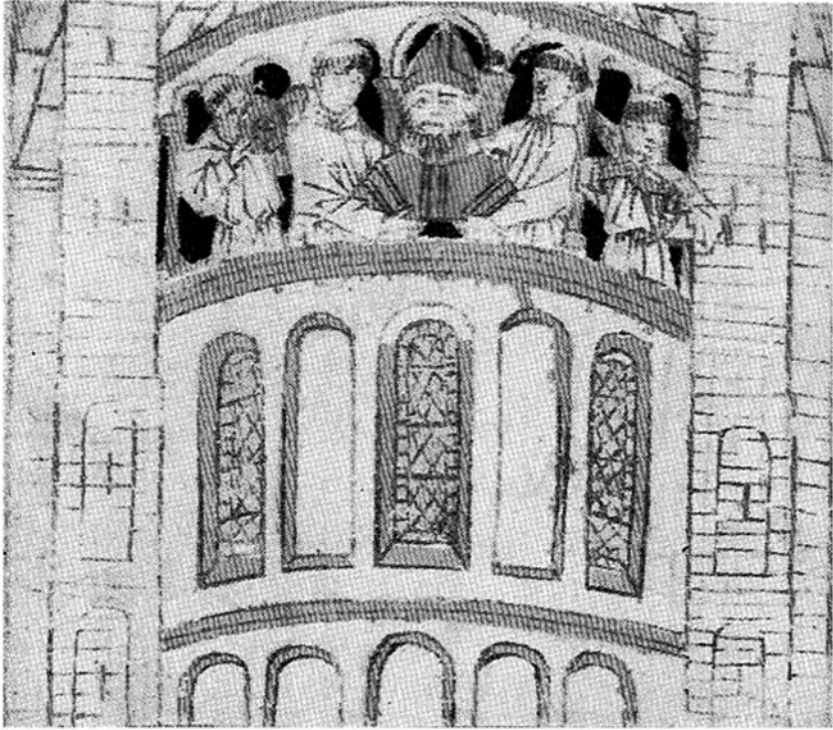


Figure 1 The showing of the reliquary of St Servatius, from the gallery on the outside of the Church of St Servatius in Maastricht. Woodcut (approx. 10 × 11 cm) in the so-called Block book (c. 1460) of St Servatius. Photo Amsterdam, BiN-collectie.

from heaven, as they say, and a drinking vessel that was sent to him from heaven, and one does not know what stone it is made of and it is of many colours. We arrived at the town just as they exhibited these treasures, for they exhibit them only once a day during the time of indulgence, and they exhibit them on walkways with openings above the choir of the great church in the manner and way they do at Aachen, and they preach before each treasure they exhibit. And there in the great square below, behind the choir, there were so many people it was a marvel, and then they rang the bells, the town servants blew their trumpets near to the treasures and relics and all the people blew their horns, which is a marvellous thing to hear and believe, and there was scarcely anyone who did not have tears come to their eyes.]⁴⁶

Philippe gets to hear something about the supernatural origin of some of the treasures, and also to see relics kept in the Church of St Servatius. He receives a commentary about each 'treasure' in the form of a sermon. In these sermons, one assumes, something must have been told of what these texts disclosed about the saints whose relics are shown, for instance concerning St Servatius himself.⁴⁷ What is remarkable is that the exhibiting of the relics is accompanied



Figure 2 Tin pilgrim badge (3.2 × 5 cm) of St Servatius from the end of the twelfth century. Bremen, Focke-Museum, Bremer Landesmuseum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte, inventar Nr.: 1975, 423.

by a multimedial spectacle of colours, bell-ringing, and the blowing of trumpets (quite near the relics) and horns.⁴⁸ Festivals made the stories of the saints memorable, and the relics could, just as other treasures did, serve as aids for remembering texts about them.

What Philippe fails to mention are the pilgrim badges that were for sale in Maastricht in 1510, the year of his visit. Examples of badges from the twelfth and fourteenth centuries are known from Maastricht; they kept alive the memory of the pilgrimage to St Servatius (Figure 2).⁴⁹ A lead-tin alloy pilgrim badge showing both Anthony the Abbot and Servatius dates from the time of Philippe de Vigneulles's visit; it was meant to keep alive memories of visits to the Hospital Brothers of St Anthony at Maastricht.⁵⁰ Already in 1468, coloured woodcuts had been on sale with images of some of the important relics on show to the pilgrims.⁵¹ In a city such as Maastricht, pilgrims could supply themselves with objects and images which they could take home, and which might remind them of the miraculous stories they had heard about the saints they had visited.

Maastricht was by no means the only pilgrimage destination where souvenirs were on sale. Pilgrim badges, made of cheap metal, are known from many places. They could also be bought at Amersfoort and Aardenburg, in Amsterdam, Bedum, 's-Gravenzande and Rhenen, in Sint Anna ter Muiden, Boxtel, Den Bosch, Steenberg, Haarlem, Hasselt and Hulsterloo.⁵² Together with 22 other pilgrim



Figure 3 Page (18 × 13 cm) in the fifteenth-century Book of Hours of the d'Oiselet family, into which 23 pilgrim badges in silver have been sewn. One of the badges shows the Annunciation and mentions 's-Gravenzande: 'SGRAVESAND AVE ORA P[RO] N[OBIS] AMEN' ('s-Gravenzande. Hail [Mary], pray for us, amen'). The Hague, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, MS 77 L 60, f. 98^r (detail).

badges, one from 's-Gravenzande has been preserved in a fifteenth-century book of hours belonging to the d'Oiselet family (Figure 3). They were executed not in a base alloy, but in silver. Social differences between pilgrims remained visible even in their badges.

Pilgrim badges were not the only souvenirs, however. In 1518 in Amsterdam, where the 'Sacrament of Miracle', a Miracle of the Host of 1345, was at the basis of the religious tourism still thriving there, one could also buy pilgrimage prints (Figure 4).⁵³ In Delft, in 1510 and 1511, devotional prints were also on sale.⁵⁴ And in Reimerswaal, apparently the first place in western Christendom to adopt the cult of Our Lady of the Seven Sorrows,⁵⁵ the devotional booklet *Devote gedenckenisse van de VII weeden* could already be purchased in 1492, the year in which dean Jan of Coudenberghe had a painting of Mary affixed in the church and started a confraternity in honour of Our Lady of the Seven Sorrows. A woodcut after the painting was inserted into the booklet (Figure 5).⁵⁶ Printed images, clearly, could be turned to advantage in helping to keep hagiographical narratives in people's memories. In 1498 the life of Lidwina appeared, written by Johannes Brugman. In it, a woodcut has found a place, showing Our Lady choosing Schiedam as her place of residence, with the harbour in the background (Figure 6).⁵⁷ A final kind of 'souvenir' that ought to be mentioned was the documentary proof that a penal pilgrimage had been completed successfully. Four inhabitants of Amsterdam, for instance, had been sentenced to a penal pilgrimage to the statue of Our Lady at 's-Gravenzande. On 31 July 1501 the verger, who was also the town clerk, wrote a letter which the four could



Figure 4 Pilgrimage print of the ‘Sacrament of Miracle’, Amsterdam, by Jacob Cornelisz van Oostanen, dated 1518. Photo Amsterdam, BiN-collectie.

use as proof that they had fulfilled their obligations by offering gifts ‘before the statue of Our dear Lady’ (*voerden beelde van onser lieven sueter vrouwen*). Back home the convicts handed their letter, including the details of their pilgrimage, to the Amsterdam authorities; the letter, a document written in memory of the events, is kept in the Amsterdam municipal archives (Figure 7).⁵⁸

One notices that prints, including texts and images, played an important role. They reminded the pilgrims of objects and paintings they had seen with their own eyes in places of pilgrimage. Such paintings could represent the story of the cult in a shortened form. In Amersfoort, a small statue of the Virgin Mary had been found in



Figure 5 Woodcut of Our Lady of the Seven Sorrows, included in the devotional booklet *Devote gedenckenisse van de VII weeden* (1492) after the painting (a cult object) in the Church of Reimerswaal. Photo Amsterdam, BiN-collectie.

1444, and quite soon a cult developed. In *c.* 1525 a painting was made of the finding of the statue (Figure 8).⁵⁹ Images of scenes from the history of a cult could also help impress stories of miracles performed by the saints on the memories of the beholders. Almost immediately after the event, a panel was painted by the Master of



Figure 6 Woodcut depicting Our Lady (‘Mary of Schiedam’) choosing Schiedam as a place of residence. She is visible in the boat. From Johannes Brugman, *Vita S. Lydwinae* (1498). Utrecht, University Library, collectie Thomaasse, RAR 5-69 oct. (p. 17).

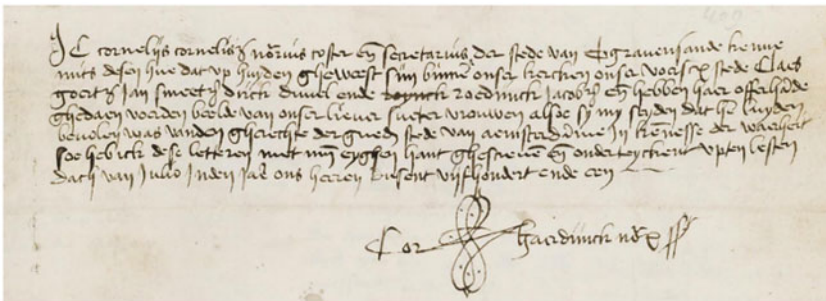


Figure 7 Letter of 31 July 1501, written by the verger of the Parish Church of 's-Gravenzande, serving as proof that a penal pilgrimage by four Amsterdam convicts to the miraculous statue of Our Lady at 's-Gravenzande had been duly accomplished. Amsterdam, Stadsarchief, Archief der burgemeesters, toegangsnr. 5020, inv. 2, p. 409.

Rhenen of the siege and capture of the town of Rhenen by Duke John II of Kleve in 1499. In it, pilgrims and soldiers are shown kneeling in the church before the bones of St Cunera (Figure 9).⁶⁰



Figure 8 Painting of c. 1525 depicting the discovery of the Amersfoort statue of the Virgin Mary in 1444. Amersfoort, Oud-Katholieke parochie.

At the end of the Middle Ages in the northern Netherlands, texts about the saints and their miracles, published in relatively cheap editions, which ever larger numbers of people could read for themselves, seem to have become increasingly important in people's devotions. This is evident not only from the printed hagiographical texts,



Figure 9 Panel showing the siege and capture of Rhenen by Duke John II of Kleve on 8 July 1499, painted c. 1500 by the Master of Rhenen. The interior of the church shows pilgrims and soldiers kneeling before the tomb in which the bones of St Cunera were kept. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum.

devotional booklets and pilgrimage prints (which also included text), but also from the books of miracles which contained reports of miracles worked by the Virgin Mary. A text from Delft survives containing accounts of nine miraculous events from the period 1327–1439. The Miracle Book of Den Bosch covers 1382–1603, and that of Amersfoort (Figure 10) 1444–1545.⁶¹

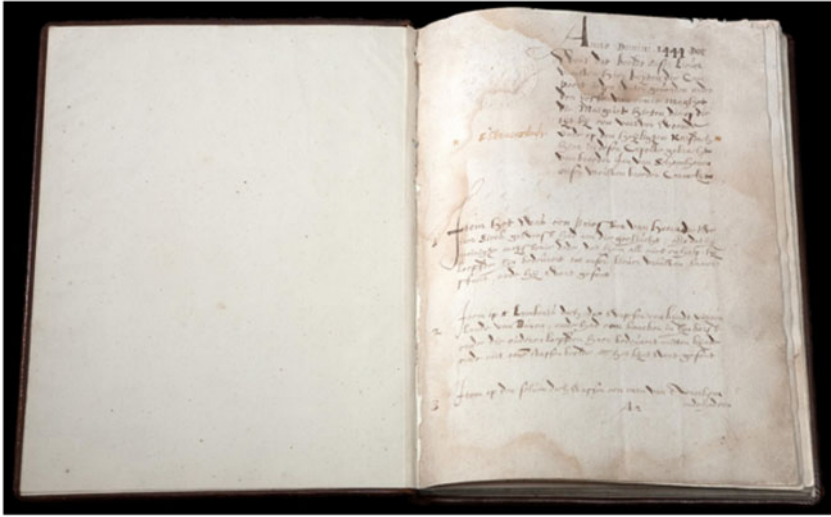


Figure 10 One of two seventeenth-century copies of the Amersfoort Miracle Book, relating 542 miracles that occurred between 1444 and 1545. Amersfoort, Oud-Katholieke parochie.

Moveable objects as signposts to changeable texts

I hope to have made it clear that all objects seen by pilgrims, from relics via contact relics and visual images to unusual objects such as petrified loaves of bread, could almost imperceptibly lead to the stories that were told about them, whether in the form of sermons or otherwise, making a more lasting impression on pilgrims' memories. The souvenirs that the pilgrims brought back made them think again and again of the signs of the power of the saints they had witnessed. They helped the pilgrimages to be remembered better than would have been the case without them. Relics, images and objects, even the cheapest of pilgrim badges, were signposts in the cultural universe: they pointed towards the narratives used in the veneration of the saints.

We may nevertheless ask ourselves whether hagiographical texts could indeed survive outside the covers of a book, in the physical memory of those who had heard them. For they would be subject to the changes wrought by remembering and forgetting, and might develop into representations fundamentally different from those that pious authors, scribes, translators, editors and printers had entrusted to parchment or paper, and which through preaching or other performances had been transmitted to an audience of listeners. We know examples of changes which led to clearly different versions of the same story. Take the Leiden petrified bread (Figure 11). According to the *Clerc uten Lagen Landen*, during the famine a loaf of bread had been bought by a woman who had eaten half of it and had kept the other half for later. When her neighbour asked her for bread, she said she had none at home and, if she did, then may God turn it into stone. This duly happened, and the bread



Figure 11 The (surviving) Leiden petrified loaf of bread. Leiden, Museum De Lakenhal, inv. nr. 5432.

was kept thereafter in St Peter's Church, where at high festivals it was shown on the Altar of the Holy Spirit. Jan of Leiden however, a second witness, talks about two sisters, and about several petrified loaves of bread. His version was accepted by later authors. So, it seems as though oral tradition changed the story – either that or Jan of Leiden was simply mistaken, because according to a notarial deed drawn up in 1574–1581 there proved to be only one loaf of bread.⁶² Whatever may have been the truth of the matter, we still need to speak of two 'versions'. In the cases of artefacts including even less text (which, though endeavouring to keep alive orally transmitted hagiographical texts, may not even have mentioned the name of the saint), we may surmise that the exact wording of those oral texts as heard by the owners of the objects could not survive the frailty of human memory. Medieval literates were convinced of this as well, as is clear from the *arenga* of the type '*memoria-oblivio*' found in relatively large numbers of charters: because human memory is weak, it is necessary to write things down.⁶³ But literate people, whether medieval or modern, have an understanding of what a text is and what it can do that is different from the understanding of their less literate contemporaries.

As I have argued elsewhere,⁶⁴ we may distinguish four groups of people who differ in their understanding of writing. 'Illiterates' have no idea of what writing is, and do not know, for instance, that writing is language rendered visible; they do not understand that the content of a written text is transmitted through the eyes rather than through the ears. With the unbecoming expression 'semi-illiterates' are meant those who, although they cannot read and write themselves (and therefore are functionally illiterate), nevertheless know what writing is, and have an awareness as to how the written word can function differently from the spoken word. 'Semi-literates' are those who know how to read and write, but who are yet unaware of the

subtleties of written communication. Their mentality is therefore in some respects close to that of the semi-illiterates. Finally, those who are ‘fully literate’ can manipulate the culture of writing. Thanks to their thorough understanding of the techniques of the written word, they are able to decide autonomously whether to avail themselves of the possibilities offered by the culture of the written word.

For medieval pilgrims, inasmuch as they did not as a rule share the mentalities of the literates, ‘word’ was not a grammatical concept but stood for ‘everything that can be said’, and in which one needed to trust. ‘An honest man is as good as his word’, an identification that is expressed in proverbs in many languages.⁶⁵ This means that for most pilgrims (relatively few of whom would have been fully literate) the exact words of a text were more likely to be subordinate to the text’s general meaning than it would have been for those among the pilgrims who were fully literate – and this would especially have been the case for those able to compare the wording of two versions of the same text (as with the petrified bread, for example). The full facts were less important than the trustworthiness a text once heard had in the retelling. That is why a text could be ‘actualized’ (even to the extent of existing in different versions) when images and objects awakened its memory. In this way texts transmitted orally could remain part of the cultural universe alongside texts transmitted in books. This circumstance does not make it easy for researchers, because how are they to compare versions of texts of which not only are there no traces in the written tradition, but which indeed never left such traces? How is one to deal with what was kept in people’s physical memories, outside the world of manuscripts and early printed books, things which slumbered until a physical memory prop woke them and occasioned new performances?

Texts meant for the veneration of saints prove useful for a first exploration of the medieval and early modern textual universe. For the power of the saints could be found in their relics, contact relics, images and, maybe, even in objects taken by pilgrims as souvenirs – as well as in texts written about them. Those texts could be written in Latin or in a vernacular; they could be reworked, translated, subdivided in liturgical lessons; they could be read silently, read aloud, and listened to – even the shortest of texts, prayers to the saints or texts to invoke them, could be effective.⁶⁶ Confronted by such textual and extra-textual *variance*, how can access to the textual universe be denied to orally transmitted stories, even if they were never written down – and even if, because of their silent absence from the written record, we can do little more than remember their erstwhile presence?

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NOTES

¹ On 'texts' in hagiography, see Tjamke Snijders, *Manuscript Communication: Visual and Textual Mechanics of Communication in Hagiographical Texts from the Southern Low Countries, 900–1200*, Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy, 32 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015), pp. 2–3, 181–83, where the author distinguishes between 'work', 'version', 'variant', 'scriptum' and 'text'. A crude yet effective way of measuring a text's success consists of simply counting its extant manuscripts, and then looking at their distribution across time and space. For a convincing study of the success of historiographical works, see Bernard Guenée, *Histoire et culture historique dans l'Occident médiéval* (Paris: Aubier Montaigne, 1980), pp. 248–99.

² Lotte Hellinga, '1. 1460–1585. Opkomst en algemene verspreiding. 1.0 Inleiding', in *Bibliopolis: Geschiedenis van het gedrukte boek in Nederland*, ed. by Marieke van Delft and Clemens de Wolf (Zwolle: Waanders & The Hague: Koninklijke Bibliotheek), pp. 11–13.

³ Michael Clanchy, *Looking Back from the Invention of Printing: Mothers and the Teaching of Reading in the Middle Ages*, Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy, 40 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2018), pp. 25, 140, and *passim*. Most current scholarship on 'reading' deals with 'understanding' (*intellegerere*) written texts rather than the skill of 'reading' (*legere*) as such.

⁴ Dini Hogenelst and Frits P. van Oostrom, *Handgeschreven wereld: Nederlandse literatuur en cultuur in de Middeleeuwen* (Amsterdam: Prometheus, 1995), pp. 12, 13, 265, 14, 279, 286.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 53, 24, 91.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 214, 231.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 142, 143, 149, 151.

⁸ See František Šmahel, 'Das lesen der unlesbaren Inschriften: Männer mit Zeigestäben', in *The Development of Literate Mentalities in East Central Europe*, ed. by Anna Adamska and Marco Mostert, Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy, 9 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), pp. 453–67; Andreas Zajic, 'Texts on Public Display: Strategies of Visualising Epigraphic Writing in Late Medieval Austrian Towns', in *Uses of the Written Word in Medieval Towns: Medieval Urban Literacy II*, ed. by Marco Mostert and Anna Adamska, Studies in Medieval Literacy, 28 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), pp. 389–426.

⁹ See Charles M. de la Roncière, 'De la mémoire vécue à la tradition: Perception et enregistrement du passé', in *Temps, mémoire, tradition au moyen âge: Actes du XIII^e congrès de la Société des Historiens Médiévistes de l'Enseignement Supérieur Public* (Aix-en-Provence: Université de Provence, 1983), pp. 213–20; Albrecht Classen, 'Objects of Memory as Hermeneutic Media in Medieval German Literature: Hartmann von Aue's *Gregorius*, Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzifal*, Thüring von Ringoltingen's *Melusine* and *Fortunatus*', *Amsterdamer Beiträge zur älteren Germanistik*, 62 (2009), 159–82.

¹⁰ Herbert Sarfatij, 'Tristan op vrijersvoeten? Een bijzonder versieringsmotief op laat-middeleeuws schoeisel uit de lage landen', in *Ad fontes: Opstellen aangeboden aan prof. dr. C. van de Kieft ter gelegenheid van zijn afscheid als hoogleraar in de middeleeuwse geschiedenis aan de Universiteit van Amsterdam*, ed. by Cees M. Cappon, Peter C. van der Eerden, Gerrit van Herwijnen and Hans van Rij (Amsterdam: Verloren, 1984), pp. 371–400.

¹¹ Joris Reynaert, 'De verborgen zijde van de middeleeuwse kopiïst: Over de functie en de samenstelling van het Gerardenbergse handschrift', *Queeste: Tijdschrift over middeleeuwse letterkunde in de Nederlanden*, 6 (1999), 4–151.

¹² Hogenelst and van Oostrom, *Handgeschreven wereld*, pp. 213–20; Albrecht Classen, 'Objects of Memory'; Sarfatij, 'Tristan op vrijersvoeten?', in *Ad fontes*, ed. by Cappon et al.

- ¹³ Jacqueline Van Leeuwen, 'Didactiek in een middeleeuws stadhuis: De functie en betekenis van een Gents opschrift uit 1480', in *In de voetsporen van Jacob van Maerlant: Liber amicorum Raf de Keyser: Verzameling opstellen over middeleeuwse geschiedenis en geschiedenisdidactiek*, ed. by Raoul Bauer, Marjan de Smet, Brigitte Meijns and Paul Trio, Symbolae Facultatis Litterarum Lovaniensis, Series A, 30 (Leuven: Universitaire Pers Leuven, 2002), pp. 336–50.
- ¹⁴ Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. and trans. by Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors, Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), V, 11, p. 484.
- ¹⁵ Robert Bartlett, *Why Can the Dead Do Such Great Things? Saints and Worshippers from the Martyrs to the Reformation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013).
- ¹⁶ Snijders, *Manuscript Communication*.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 234–37.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 348–53.
- ¹⁹ Karl Stoker and Theo Verbeij, *Collecties op orde. Middelnederlandse handschriften uit kloosters en semi-religieuze gemeenschappen in de Nederlanden*, 2 vols, *Miscellanea Neerlandica*, 15–16 (Leuven: Peeters, 1997), 1, 'Studie'; 2, 'Repertorium', Vol. 2, No. 1019.
- ²⁰ See *ibid.*, No. 928.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, No. 435.
- ²² For the other manuscripts with hagiographical texts dating from before c. 1400, see *ibid.*, Nos. 997, 1009, 1128, 1134 and 1138. Fragments of Nos. 519 and 1138 deal with the life of Jesus.
- ²³ *Bedevoertplaatsen in Nederland*, ed. by Peter Jan Margry and Charles M. A. Caspers, 4 vols (Hilversum: Verloren, 1997–2004), 1, 'Noord- en Midden-Nederland'; 2, 'Noord-Brabant'; 3, 'Limburg'; 4, 'Addenda. Index' (Vol. 4, pp. 307–09).
- ²⁴ Everardus Adrianus Overgaauw, *Martyrologues manuscrits des anciens diocèses d'Utrecht et de Liège: Étude sur le développement et la diffusion du martyrologue d'Usuard*, 2 vols, *Middeleeuwse Studies en Bronnen*, 30 (Hilversum: Verloren, 1993).
- ²⁵ *Bedevoertplaatsen in Nederland*, ed. by Margry and Caspers, Vol. 3, p. 453.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, p. 290.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, p. 437; Vol. 1, p. 800; Vol. 2, p. 709; Vol. 1, p. 637.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, p. 394.
- ²⁹ Stoker and Verbeij, *Collecties*, 2, p. 561, with references to the manuscripts of the Middle Dutch translation (7), the Northern Dutch translation (9), and the translation by the Bible translator of 1360 (no fewer than 48), whose identification with Petrus Naghel is sometimes considered contentious.
- ³⁰ Stoker and Verbeij, *Collecties*, 1, p. 210.
- ³¹ Marijke Carasso-Kok, *Repertorium van verhalende historische bronnen uit de Middeleeuwen*, *Bibliografische reeks van het Nederlands Historisch Genootschap*, 2 (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981), Nos. 1–96.
- ³² *Ibid.*, Nos. 6, 12–14, 20, 23, 26–27, 30, 34, 37, 40, 63, 45–49, 51, 55, 59, 61, 63–65, 70, 72, 74, 76, 83–84, 94, 96.
- ³³ The following 'Utrecht' saints, mentioned in Carasso-Kok, *Repertorium*, do not occur in *Bedevoertplaatsen in Nederland*: Agnes and Benignus, Bishop Frederik, Abbot Gregory, Liudger (later Bishop of Münster), and Bishop Radbod of Utrecht.
- ³⁴ Carasso-Kok, *Repertorium*, Nos. 24 Dodo (thirteenth or fourteenth century?); 35 Hatebrand (c. 1600, using a thirteenth-century *vita*); 86 Sibrand, Jarich and Jelger (c. 1267–1275); and 88 Suitbert (possibly early tenth-century, if the identification with Bishop Radbod of Utrecht is correct).
- ³⁵ Carasso-Kok, *Repertorium*, Nos. 31 (Geertrui van Oosten), and 95–96 (Wiro); for the cult of Wiro, see *Bedevoertplaatsen in Nederland*, ed. by Margry and Caspers, Vol. 3, p. 850 (possibly from the seventeenth century onwards).

- ³⁶ *Bedevaartplaatsen in Nederland*, ed. by Margry and Caspers, Vol. 1, pp. 318–19, referring to a procession of 1497, mentioned in Dordrecht Municipal Archives, which took place until 1572, inv.nr. 15, f. 89r, nr. 699. The legend of this saint is first mentioned by Jan Gerbrandszoon van Leiden [*Chronicon comitum Hollandiae et Episcoporum Ultraiectensium*] (Carasso-Kok, *Repertorium*, No. 302).
- ³⁷ *Bedevaartplaatsen in Nederland*, ed. by Margry and Caspers, Vol. 1, p. 748.
- ³⁸ The loaf can still be seen in Leiden, in the Museum de Lakenhal.
- ³⁹ *Bedevaartplaatsen in Nederland*, ed. by Margry and Caspers, Vol. 1, p. 530, and Carasso-Kok, *Repertorium*, Nos. 202, 302.
- ⁴⁰ *Bedevaartplaatsen in Nederland*, ed. by Margry and Caspers, Vol. 1, p. 295; Hogenelst and Van Oostrom, *Handgeschreven wereld*, p. 143.
- ⁴¹ Alcuin, *Vita [prosaica] Willibrordi*, ed. by Wilhelm Levison in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum*, 7, ed. by Bruno Krusch and Wilhelm Levison (Hanover and Leipzig: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 1920), pp. 113–41; Alcuin, *Homilia*, ed. by Wilhelm Wattenbach in *Monumenta Alcuiniana*, ed. by Wilhelm Wattenbach and Ernst Dümmler, Bibliotheca rerum Germanicarum, 6, ed. by Philipp Jaffé (Berlin: Weidmann, 1873), pp. 61–64; Alcuin, *Vita metrica Willibrordi*, in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Poetae latini*, 1, ed. by Ernst Dümmler (Berlin: Weidmann, 1881), pp. 207–20.
- ⁴² *Bibliotheca hagiographica latina antiquae et mediae aetatis*, 2 vols, Subsidia Hagiographica, 6 (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1898–1899); see *Novum Supplementum*, ed. by Henricus Fros, Subsidia Hagiographica, 70 (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1986), Nos. 8935–39 for further literature.
- ⁴³ Baudouin De Gaiffier d'Hestroy, 'L'Hagiographe et son public au XI^e siècle', in *Miscellanea historica in honorem Leonis van der Essen: Universitatis catholicae in oppido Lovaniensi iam annos XXXV professoris*, 2 vols, Recueil de travaux d'histoire et de philologie, 3^e série, 28–29 (Brussels: Éditions Universitaires, 1947), Vol. 1, pp. 135–66 (pp. 152–53).
- ⁴⁴ Daniel Missonne, 'Les Sources littéraires de la vie de Saint Éloque et les amplifications waldodoriennes de la translation', *Revue bénédictine* 71 (1961), pp. 338–365 [with an edition of the *Vita Eloquentii* at pp. 358–365], (p. 358).
- ⁴⁵ *Gedenkbuch des Metzger Bürgers Philippe von Vigneulles aus den Jahren 1471 bis 1522*, ed. by Heinrich Michelant, Bibliothek des literarischen Vereins in Stuttgart, 24 (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1852), p. 173.
- ⁴⁶ Translation by Bartlett, *Why Can the Dead Do Such Great Things?*, pp. 302–03, slightly amended.
- ⁴⁷ Carasso-Kok, *Repertorium*, Nos. 78–85.
- ⁴⁸ Hartmut Kühne, *Ostensio Reliquiarum: Untersuchungen über Entstehung, Ausbreitung, Gestalt und Funktion der Heilumsweisungen im römisch-deutschen Regnum* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2000), pp. 208–27.
- ⁴⁹ *Bedevaartplaatsen in Nederland*, ed. by Margry and Caspers, Vol. 3, pp. 465–66.
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, Vol. 3, p. 502.
- ⁵¹ *Ibid.*, Vol. 3, p. 463.
- ⁵² *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, pp. 83 (Aardenburg), 124 (Amersfoort), 138 (Amsterdam), 191 (Bedum), 380–81 ('s-Gravenzande), 396 (Haarlem), 487 (Hulsterloo), 651 (Reimerswaal), 670 (Rhenen), and 715 (Sint Anna ter Muiden); 2, pp. 161 (Boxtel), 406–07 (Den Bosch), and 809 (Steenbergen).
- ⁵³ *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, p. 136.
- ⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, pp. 273–74.
- ⁵⁵ Thus Tim Graas in *ibid.*, p. 653, referring on p. 656 to Carol M. Schuler, 'The Seven Sorrows of the Virgin: Popular Culture and Cultic Imagery in Pre-Reformation Europe', *Semiotus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art*, 21 (1992), 5–28, among many other studies.
- ⁵⁶ *Bedevaartplaatsen in Nederland*, ed. by Margry and Caspers, Vol. 1, p. 654.
- ⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, p. 704.
- ⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, p. 379; cf. Jan van Herwaarden, *Opgelegde bedevaarten: Een studie over de praktijk van opleggen van bedevaarten (met name in de stedelijke rechtspraak) in de Nederlanden gedurende de late Middeleeuwen (ca. 1300–ca. 1550)*, Van Gorcum's historische bibliotheek, 95 (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1978).

⁵⁹ *Bedevaartplaatsen in Nederland*, ed. by Margry and Caspers, Vol. 1, p. 12; see also, for example, Vol. 1, pp. 90 (a lost painting from Abbenbroek, after which a woodcut was published in 1492), 120 (a fresco in the Church of Amerongen), and 364 (a fresco in Franeker).

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, Vol 1, p. 669.

⁶¹ Carasso-Kok, *Repertorium*, Nos. 63–65. See also, for the Amersfoort book of miracles, *In het water gevonden: Het Amersfoortse Mirakelboek naar het handschrift Brussel, Koninklijke Bibliotheek Albert I, 8179–8180*, ed. by Dick E. H. de Boer, Juliette Duisterwinkel and Ludo Jongen, *Middeleeuwse Studies en Bronnen*, 155 (Hilversum: Verloren, 2015).

⁶² *Bedevaartplaatsen in Nederland*, ed. by Margry and Caspers, Vol. 1, pp. 530–31.

⁶³ Anna Adamska, ‘Studying Preambles Today: A Paradigm Shift in Diplomatic?’, in *Urkundenformeln im Kontext: Formen der Schriftkultur im Ostmitteleuropa des Mittelalters (13.–14. Jahrhundert)*, ed. by Sébastien Rossignol and Anna Adamska, *Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung*, 65 (Vienna: Böhlau, 2016), pp. 35–45, referring to Heinrich Fichtenau, *Arenga: Spätantike und Mittelalter im Spiegel von Urkundenformeln*, *MIOG* Ergänzungsband, 18 (Graz & Cologne: Böhlau, 1957), who devoted a chapter to this type of *arenga*.

⁶⁴ The rest of this paragraph is taken from Marco Mostert, ‘Forgery and Trust’, in *Strategies of Writing: Studies on Text and Trust in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Petra Schulte, Marco Mostert and Irene van Renswoude, *Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy*, 13 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), pp. 37–59 (pp. 40–41).

⁶⁵ Marco Mostert, ‘Schrift als Ausdruck von Mentalität und die Gründe ihres Wandels’, in *Wandlungsprozesse der Mentalitätsgeschichte*, ed. by Peter Dinzelsbacher and Friedrich Harrer (Baden-Baden: Deutscher Wissenschafts-Verlag, 2015), pp. 93–120 (pp. 113–17).

⁶⁶ See, for example, Monique Goulet, *Écriture et réécriture hagiographiques: Essai sur les réécritures de Vies de saints dans l'Occident latin médiéval (VIII^e–XIII^e siècle)*, *Hagiologia: Études sur la sainteté en Occident – Studies on Western Sainthood*, 4 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005).