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To shape one's own reading practice

Lectoral agency in printed Devotio Moderna psalters (1480-1500)

Abstract

The psalms were deeply ingrained in late-medieval religious culture and practice. This article investigates how readers of Middle Dutch psalters handled these books and how they included the psalms in their religious practices. It focusses on the material evidence in about fifty copies of the incunable editions of the popular Devotio Moderna psalm translation. Ownership inscriptions, annotations, and instances in which the psalter was bound together with other texts in manuscript and print, reveal the active involvement of owners and users in shaping these books. Moreover, by adapting their books, the predominantly female reading public of these psalters also proves to have shaped their own religious reading practices.

Keywords: psalms, reading, Middle Dutch, marginalia, *Sammelbände*

Premodern books were dynamic objects. While thirty years ago, scholars could still suggest that 'under the influence of printing, reading became increasingly an activity of the passive reception of a text', the astonishing material evidence of surviving early printed books that are annotated, reshaped, or collected in miscellaneous *Sammelbände*, suggests otherwise.¹ Both manuscripts and early printed books bear traces of adaptation, correction, rebinding, and customisation. Previous studies have shown how readers of various genres appropriated the material entity of the book by commenting upon the text in marginal notes, leaving objects between the pages, or binding the book together with other texts or images in composite books.² Such ongoing practices of use

1 Paul Saenger, Michael Heinlen, 'Incunable Description and its Implications for the Analysis of Fifteenth-Century Reading Habits', in: Sandra L. Hindman (ed.), *Printing the Written Word: The Social History of Books, circa 1450-1520*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991, 225-258: 254.

2 See, for instance: William Sherman, 'What Did Renaissance Readers Write in Their Books', in: Jennifer Andersen, Elizabeth Sauer (ed.), *Books and Readers in Early Modern England*. Berlin/Boston: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002, 119-137; Mariken Teeuwen, Irene van Renswoude,

and interactions with the book could result in an intertemporal, pluriform, and multimedial layering of 'voices' within the object. What happens when we listen to these voices – what aims, hopes, beliefs, initiatives, and identities of readers can be heard in the adaptations and customisations of the book?

Studies of medieval and early modern marginalia and readers' traces have often focussed on the reading activities of certain exceptional individuals, such as Gabriel Harvey, John Dee, or Martin Luther.³ Over the past few years, however, an increasing number of studies has shown the relevance of studying readers' activities in multiple copies of a specific text or genre, such as Bibles, almanacs, or medical-astrological books.⁴ The expansion of the field of study into various genres has created space for the voices of less scholarly readers and of female readers. It has demonstrated that these readers possessed a certain level of what William Sights (2001) has coined as 'lectoral agency': an ability to 'alter the physical look of a text in matters of emphasis and organization', thus having 'tremendous power over how that text will be received and understood.'⁵

Recently, I have started researching the users, the contexts of use, and material transmission of one of the most popular books of the late medieval

The Annotated Book in the Early Middle Ages: Practices of Reading and Writing. Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2017; Renske Annelize Hoff, *Involving Readers: Practices of Reading, Use, and Interaction in Early Modern Dutch Bibles (1522-1546)*. Groningen: University of Groningen (dissertation), 2022; Kathryn M. Rudy, *Image, Knife, and Gluepot: Early Assemblage in Manuscript and Print*. Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2019; Jeffrey Todd Knight, *Bound to Read: Compilations, Collections, and the Making of Renaissance Literature*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013; Hanneke van Asperen, 'The Book as Shrine, the Badge as Bookmark: Religious Badges and Pilgrims' Souvenirs in Devotional Manuscripts', in: Marco Faini, Alessia Meneghin (ed.), *Domestic Devotions in the Early Modern World*. London/Boston: Brill, 2019, 288-312; Adam Smyth, 'Book Marks: Object Traces in Early Modern Books', in: Katherine Acheson (ed.), *Early Modern English Marginalia*. New York: Routledge, 2019, 51-69.

3 Lisa Jardine, Anthony Grafton, "'Studied for Action': How Gabriel Harvey Read his Livy", in: *Past & Present* 129 (1990), 30-78; William Sherman, *John Dee: The Politics of Reading and Writing in the English Renaissance*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995; Arnoud Visser, 'Irreverent Reading: Martin Luther as Annotator of Erasmus', in: *Sixteenth Century Journal* 48, 1 (2017), 87-109.

4 See: Femke Molekamp, *Women and the Bible in Early Modern England: Religious Reading and Writing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013; Mart van Duijn, *De Delftse Bijbel: Een sociale geschiedenis, 1477-circa 1550*. Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 2017; Suzan Folkerts, 'Reading the Bible Lessons at Home: Holy Writ and Lay Readers in the Low Countries', in: *Church History and Religious Culture* 93 (2013), 217-237; Hoff, *Involving Readers*; Adam Smyth, 'Almanacs, Annotators, and Life-Writing in Early Modern England', in: *English Literary Renaissance* 38, 2 (2008), 200-244; Andrea van Leerdam, *Woodcuts as reading guides. How images shaped knowledge transmission in medical-astrological books in Dutch (1500-1550)*. Utrecht: Utrecht University (dissertation), 2022.

5 William Sights, *Managing Readers: Printed Marginalia in English Renaissance Books*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2001, 89.

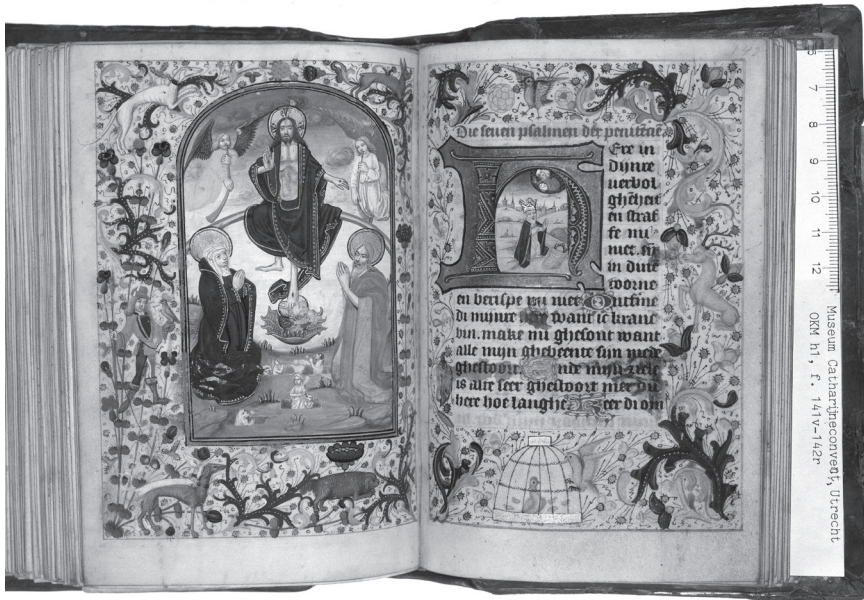


Figure 1. Beginning of the Seven Penitential Psalms in an illuminated Middle Dutch Book of Hours (c.1480). Utrecht, Museum Catharijneconvent, OKM h1, fol. 141v-142r. Photograph: Ruben de Heer

and early modern period: the psalter.⁶ Psalms were omnipresent in the liturgy and both literate and illiterate people would come to know their Latin texts and melodies by heart from an early age. Psalters were also used as instruments in education, read to the dying, carried around as protective amulets, and prayed or sung in private devotion.⁷ Praying the seven penitential psalms, in

6 This research has been supported by the Fellowship Neerlandistiek of Utrecht University (2021) and the Bibliographical Society of America Short Term Fellowship (2022). Methodologically, it continues ideas and approaches employed in my PhD research at the University of Groningen and the KU Leuven (2017-2021). See: Hoff, *Involving Readers*. Both my PhD research and the current study further develop insights about late-medieval religious reading culture that were generated in previous research projects at the University of Groningen, in particular 'Holy Writ and Lay Readers' (2008-2012; supervised by Sabrina Corbellini) and 'Cities of Readers' (2015-2021; supervised by Sabrina Corbellini and Bart Ramakers).

7 See: Marco Mostert, 'Kennisoeverdracht in het klooster: over de plaats van lezen en schrijven in de vroegmiddeleeuwse monastieke opvoeding', in C. Vellekoop (ed.), *Scholing in de Middeleeuwen*. Hilversum: Verloren, 1995, 87-125; 110; Wybren Scheepma, *Medieval Religious Women in the Low Countries: The Modern Devotion, the Canonesses of Windesheim, and their Writings* (transl. David F. Johnson). Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2004, 42; 55; Youri Desplenter, 'Middel nederlandse psaltervertalingen: 'Het is nergens voor nodig om veel meer boeken dan het psalter te bestuderen'', in: August den Hollander

particular, was standard practice in late medieval devotion, both by (semi-) religious people and laity and by men as well as women. As liturgical texts and as personal prayers, the psalms were interwoven with the lives of people. In addition to the Latin psalms, Middle Dutch psalm translations have survived in a large number of manuscripts and one particular Middle Dutch translation of the psalter, which originated in the religious circles of the *Devotio Moderna*, also appeared in multiple printed editions between 1480 and 1510. These texts may have reached a broad reading public, who valued the availability of Middle Dutch psalms in addition to the well-known Latin texts. Studying the interactions with Middle Dutch psalters may hence support the cause to see beyond the exceptional few into a broader religious reading culture. In this article, I will discuss who owned late-medieval printed, vernacular psalters and how they handled their books. How and why did they interact with their psalters, and how did these interactions potentially transform these books?

The current article is based on a study of 52 copies of four incunable editions of the *Devotio Moderna* psalter.⁸ In what follows, I will first introduce the *Devotio Moderna* psalter. Then, I will analyse several patterns of use that the surviving incunable psalters reveal with regard to owners' and readers' involvement in shaping and customising the book. In doing so, I will focus on three types of material evidence: 1) ownership inscriptions; 2) contemporary handwritten annotations along the printed text of the *Devotio Moderna* psalter; and 3) hybrid composite volumes or *Sammelbände* that consist of the printed psalter and manuscript sections that were bound together. These forms of post-print adaptation of the incunables reflect the various ways in which the *Devotio Moderna* psalters were used and approached by their late fifteenth and early sixteenth-century readers.

The *Devotio Moderna* psalter

The psalm translation that is known as the *Devotio Moderna* psalter developed from the translation of the penitential psalms and roughly fifty other psalms in

et al. (ed.), *Middel nederlandse bijbelvertalingen*. Hilversum: Verloren, 2007, 77-86: 77; Elizabeth Solopova, 'The Liturgical Psalter in Medieval Europe', in: Susan Gillingham (ed.), *Jewish and Christian Approaches to the Psalms: Conflict and Convergence*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, 89-104: 95.

8 Five more copies are known of these editions. I have been unable to study these copies due to various reasons, including, for instance, the fact that the National Library of Russia was inaccessible for foreign researchers. Moreover, I am grateful to many curators and colleagues, in particular Brianne Dolce, Samantha Brown, and Matthew Schantz, for providing me with scans and photographs of copies located abroad.

the late fourteenth century. The penitential psalms were commonly included in Books of Hours, and the translation of these psalms is likely connected to Geert Grote's creation of his Middle Dutch Book of Hours.⁹ These psalms were later supplemented with translations of the other psalms to form the complete collection that is referred to as the *Devotio Moderna* psalter. The translation is usually attributed to Johannes Scutken (†1423), who also, most likely, translated the New Testament.¹⁰ This translation of the psalms into Middle Dutch has survived in around eighty to ninety manuscripts, mostly from the Northern Low Countries.¹¹

In addition to the manuscript transmission, the psalm translation was printed nine times between 1480 and 1510 (see table 1). The printed psalters do not simply contain the biblical book of psalms. Alongside all 150 psalms, presented in canonical order, the editions contain four Middle Dutch hymns, biblical cantica, an overview of the penitential psalms, the Litany of the Saints, and several other short prayers (e.g. the Pater Noster and the Ave Maria). In the Divine Office, the book of Psalms was read in its entirety throughout the week, starting with psalm 1 in the Matins on Sunday.¹² The printed paratext in the psalter editions supports readers in following along with the liturgical reading schedule by providing information on the order in which the psalms ought to be read. Between the end of psalm 67 and the beginning of psalm 68, for instance, it states: 'Here begin the matins of the Thursday.'¹³ The appropriate

9 Kathryn Rudy's (2010) study of 'dirt' in medieval books of hours and prayer books suggests that the penitential psalms in books of hours were particularly intensively used. See: Kathryn M. Rudy, 'Dirty Books: Quantifying Patterns of Use in Medieval Manuscript Using a Densitometer', in: *Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art* 2, 1-2 (2010).

10 See: J. A. A. M. Biemans, *Middel nederlandse Bijbelhandschriften*. Leiden: Brill, 1984, 100; Desplenter, 'Middel nederlandse psaltervertalingen', 82. On the New Testament translation attributed to Johannes Scutken, see: Sabrina Corbellini, 'De Noord nederlandse vertaling van het Nieuwe Testament. Het paradijs in een kloostercel', in: August den Hollander et al. (ed.), *Middel nederlandse bijbelvertalingen*. Hilversum: Verloren, 2007, 131-145; Suzan Folkerts, 'De Noord-Nederlandse vertaling van het Nieuwe Testament (eind veertiende eeuw)', in: Paul Gillaerts et al. (ed.), *De Bijbel in de Lage Landen: Elf eeuwen van vertalen*. Heerenveen: Royal Jongbloed, 2015, 165-176.

11 Desplenter, 'Psaltervertalingen van de moderne devotie (ca. 1380-ca. 1520)', in: Paul Gillaerts et al. (ed.), *De Bijbel in de Lage Landen: Elf eeuwen van vertalen*. Heerenveen: Royal Jongbloed, 2015, 151-164: 151. The *Devotio Moderna* translation of the psalms is usually considered one of the three main strains of Middle Dutch psalm translations. It is the only Middle Dutch translation that was put to print. See: Desplenter, 'Middel nederlandse psaltervertalingen'.

12 Solopova, 'The Liturgical Psalter', 89-93.

13 'Hier beghint die metten vanden donredaghe.' Quoted after Jacob Jacobszoon van der Meer's 1480 edition.

Table 1: Printed editions of the Devotio Moderna psalter

Year	Printer	Place	Number of surviving copies	STCN number/ USTC number ¹⁴
1480	Jacob Jacobszoon van der Meer	Delft	22	101090838/438302
1487	Christiaen Snellaert	Delft	5	101128339/435855
1491	Peter van Os van Breda	Zwolle	16	102952280/436062
1498	Henrick Eckert van Homberch	Delft ¹⁵	14	101227973/436495
1502	Henrick Eckert van Homberch	Antwerp	6	363813772/400229
1502	Jan Seversz	Antwerp	2	102212503/424678
1504	Adriaen van Berghen	Antwerp	8	-/400258
1508	Adriaen van Berghen	Antwerp	6	-/400278
1510	Jan Seversz	Antwerp	2	102176353/424796

small liturgical prayers (such as antiphons and collects) are placed between the psalms.

With regard to paratext, all but one edition – the 1491 edition by Peter van Os van Breda – provide the Latin incipits of every psalm. In addition, the editions from 1491 onwards introduce each psalm with a short heading, informing the reader of ‘the powers and the virtues of the psalms’ (‘die crachten ende doechden des psalmes’).¹⁶ Only the first edition, printed by Jacob Jacobszoon van der Meer in Delft in 1480, also includes a prologue, which will be discussed in more detail further in this article. The editions contain few other paratextual reading aids. Elements such as foliation, tables of content, registers, or running titles are lacking. However, navigation through these psalters is often supported by hand-added rubrication, which structuralises the text by emphasising initials and headings.¹⁷

By virtue of the practical feasibility of the project, this article only takes into account the surviving copies of the four incunable editions.¹⁸ For the survival rate of the psalter editions, see table 1.

14 Short-Title Catalogue Netherlands and Universal Short Title Catalogue.

15 The fact that three out of four editions were printed in Delft corresponds with a particular popularity of the Devotio Moderna psalter in manuscript in and around Delft. See: Despleter, ‘Middel nederlandse psaltervertalingen’, 11.

16 Quoted after Jan Seversz.’ 1510 edition.

17 Not all copies have been rubricated. See, for instance, a copy of Van Berghen’s 1508 edition at the Royal Library in Brussels (Brussels, Royal Library, LP 9254 A).

18 The other four editions will be discussed in a future publication in an edited volume (Brill), foreseen for 2023/2024, which results from the USTC History of the Book Conference at St Andrews in 2022.

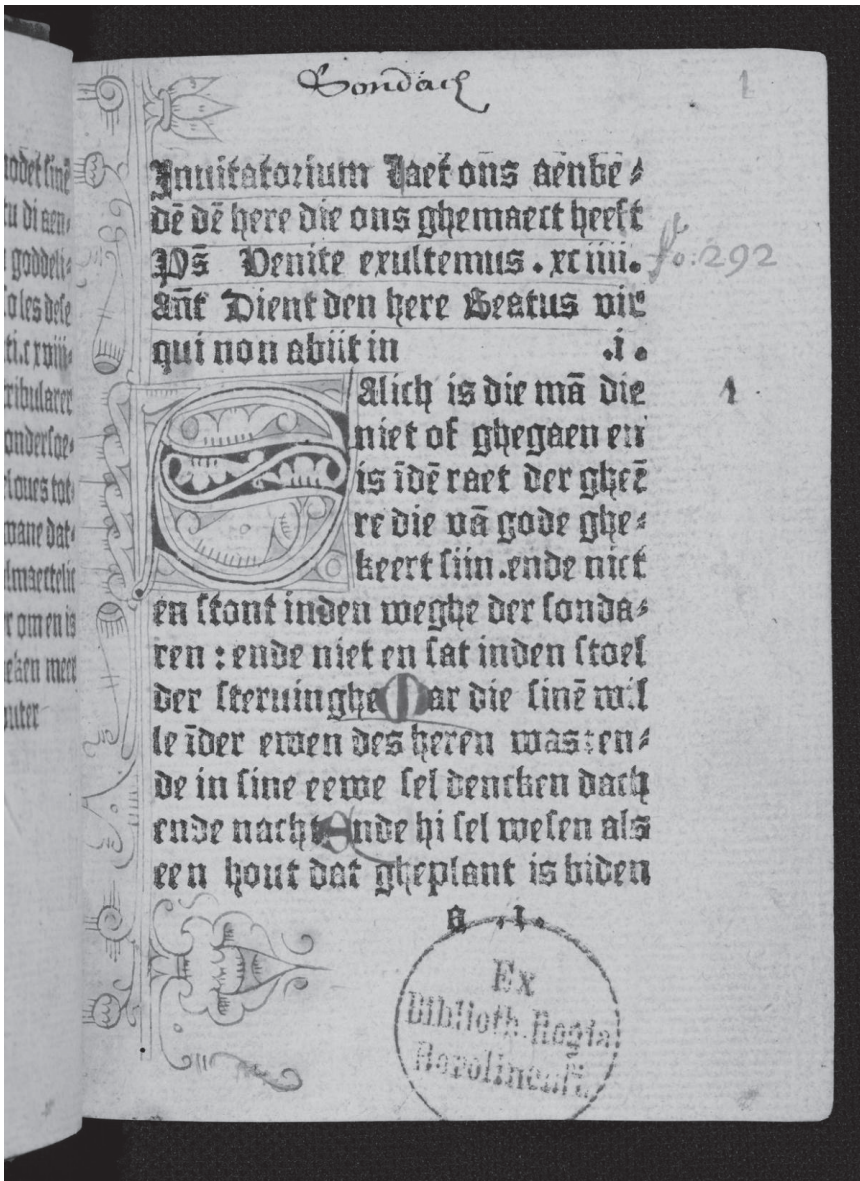


Figure 2. Beginning of psalm 1 in Jacob Jacobszoon van der Meer's edition of the Devotio Moderna psalter (1480). Berlin, Staatsbibliothek - Preußischer Kulturbesitz, 8o Inc 4820. (<http://resolver.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/SBB0001975E00000000>)

Diversity of owners

With regard to the manuscript transmission of the psalm translation, Desplenter (2015) has stated that they were mainly created for and used within female tertiary communities: convents of the Third Order that often originated as communities of the Common Life.¹⁹ The ownership inscriptions in the incunable psalters suggest that the reading public of the printed psalm books was also predominantly female. Out of the fifty-seven psalter copies studied here, about a third contains the names of its fifteenth or sixteenth-century owners, and amongst the twenty-two ownership marks from this period are fourteen female owners and seven male owners.²⁰ Corresponding with Desplenter's conclusions about manuscript ownership, most female owners of the incunable psalters lived religious or semi-religious lives. They usually refer to themselves as sister or beguine, and sometimes mention the name or location of their convent. These convents prove to mostly be communities of tertiaries and regular canonesses.²¹ Some owners simply wrote down their name, as is the case for women such as Ade Wormboutsd., who owned a 1480 psalter,²² and Neelgen Wijllems, who wrote her name in a copy of the psalter edition from 1498.²³ It is possible these women lived religious lives, but they

19 Desplenter, 'Psaltervertalingen van de moderne devotie', 153-155. Some convents further developed by taking on the Augustinian rule. See: Youri Desplenter, *Al aertrijc segt lofsanc: Middelnederlandse vertalingen van Latijnse hymnen en sequensen; Deel 1: Studie*. Gent: Koninklijke Academie voor Nederlandse Taal- en Letterkunde, 2008, 184-185. However, as stated by Alison More, 'the institutional affiliations of these 'tertiary' houses were quite fluid, and it was not uncommon for an individual house to be discussed (or to refer to itself) as having a number of different order identities.' See: Alison More, 'Canonical Change and the Orders of 'Franciscan' Tertiaries', in: Bert Roest and Johanneke Uphoff (ed.), *Religious Orders and Religious Identity Formation, ca. 1420-1620: Discourse Strategies of Observance and Pastoral Engagement*. Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2016, 69-85: 71.

20 The gender of one inscriber remains unknown, because they only wrote down their first initial: *Dit is een boec van A*. The Hague, Royal Library, 150 E 14. These percentages of male and female owners are similar to the results of Mart van Duijn's research into the contemporary Delft Bible (1477): sixty percent of the known individual owners of the Delft Bible prove to be female. See: van Duijn, *De Delftse Bijbel*, 146. The ratio between male and female owners differs significantly from research on vernacular Bibles from the second decennium of the sixteenth century onwards, of which the vast majority of surviving copies proves to have been owned by men. See: Hoff, *Involving Readers*, 181-182.

21 On the ownership of incunabula in these communities, see in particular: Anna Dlabáčová, Patricia Stoop, 'Incunabula in Communities of Canonesses Regular and Tertiaries Related to the *Devotio Moderna*: Towards an 'Inclusive' Approach of Late Medieval Book Ownership in the Low Countries', in: *Quaerendo* 51, 3 (2021), 219-248.

22 Uppsala, University Library, Ink. 34.107 8:0, Caroline Specialsamlingar.

23 The Hague, Royal Library, 150 E 28.

could also have been lay women. Out of the seven male owners from the fifteenth and sixteenth century, just one undoubtedly lived a religious life: brother Dirck van Deventer, who was related to the tertiary community of St Agnes in Tiel, and who was likely the first owner of a 1498 psalter.²⁴

With regard to book ownership within religious communities, the psalters appear to have been owned and used collectively as well as privately. For instance, a copy of Henrick Eckert van Homberch's 1498 psalter was gifted by Sister Delyaen Pauwen for, as is stated explicitly, communal use ('int gemeen') within the tertiary community of St Cecilia in Utrecht.²⁵ A copy of the 1480 edition was first privately owned by a certain Katherina Dircksdochter but later belonged to a convent in Vlaardingen, possibly the tertiary St Cecilia convent.²⁶ On the other hand, individual use is stressed in the inscription by Sister Allien Boudewijns vander Santfoort, who owned a copy of the psalter edition from 1480 and writes explicitly that she paid for the book herself.²⁷ The St Catherine-at-Rapenburg female convent in Leiden, furthermore, owned at least two copies of the *Devotio Moderna* psalter, of the 1480 and 1487 editions.²⁸ The first of these was indeed collectively owned, but 'in bewaringhe Lijsbeth Seniendochter': in the personal keeping of Lijsbeth Seniendochter. The second was in the keeping of Aef Willemsdochter. Both women may not have owned these psalters in the legal sense of the word, but can likely be considered their primary users.

In most cases, little more is known about the owners of the psalters than their names. However, there are some exceptions. The sixteenth-century woman Gisberge Rijcken, who owned a copy of Van Homberch's psalter from 1498,²⁹ also marked her ownership in a Middle Dutch Book of Hours, printed in 1496 in the Holland town of Gouda by the *collatiebroeders* (collation brothers).³⁰ Contrary to her inscription in the psalter, Gisberge mentions in her mark in the Book of Hours that she is a sister – although it is unknown to which convent she

24 Baltimore, John Hopkins University Library, Incun. 1498.B5 c.1. According to the ownership inscription, brother Dirck van Deventer owned the book in 1499.

25 The Hague, Royal Library, 151 D 13. See also: Dlačová, Stoop, 'Incunabula in Communities', 228.

26 Nijmegen, University Library, Inc 52.

27 Utrecht, Museum Catherijneconvent, ABM i3a-73 B 1.

28 The Hague, Huis van het Boek, 001 F 013; Cambridge, University Library, Inc.6.E.2.2[2833]. The sisters of this convent were so-called 'conversinnen' of St Augustine. See: Dlačová, Stoop, 'Incunabula in Communities', 222.

29 Salisbury, Cathedral Library.

30 Cambridge, University Library, Inc. 6.E.3.10[2889].



Figure 3. Drawing of a coat of arms and ownership inscription by Hendrick Moens de Luna. Amsterdam, University Library, Ned. Inc. 534

belonged. For her devotional reading, she likely used the complete collection of the Middle Dutch psalms alongside the Hours.

Another example is the nobleman Hendric Moens de Luna, born on 12 December 1470, who owned a copy of Van der Meer's psalter from 1480.³¹ In his

³¹ Amsterdam, University Library, Ned. Inc. 534.

psalter, Moens de Luna recorded important events from his family history, such as the death of his grandmother, the marriage and deaths of his parents, and the deaths of several uncles, amongst whom his uncle Hendrick Moens who died in 1497 ‘in a battle against the Turks in Hungary’.³² One of the flyleaves also contains a colourful picture of the family’s coat of arms, placed between two knights in full armour. Similar drawings of the coat of arms can be found in a genealogical document from around 1700 in the family archive of the Moens family.³³ The document was created by, amongst others, H. Baron de Bronchorst and A. van der Cruce. Their signatures can also be found in the psalter and they appear to have used the psalter as a source for the genealogical document that they created roughly two centuries after Moens de Luna owned this book.³⁴

Layers of interactions: annotations and hybridity

The inscriptions by the 15th-century Moens de Luna and the 17th-century Bronchorst form two layers of interaction in the history of the psalter. Another layer is visible in the fact that, before or during Moens de Luna’s ownership, the psalter was bound together with manuscript quires containing Middle Dutch prayers. These various ‘voices’ display how the psalter, as a material and textual object, was used and shaped in various ways: as a repository for memories and relations, an archive of trustworthy genealogical information, and a book of prayer and devotion. In this section, I will further unravel the connections between readers’ additions and adaptations, and the contexts in and purposes to which the psalter was used.

Handwritten annotations in incunable psalters

The interactions of book owners, readers, and users with the *Devotio Moderna* psalters resulted in a broad array of handwritten marks and annotations, left on pastedowns and flyleaves, in the margins, or squeezed between printed lines. These markings differ in some ways from readers’ traces in other genres. For instance, underlining, manicules, or marginal inscriptions of *nota bene*, that are omnipresent in contemporary early printed books such as Bibles

32 ‘... in een slag tegen den Turck in Hongerij’.

33 Amsterdam City Archives, inv. nr. 192, 18.

34 Just underneath Moens de Luna’s note on the death of his mother, for instance, Bronchorst wrote: ‘vidimus H. Baron de Bronchorst, 1665.’ A *vidimus* – ‘we have seen’ – was a document with which an authority confirmed that they had seen an original version of a legal text.

and medical-astrological books,³⁵ are barely found in the psalters. Amongst the multitude of handwritten notes that are left in these psalters, three main categories can be recognised: the addition of Latin incipits, explanatory notes that provide information on the psalms, and annotations and navigational aids that help readers use the psalter in connection with the liturgy.

Latin incipits have been added in contemporary handwriting to over a third of the surviving copies of Peter van Os van Breda's psalter of 1491.³⁶ As mentioned before, contrary to the editions of his fellow printers, Van Os van Breda did not include the Latin incipits as a heading to each psalm. Nevertheless, a considerable part of the reading public appears to have felt a need for these incipits. Not only would certain psalms primarily be known by their Latin incipit, but these incipits would also have allowed users to employ their Middle Dutch psalter in accordance with the Latin liturgy or alongside a Latin book of psalms. Furthermore, as stated by Eyal Poleg, the presence of Latin incipits alongside vernacular psalms would have 'cued the memory of readers versed in the Latin Psalms' to the translation.³⁷ As the incipits connected the practices and experiences of reading the Latin psalms to those of the Middle Dutch psalms, they prove to have been an essential element of these psalters to many late-medieval users. With the incipits absent in the printed text, the effort was undertaken to include them by hand.

The second type of note that can regularly be encountered in these psalters comments on the contents, meaning, origins, or virtues of the psalms. These annotations are similar to the printed explanatory headings in the editions from 1491 onwards. For instance, in a copy of Snellaert's 1487 psalter currently located in Cambridge – the copy owned by the St Catherine-at-Rapenburg convent in Leiden – annotations in the margins at the beginning of each psalm provide information on by whom, in which circumstances, and why the psalm

35 See: Suzan Folkerts, 'Middle Dutch Epistles and Gospels: The Transfer of a Medieval Bestseller into Printed Editions during the Early Reformation', in: Wim François and August A. Den Hollander (ed.), *Vernacular Bible and Religious Reform in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Era*. Leuven: Peeters, 2017, 53-74: 60-61; Hoff, *Involving Readers*, 201-209; Van Leerdam, *Woodcuts as reading guides*, 186-187.

36 Handwritten Latin incipits have been included in the following copies of Van Os van Breda's psalter of 1491: Cambridge, University Library, Inc. 7.E.7.2[3080]; Ghent, University Library, Res. 534; Liège, University Library, Bib. Générale XV.C16; London, British Library, IA. 48145; Oxford, Bodleian Library, Aucht. M inf. 1.8 (Weston Stack); The Hague, Huis van het Boek, 1 F 29.

37 Eyal Poleg, 'Memory, Performance, and Change: the Psalms' Layout in Late Medieval and Early Modern Bibles', in: Bradford A. Anderson (ed.), *From Scrolls to Scrolling*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020, 119-152: 131.

was written.³⁸ At the beginning of psalm 35,³⁹ for example, the note states that: ‘This psalm was made by David, in which he describes the anger against his persecutor Saul and the goodness of our Lord who saved him from him. And in it he prays against the malicious judges.’⁴⁰ Similar notes were written in a copy of the 1491 psalter located in Liège, such as: ‘This psalm was made by David as a confession when he went to the temple and confessed to the Lord.’⁴¹ In this copy, extra space for annotations has been created by binding in slips of paper between the pages of the book.

The first-person narrative of the psalms allowed a reader or singer to use the psalms as ‘scripted’ prayers, taking up the role of the ‘I’ of the Psalmist in their private devotion.⁴² The psalms could be adopted for praying in specific circumstances and to certain purposes. Some notes in the beforementioned Cambridge copy of Snellaert’s psalter assist the reader by explaining the benefits of reading certain psalms. For instance, psalm 79 ‘was made by Asaph, [about] how the vineyard was first planted in the fathers of the old law and afterwards in the new, that is the holy Church. And it is a prayer for when one happens to live amongst strangers.’⁴³ Handwritten reading aids that stress the purpose and benefits of certain psalms can similarly be encountered in other copies. In the copy of Van der Meer’s psalter that belonged to a convent in Vlaardingem, inscriptions in a contemporary hand at the beginning of each psalm provide either a summary of the psalm’s contents and meaning, or describe the purpose

38 Cambridge, University Library, Inc.7.E.2.2[2833].

39 The psalm numbering used in the *Devotio Moderna* psalters follows the Latin Vulgate, which presents the numbering of psalm 9-148 according to the Septuagint (rather than the Hebrew numbering). In this article, if I refer to certain psalm numbers, I do so according to the numbering of the psalters themselves, thus following the Septuagint numbering.

40 ‘Desen psalm maecte David dat hi in bescrijft die boesheit sijns vervolgers sauls. ende die goedertierenheit ons heren dien der of verlostede Ende der hi in bidde weder die walsche rechtters.’ Some notes are written in a more concise style, such as the one at the begin of psalm 39: ‘David. About Christ and the church, and prays for the salvation of his soul’ (‘Dauid Van Christo ende der kerken ende bidt om salicheit sijne sielen’).

41 Liège, University Library, Bib. Générale XV.C16. ‘Desen psalme maecte dauid tot eenre biecht als he inden tempel ginc ende den heer biechtende was.’

42 See: Annie Sutherland, ‘Performing the Penitential Psalms in the Middle Ages’, in: Manuele Gragnolati, Almut Suerbaum (ed.), *Aspects of the Performative in Medieval Culture*. Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 2010, 15-37: 18. Similar to psalms and other popular prayers, late medieval religious Middle Dutch songs also regularly present an expressive lyrical ‘I’, inviting the singer to take on the role of this I. See: Thom Mertens, Dieuwke van der Poel, ‘Individuality and Scripted Role in Devout Song and Prayer’, in: Rijcklof Hofman et al. (ed.), *Inwardness, Individualization, and Religious Agency in the Late Medieval Low Countries*. Turnhout: Brepols, 2020, 159-179.

43 ‘... maecte asaph hoe wijngaert eest geplant was inden vaders der ouder wet ende na inder nuwen dat is die heilighe kerc Ende is een gebet als men onder vreemde luden bestaet te wonen.’

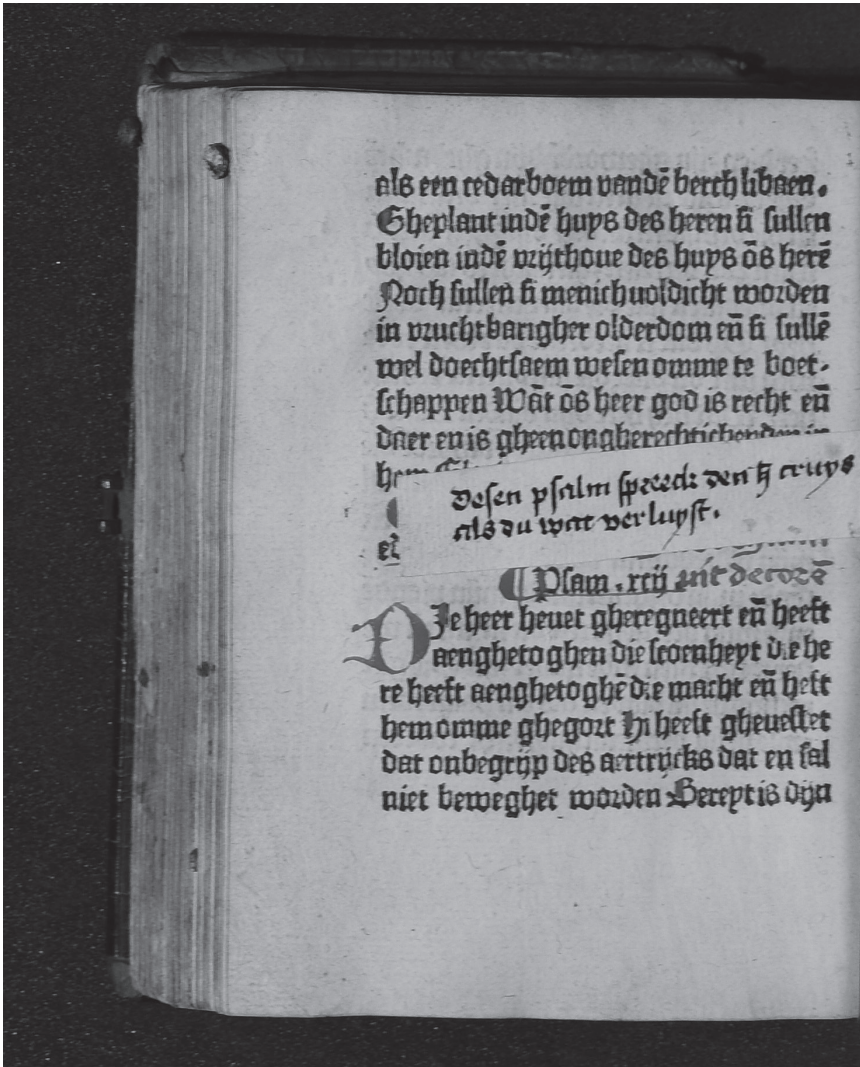


Figure 4. Annotation on a slip of paper bound in at the beginning of psalm 92. Liège, University Library, Bib. Générale XV.C16

to or circumstances in which a certain psalm might be suitable to include in one's prayers.⁴⁴ Psalm 21, for instance, is 'a prayer for when one is greatly affected by temptations.'⁴⁵ Likewise, in a copy of the psalter edition from

44 Nijmegen, University Library, Inc 52.

45 'Een ghebet als men seer aengeuochten wort van temptatien.'

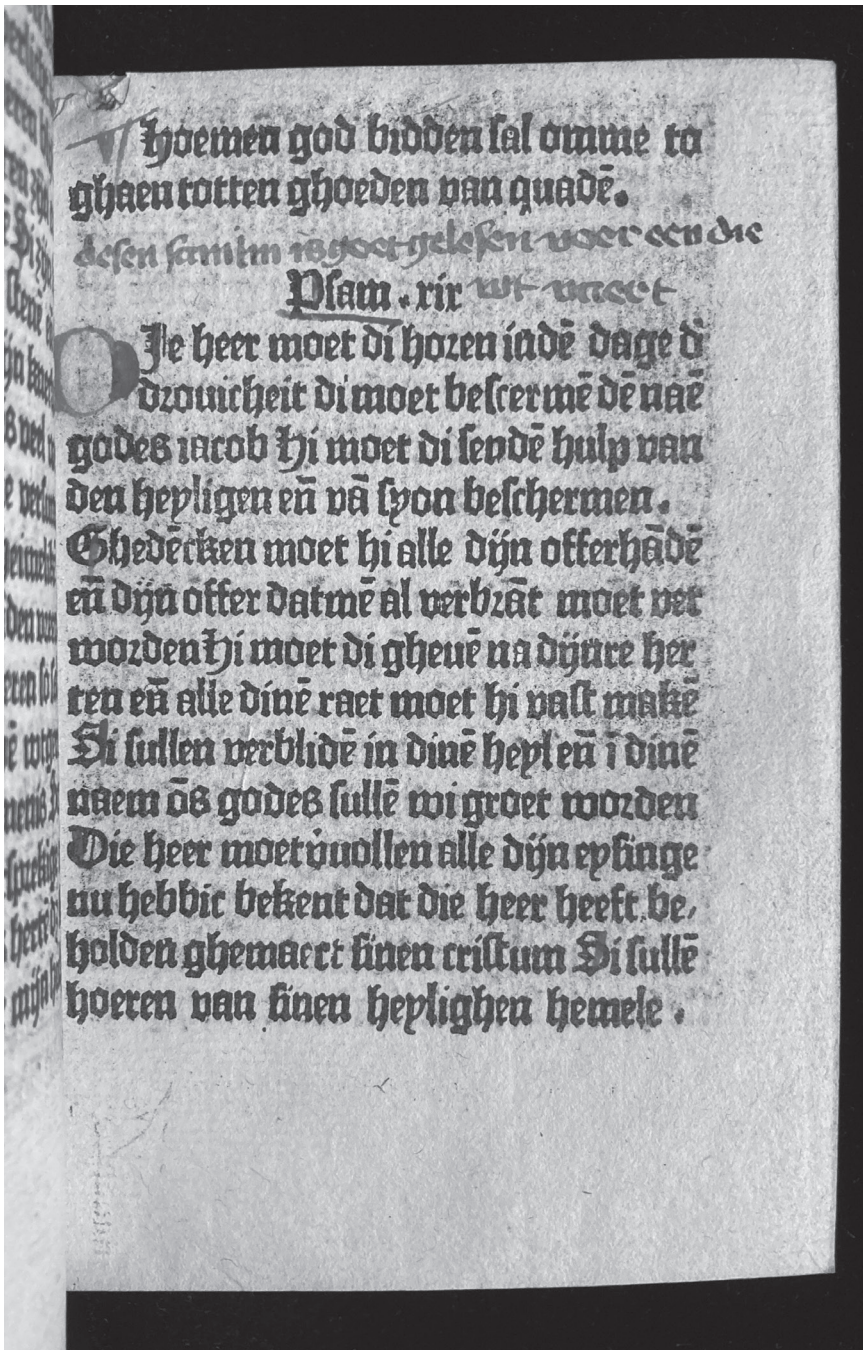


Figure 5. Note at the beginning of psalm 19. San Marino, The Huntington Library, 87213

1491, a note at the beginning of psalm 19 states that 'this psalm is beneficial to read for anyone who sails out.'⁴⁶ And the beforementioned Liège copy of the same edition reminds its readers that psalm 110 'should be spoken by those who wish to attend the Holy Sacrament.'⁴⁷ Annotations like these reveal how users approached their psalters as repositories of prayers, which they enriched with handwritten aids that helped them track down the appropriate psalms for specific situations.

A third category of annotations relates to the fact that, besides being suitable for prayer at times of distress, joy, devotion, or even travel, reading the psalms was an immanent part of the canonical hours of the Divine Office. Some copies contain handwritten elements that reflect and support readers' interests in using the psalter as a (partial) vernacular breviary. In a copy of Van der Meer's 1480 psalter, for example, the days of the week have been inscribed in a contemporary hand in the top margins of the recto-side of the pages, similar to running titles (see also: figure 2).⁴⁸ For example, from psalm 68 to psalm 80, each leaf is marked 'Donderdach': Thursday.⁴⁹ These handwritten running titles function as 'navigational aids', a term coined by Peter Stallybrass to refer to the paratextual elements in a book that enable non-continuous, non-linear reading of the text.⁵⁰ The addition of these running title-like inscriptions enables a reading practice in which a user of the psalter could simply flip through the pages and conveniently find the psalms applicable for reading on a certain day. Although not all tertiary communities would have read the full Office, either in Latin or in Middle Dutch, additions like these underscore readers' interests in liturgical use of their psalters.⁵¹

Hybrid composite psalters

Besides leaving constructive annotations on the level of the page, book owners and users could also bind the book of psalms together with other texts or

46 San Marino, The Huntington Library, 87213. 'Desen samlm is goet gelesen voer een die wt vaert.'

47 Liège, University Library, Bib. Générale XV.C16. '... sullen spreken die toe den heilighe sacrament gaen willen.'

48 Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, 8o Inc 4820.

49 From psalm 109 (the first psalm to be read in the Sunday Vespers) onwards, the verso-sides of the pages are also inscribed with notes on the prayer time (e.g. 'Completen' and 'Primen': Complits, and Primes) or the type of text (e.g. 'Antiffen': antiphons).

50 See: Peter Stallybrass, 'Books and Scrolls: Navigating the Bible', in: Jennifer Andersen, Elizabeth Sauer (ed.), *Books and Readers in Early Modern England: Material Studies*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002, 42-79: 51.

51 On the reading of the Office in tertiary communities and other orders relation to the Devotio Moderna, see: Desplenter, *Al aertrijc segt lofsanc*, 185-209.

images. Doing so, they could influence the functionality and applicability of the book for certain reading practices and approaches, hence shaping it to suit their personal or communal preferences. Although a few copies are (or once were) bound together with printed material, it proves to be more common for the *Devotio Moderna* incunable psalters to be bound together with handwritten material. Nine copies survive as part of such hybrid composite volumes.⁵² Although it is beyond the scope of this article to describe each of these volumes exhaustively, some general statements can be made regarding the type of material that was regularly bound with the psalter.

Firstly, the interest in reading the psalms within a liturgical framework, as recognised in the abovementioned annotations, is also reflected by the types of manuscripts that are bound together with the psalters. A copy of the 1487 psalter, for example, shares its binding with an eight-leaf, late fifteenth or early sixteenth-century manuscript quire.⁵³ It contains a schedule of which psalms – indicated by their Middle Dutch incipits – to read on the feast- and Saint's days throughout the year, liturgically ordered from the Vespers of Christmas night onwards. Whereas the paratextual elements throughout the psalter facilitate the inclusion of the psalms in a *weekly* liturgical structure, this manuscript addition allows users to figure out which psalms to read throughout the liturgical year. By including it in the volume, the psalter has thus been turned into a more comprehensive instrument for reading in connection with the liturgy.

Not only the question of when to read, but also of why and how to read the psalms, is answered in handwritten texts that were bound together with the incunable psalters. A copy of the 1491 edition is supplemented with a manuscript that explains the merits of reading the psalms and the ways in which to do so: 'Whoever would like to save a soul from purgatory, they should read the psalter as is described henceforth...'⁵⁴ In a similar vein, two other copies of the same edition have been bound together with texts that serve as 'prologues' to

52 The following copies consist of an incunable edition of the *Devotio Moderna* psalter and manuscript parts: Haarlem, Nederlands-Vlaams Bijbelgenootschap, BN 0.480.018.5 (previously part of the collection of Bijbels Museum); Amsterdam, University Library, Ned. Inc. 534; London, British Library, IA.47111; Cambridge, University Library, Inc.6.E.2.2[2833]; London, British Library, IA.47148; The Hague, Royal Library, 150 E 15; Brussels, Royal Library, A 2014; Liège, University Library, Bib. Générale XV.C16; Cambridge, University Library, Inc.6.E.2.4[2854].

53 The Hague, Royal Library, 150 E 15.

54 Leiden, University Library, 1498 F 4. 'Wye gaerne een ziel verloste wten vegeuier die sal den souter lesen als hier nae is gescreuen ...' This text is also found in some manuscripts of the *Devotio Moderna* psalter, e.g. The Hague, Royal Library, 133 D 25. See: Biemans, *Middel nederlandse Bijbelhandschriften*, 102.

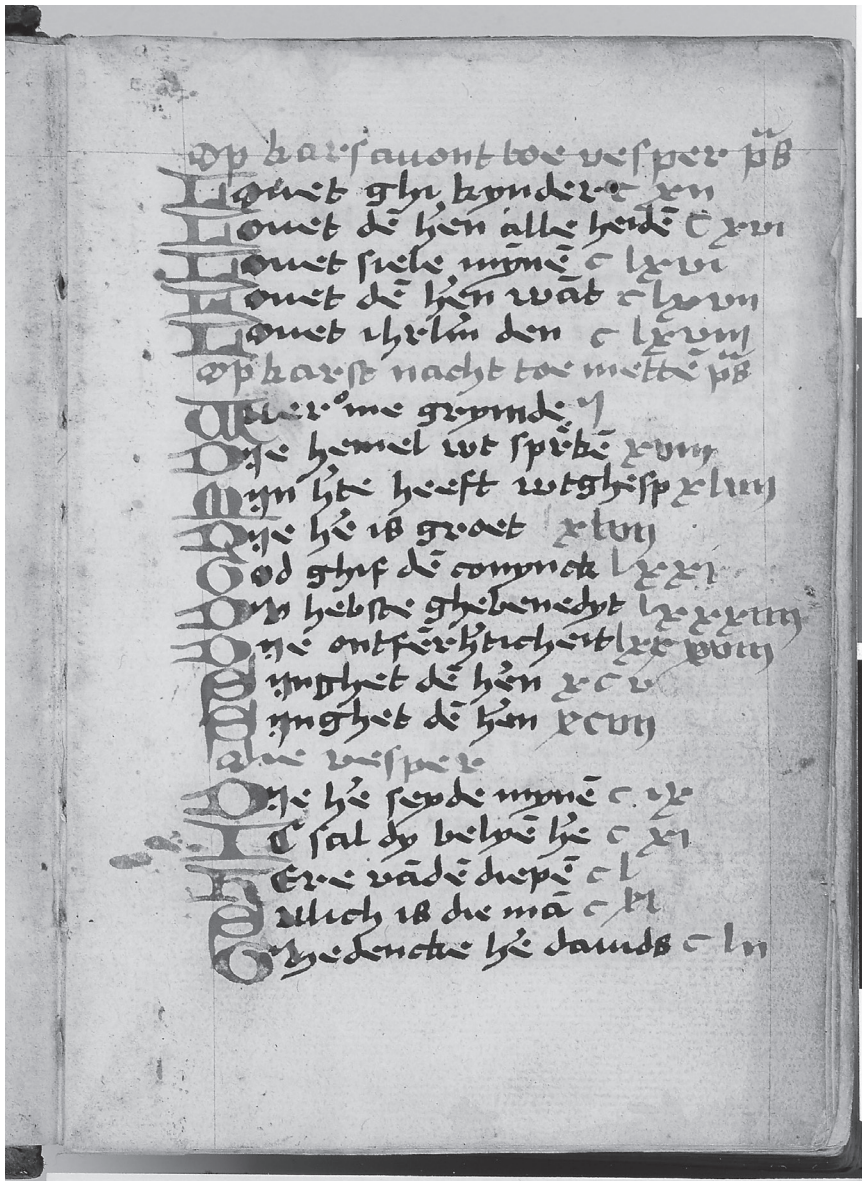


Figure 6. Handwritten reading schedule in an incunable psalter. The Hague, Royal Library, 150 E 15

the text of the psalms.⁵⁵ The Brussels copy contains the text usually referred to as ‘Die love der salmen’: the glory of the psalms.⁵⁶ This prologue is included in a large number of the Devotio Moderna psalter manuscripts, as well as in the first incunable edition.⁵⁷

The prologue is a collection of short texts, including a Middle Dutch adaptation of the first part of Ludolph of Saxony’s *Expositio in Psalterium Davidis*.⁵⁸ The text begins as follows: ‘This is about the glory of the psalms, of which St. Augustine spoke exceptionally and with most praise in a book that is called *The book of the spirit and the soul*’.⁵⁹ It continues by discussing the many benefits the psalms may bring when they are heard, sung, or read. It also lists suitable psalms for specific situations. Would it be the case, for instance, that one were ‘in agony because of many troubles’, one should simply read psalms 21, 63, and 68 ‘and the benevolent God will help you forthwith’.⁶⁰ The text that is bound in with one of the 1491 copies is an adaptation of the same *Love der salmen* prologue, followed by a ‘voerrede des propheten dauids ouer de psalter’: a preface by the prophet David on the psalms.⁶¹ The inclusion of these elements with the incunables suggests a certain level of knowledge amongst the readers of the Devotio Moderna psalter of the manuscript transmission

55 Brussels, Royal Library, A 2014; Liège, University Library, Bib. Générale XV.C16.

56 This text is also found in another hybrid composite psalter, namely within the extensive manuscript section bound together with a copy of Snellaert’s edition of 1487 (Cambridge, University Library, Inc.6.E.2.2[2833]).

57 See: Biemans, *Middelnederlandse Bijbelhandschriften*, 101.

58 About Middle Dutch translations of the *Expositio in Psalterium Davidis*, see: J. M. Willeumier-Schalij, ‘Expositio in Psalterium Davidis van Ludolphus van Saksen in het Middelnederlands’, in: *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandse Taal- en Letterkunde* 94 (1978), 129-147.

59 ‘Dit is van den loue der salmen daer sinte Augustinus sonderlinge van seit ende seer priselicken in enen boecke dat genoemt is tboec vanden gheest ende der sielen’ (prologue quoted after the 1480 edition by Van der Meer, copy: The Hague, Royal Library, 150 E 14). The book referred to here, the Pseudo-Augustinian *De spiritu et anima*, is not the actual source of the text. The source text has been identified as the *Prologus in librum Psalmorum* by the Basiliius, which has also been ascribed to Augustine. See: Biemans, *Middelnederlandse Bijbelhandschriften*, 102.

60 ‘... dattu met menigher hande tribulacien bedruet biste’; ‘Ende die goedertieren god sel die te hants helpen.’

61 Liège, University Library, Bib. Générale XV.C16. This ‘prologue of David’ is an adaptation of a text included as psalm 151 in most manuscripts of the Septuagint. A Latin translation of the text is incorporated in some medieval Vulgate manuscripts and psalters. The Middle Dutch translation added to this incunable can also be encountered in Devotio Moderna psalter manuscripts, for instance in Brussels, Royal Library, IV 1012. On the medieval transmission of psalm 151, see: Brandon W. Hawk, ‘Psalm 151 in Anglo-Saxon England’, in: *The Review of English Studies*, 66, 207 (2015), 805-821.

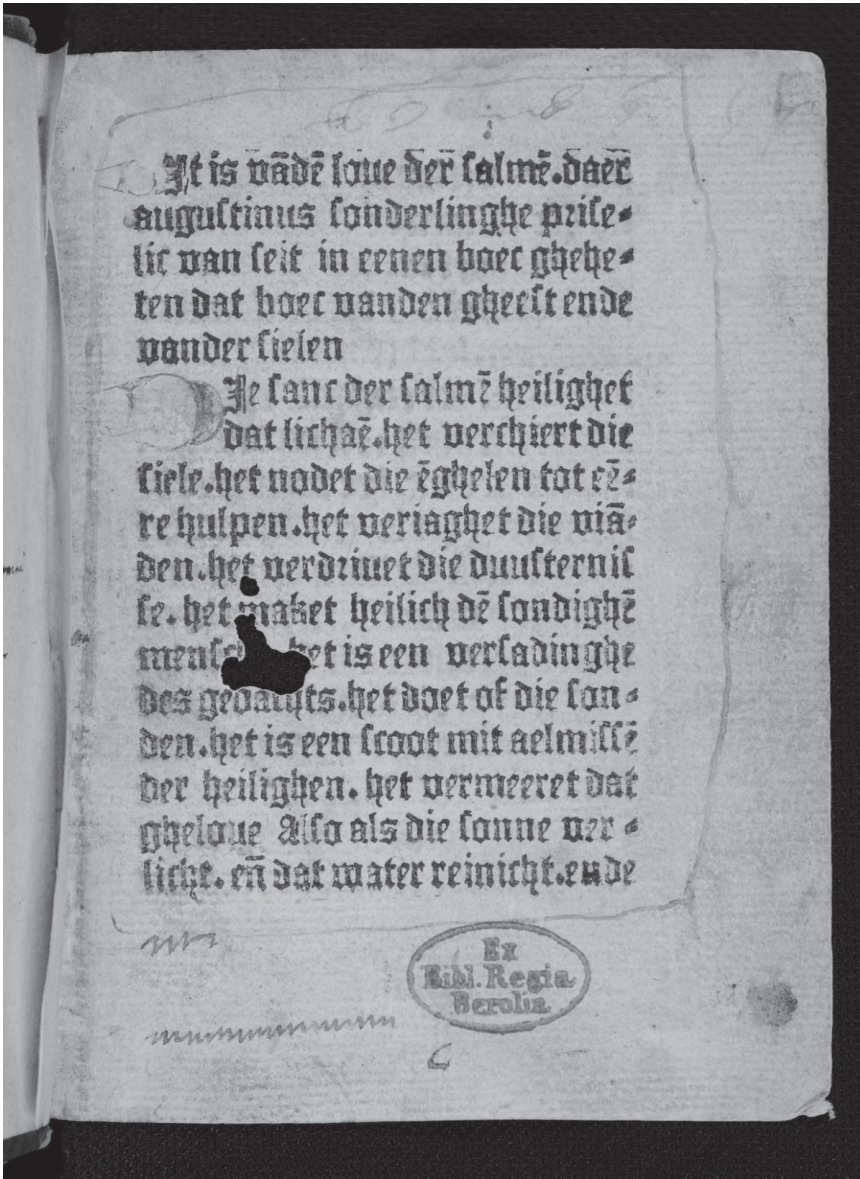


Figure 7. Beginning of the prologue 'Die love der salmen' in the 1480 psalter by Jacob Jacobszoon van der Meer. Berlin, Staatsbibliothek - Preußischer Kulturbesitz, 8o Inc 4820. (<http://resolver.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/SBB0001975E00000000>)

of the translation. Furthermore, the effort that was undertaken to include the prologues implies a shared need for and interest in these prefatory texts.

Next to the addition of prologues, the psalters were combined with other religious texts. Seven copies of the incunable psalters have been bound together with offices, prayers, or religious treatises.⁶² An example is a copy of the 1480 edition that is currently located in London.⁶³ 21 leaves were bound in after the printed text, containing various religious texts in a contemporary hand, which also left some marks in the printed psalter.⁶⁴ The manuscript consists of texts that are commonly found in vernacular Books of Hours of the same period: the *Devotio Moderna* translation of the (long) Vigil for the Dead (*die lange vigilie*, fol. 1r-11v in the manuscript) and of the Hours of the Virgin (*onser vrouwen ghetiden*, fol. 12r-20v). It ends with 'The ten psalms that our dear Lord spoke on the cross' (*tien psalmen die onse lieue here sprac anden cruce*, fol. 21r-21v): a short prayer to Jesus followed by references to ten psalms, indicated by their Latin incipits, and concluding with another short prayer to Jesus' passion and wounds.

The combination of the Middle Dutch psalter with texts from the Book of Hours is known from the manuscript transmission of the translation. As Desplenter explains, psalter manuscripts often contained supplementary Middle Dutch translations of the offices.⁶⁵ The choice of offices to add to a manuscript or printed psalter was variable, resulting in volumes that each present a different, personalised combination of texts. The copy of the 1480 psalter owned by Hendric Moens de Luna, for instance, is bound together with a manuscript containing Middle Dutch translations of the sequences and the Hours of the Holy Trinity.⁶⁶ The inclusion of texts such as these reflect the close

62 It concerns the following copies: Haarlem, Nederlands-Vlaams Bijbelgenootschap, BN o.480.018.5 (previously part of the collection of Bijbels Museum); Amsterdam, University Library, Ned. Inc. 534; London, British Library, IA.47111; Cambridge, University Library, Inc.6.E.2.2[2833]; London, British Library, IA.47148; Liège, University Library, Bib. Générale XV.C16; Cambridge, University Library, Inc.6.E.2.4[2854].

63 London, British Library, IA.47111.

64 This implies that the two sections were likely brought together early in the life of the book. As books were often taken apart or rather combined during the premodern and modern period, it can be difficult to state for certain that a hybrid composite volume was indeed functioning in that way in the late fifteen or early sixteenth century. Material characteristics such as the same decoration or the same hand in both parts can help in determining whether it is likely that the compilation of the book was indeed a contemporary matter.

65 See: Desplenter, *Al aertrijc segt lofsanc*, 272; 300-307; Biemans, *Middel nederlandse Bijbelhandschriften*, 104-106.

66 Amsterdam, University Library, Ned. Inc. 534.

connection between the use of the psalms and the offices in private devotion. Although it has, unfortunately, not been possible to connect the additions of such texts to specific readers or reading contexts, these hybrid books display how readers apparently considered it convenient to have the texts physically close to each other, allowing them to swiftly move from one text to the other.

Conclusion

The handwritten *Love der salmen* prologue that was bound in with the copy of the 1491 psalter kept in Brussels (Royal Library, A 2014) contains the following phrases:

When one sings this book in church, they are words of the Holy Church, praising our Lord God. When it is read by righteous people, one gives thanks to God. When it is read by the sinful, one prays to God for grace. When it is read for the souls in purgatory, they are words cried out to God out of pain.⁶⁷

Contemporary users indeed regarded the psalter as a collection of texts that was inherently versatile. The Middle Dutch psalms could be read to soothe personal issues as well as be approached as part of the rhythmic framework of the liturgical day, week, and year. The book could be used as a place to safe-keep personal memories or prayers, or rather serve as an object that recorded religious practice and could be shared amongst a community of people. By writing down their names, annotating and adapting the book's textual contents, or having it bound together with other printed and manuscript texts, readers shaped the features of their psalters according to their wishes and ideals. They made sure these books were easy to navigate, to connect to (Latin) liturgical contexts, to pick up in trials and tribulations, and to read alongside other prayers, offices, or religious treatises.⁶⁸ Future research into these reading contexts may hopefully provide further insight into the connections between

67 'Als men dyt bock in der kerken synget so synt worde der hilliger kerken louende unsen heren god Wanner he gelezen wert van den gerechten menschen so dancket he gode Wanner he gelezen wert van den sunder so byddet men gode umme genade Wanner he gelezen wort vor de zelen de in den vegevr synt so synt worde der zelen ropende tot gode van pynen.'

68 The customisation of prayer books and the connections between personal preferences and material adaptation have been studied before, with a particular focus on Books of Hours. See: Virginia Reinburg, *French Books of Hours: Making an Archive of Prayer, c. 1400-1600*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012; Rudy, *Image, Knife, and Gluepot*.

psalm reading and the reading of, for instance, the New Testament, Books of Hours, and song books.

The copies of the *Devotio Moderna* psalters show the involvement of a predominantly female religious reading public in actively shaping their own reading material. This result corresponds with earlier studies into the use and production of manuscripts in (female) convents that were related to the *Devotio Moderna*. Brothers and sisters not only owned and read texts, but also copied them, created song books or other devotional books, or collected excerpts from religious texts in *rapiaria*: notebooks, often anonymous, in which quotations, summaries, and excerpts were written down with the purpose of spiritual exercise.⁶⁹ In the words of Thom Mertens, they would ‘read with the pen’.⁷⁰ Although previous studies have focused primarily on the creation and use of manuscripts in these communities, the many ways in which printed psalters were adapted and extended display how these readers were also involved in customising and ‘creating’ their printed books. In their hands, the printed word was not fixed. This, in its turn, stresses that the idea of a static printed word, opposing flexible manuscript culture, proves wrong – or at least over-generalised.⁷¹ Moreover, the patterns that can be recognised in readers’ adaptations and additions show that they were often aware of common characteristics of the transmission of the *Devotio Moderna* psalter in manuscript. They valued the combination of the psalms with certain notes, prologues, prayers, or offices, and if these were absent in the printed edition, they would include them by hand.

In handling their psalters, these readers not only expressed ‘lectoral agency’ but also a certain ‘devotional agency’. Either by making certain requests to binders, rubricators, and decorators, or by simply taking up pen and scissors,

69 See, for instance: Wybren Scheepma, *Deemoed en devotie: De koorvrouwen van Windesheim en hun geschriften*. Amsterdam: Prometheus, 1997, 80-86; Thérèse de Hemptinne, ‘Reading, Writing, and Devotional Practices: Lay and Religious Women and the Written Word in the Low Countries (1350-1550)’, in: Thérèse de Hemptinne, Maria Eugenia Góngora (ed.), *The Voice of Silence: Women’s Literacy in a Men’s Church*. Turnhout: Brepols, 2004, 111-126: 126; Cécile de Morrée, *Voor de tijd van het jaar: Vervaardiging, organisatie en gebruikscontext van Middelnederlandse devote liedverzamelingen, ca. 1470-1588*. Hilversum: Verloren, 2007, 24-26.

70 Thom Mertens, ‘Lezen met de pen. Ontwikkelingen in het laatmiddeleeuws geestelijk proza’, in: Frits van Oostrom, Frank Willaert (ed.), *De studie van de Middelnederlandse letterkunde: stand en toekomst*. Hilversum: Verloren, 1989, 187-200.

71 This issue has been addressed by, amongst others: Adrian Johns, *The Nature of the Book: Print and Knowledge in the Making*. Chicago/London, The University of Chicago Press, 1998, 3; David McKitterick, *Print, Manuscript and the Search for Order, 1450-1830*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, 220.

they actively shaped the ways in which they approached and used the psalms. Annotations and adaptations are more than only reflections of reading behaviours: they also served as instruments for late-medieval readers to assert their influence over the book, its contents, and its possible uses. By customising their psalters, readers could quite literally take their devotional reading practices into their own hands.

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