

Preachers, supplicants and pilgrims. Two Vadstena brothers in Rome

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On 26 June 1487, two Vadstena brothers left their home monastery for a journey abroad that would last for more than a year. “They left”, the Vadstena Memorial Book (*Diarium Vadstenense*) writes, but nothing is said of how they travelled. One must assume that they walked, rode and travelled by sea when necessary or convenient. However, they had plenty of time; their first stop was Gnadenberg, a Birgittine monastery close to Nuremberg in Bavaria, where they were to participate in the general chapter of the Birgittine Order. This was set to start two months later, on Tuesday 28 August.²

The brothers that had been sent out, Clemens Petri and Johannes Matthei, were highly trusted. Both were later to serve as confessor generals, both were well educated. Of Clemens and his education we know nothing, but his excellent Latin and erudition indicate higher studies. Of Johannes, however, we know that he had studied at a European university. He was a *baccalaureus* in canonical law,³ a degree he had probably earned in Cologne. Based on their entry in the monastery we can assume that Clemens was the elder, probably close to his sixties, and Johannes around 20 years younger.⁴

At the general chapter in Gnadenberg, Clemens Petri presided as the leading delegate of the mother monastery. Here, many things that were important to the order were discussed; among other things, the Customary of the Birgittine brothers, *Liber usuum*, was accepted, a text compiled in Vadstena that was to become mandatory for the whole order.⁵

Other matters that were discussed at the general chapter have been well known for a long time. The main protocol was published already in 1764.⁶ Important additions and corrections were

1. Monica Hedlund had prepared an extensive manuscript for her presentation at the *Topoi, Topographies and Travellers* conference, but sadly passed away in October 2016. Her manuscript has been edited with notes and a bibliography by Claes Gejrot, and Ragnar Hedlund has translated the text into English.

2. *Item, xxvi die mensis Iunii duo fratres nostri sacerdotes, scilicet frater Clemens Petri senior et frater Iohannes Mathei, iter arripuerunt ad capitulum generale circa festum sancti Augustini celebrandum in monasterio ordinis sancti Salvatoris, Monte gracie, prope Nørinbergiam in Alamannia. Diar. Vadst. 874.*

3. *Diar. Vadst. 826.*

4. Clemens Petri entered Vadstena in 1462, Johannes Matthei in 1476 (*Diar. Vadst. 726 and 826*).

5. Recently edited by Sara Risberg; see Risberg 2003.

6. von Nettelbla 1764.

made in the early 1970s by Tore Nyberg.⁷ However, a festive sermon was also delivered by one of our brothers in Gnadenberg. It is preserved in one single source, Uppsala University Library C 153, a manuscript from Vadstena monastery and catalogued by me in the 1980s.⁸ This sermon was published a few years ago in a critical edition by Maria Berggren.⁹ There is no way of telling with certainty who actually delivered the sermon. According to Maria Berggren, it was probably Clemens Petri, but possibly, both brothers co-authored it. This is because both are well-documented in the preserved Vadstena material as competent and frequent preachers.¹⁰

The manuscript C 153 has a rather curious appearance. It has a strange size, a high and narrow half folio, such as would have been used for accounts, registers and sometimes verses. There are no accounts in the volume, but there is an epic in verse and *indices* for some important works in the library of Vadstena Abbey.¹¹ But there is a number of other texts normally not written in this format, for instance sermons such as our text from Gnadenberg (fol. 158r–166r). The whole manuscript is considerably worn and messy. It is bound simply in a pair of torn parchment leaves from older manuscripts and consists of a number of so-called codicological units, that is parts that may have lived lives of their own before they finally ended up between the same covers (there are at least two cases of incorrect bindings in it). In our catalogue article, we state that the manuscript is written in a “careless cursive by many hands”,¹² and this may be true, but the majority is probably from one single hand. For sure, this varies to some extent due to the speed of writing and a general ambition of neatness; however, it has at least one unusual characteristic, and we will take a closer look at this. Clemens Petri has left two extensive manuscripts of sermons, where we can study his way of writing.¹³ All medieval scribes abbreviate the word *et* (“and”) at least as often as they spell it out. All the scribes in Vadstena use different versions of the “tironian seven” as an abbreviation of *et*, and Clemens does too. However, he also has a special fast version, that I have never seen anywhere else until now (and in any case not in the writings of his companion Johannes Matthei): Clemens uses something which could be referred to as a “handwriting-j” (see Fig. 1).

This unusual abbreviation appears in many places in our manuscript. With a reasonable amount of certainty, I would argue that this manuscript is the personal note-book of Clemens Petri. The part of the book that contains the festive sermon features another interesting detail: the leaves feature prominent traces of a fold across the middle; thus, they have been folded to half the size.

7. Nyberg 1972–1974.

8. MHUU 2, 186–189.

9. Berggren 2009, 219–234.

10. Berggren 2009, XL–XLIII.

11. MHUU 2, 188.

12. “Nachlässige Kursive von mehreren Händen”, MHUU 2, 186.

13. C 308 (*Sermones de sanctis*) and C 321 (*Sermones de tempore*), UUB.



Fig. 1. Examples of the abbreviation of *et* as used by Clemens Petri.

Our sermon was even written, in a few pages, in such a way that it takes the fold into account.¹⁴

When the chapter of Gnadenberg finished in mid-September,¹⁵ the brothers continued to Rome, where they arrived in October. Their next mission was to work for the canonisation of Katarina, the daughter of St. Birgitta. Great efforts had been made from 1469 and onwards, and a preliminary permit of local veneration was present already since 1482.¹⁶ However, the ambitions of the Birgittines were more wide-reaching than that: the goal was a proper canonisation, the same as had befallen the founder of the Order in 1391.

Already in October 1487, as soon as our brothers had arrived from Gnadenberg, they made sure to submit a new petition from the Birgittine Order with the support of preachers and noblemen. Among other things, the pope was asked to confirm the aforementioned permission, issued by his predecessor Sixtus IV in 1482. Achieving this took some eight months of efforts but finally, on 14 June 1488, the much anticipated licence for the translation of the remains of Katarina (the process frequently incorrectly referred to as beatification) was issued. Now, she could also be venerated in the *whole* of the Birgittine Order, that is even in convents outside of Scandinavia. With this, the brothers would have to be content, and on the whole, it was seen as a great success.¹⁷

14. It can be added that a thin inlay (*a binio*) which is now fol. 79–82 displays the same traces of a fold and has apparently ended up in the wrong place. It does not relate to any particular extent to the texts around it and it is independent in relation to the inlay with the sermon and the notes that will be discussed in the following.

15. 13 September 1487 (Nyberg 1972–1974, I, 249).

16. On the efforts for the canonisation of Katarina, see Fröjmark 1992, 58–66. For the papal letter issued on 16 August 1482, see SDHK 31155; the text is printed in *Dipl. Norv.* XVII no. 1123.

17. See SDHK 32071–32072, partly printed in Nyberg 1972–1974, I, 123–124.

The manuscript C 153 reflects the efforts of the brothers even in this area. In the acts of the Katarina process, edited by Isak Collijn and based on a manuscript which is magnificent but has a defect introduction,¹⁸ the text has been possible to complete with the help of a few pages in C 153. There, Clemens Petri has written a copy of a petition, apparently in left-over gaps, which a cardinal's commission in Rome already in 1470 had addressed to the persons responsible for the process in Sweden; among other things, this petition contained instructions for the examination of witnesses. Immediately after this petition, four of the thirteen "articles" follow, which were sent to Sweden with papal approval as a basis for completing the investigations in 1475.¹⁹ The complete version of these articles can be found in another of Clemens's manuscripts, C 321.²⁰

In the same folded sheet as our festive sermon there is also another little trace of the activities of the brothers during the Katarina process. The sermon itself is followed by a number of blank pages, but on the last page of the inlay²¹ a few shorter texts can be found; there is no room here to analyse them in detail. One of them, however, is important to us, as it concerns the canonisation of Katarina. It is apparently an (incomplete) draft of a petition directed to Pope Innocent VIII, written by Clemens Petri with a small, highly cursive and difficult handwriting. The tone of this draft is a rather gloomy one. The text seems to assume that the pope is not particularly benevolent towards the thought of a canonisation of Katarina, but if this should still be the case, the pope is asked to extend the permit of veneration to the *whole* of the Order (which would then also follow).

This little text is strange: among the many texts we have concerning the canonisation process of Katarina, this seems to be the only text directly testifying to the lobbying of the brothers in Rome. Apart from this, their activities have been reconstructed with the help of the writings of others and the answers finally delivered by the pope.

So what did Clemens and Johannes do when they did not spend their time in the antechambers of some potentate from the curia? I think I may at least have a suggestion.

In our manuscript C 153, immediately after the sheet with the festive sermon from Gnadenberg, the very last inlay follows. This is rather torn and worn, with the same typical trace of a fold across the pages.²² Admittedly, the quality of the paper is not exactly the same, but judging from the folding marks, these pages must have been in the same "trouser pocket", as it were, as the Gnadenberg sermon. The original inlay consists of four pages, with only three pages with text on them. Secondly, a considerably smaller double leaf has been bound into the middle of the inlay, with a completely different text that we can discard in this context.

18. Collijn 1942–1946; the edition is based on *cod.* A 93, The Royal Library, Stockholm.

19. C 153, UUB, fol. 124v–125v and 123v–124r, see SDHK 29833; printed by Collijn 1942–1946, XV–XIX.

20. C 321, UUB, fol. 359v–360v; compare with Collijn 1942–1946, 7–11.

21. C 153, UUB, fol. 168v and 169 (the latter crippled, torn in the middle of the fold).

22. C 153, UUB, fol. 170r–171r.

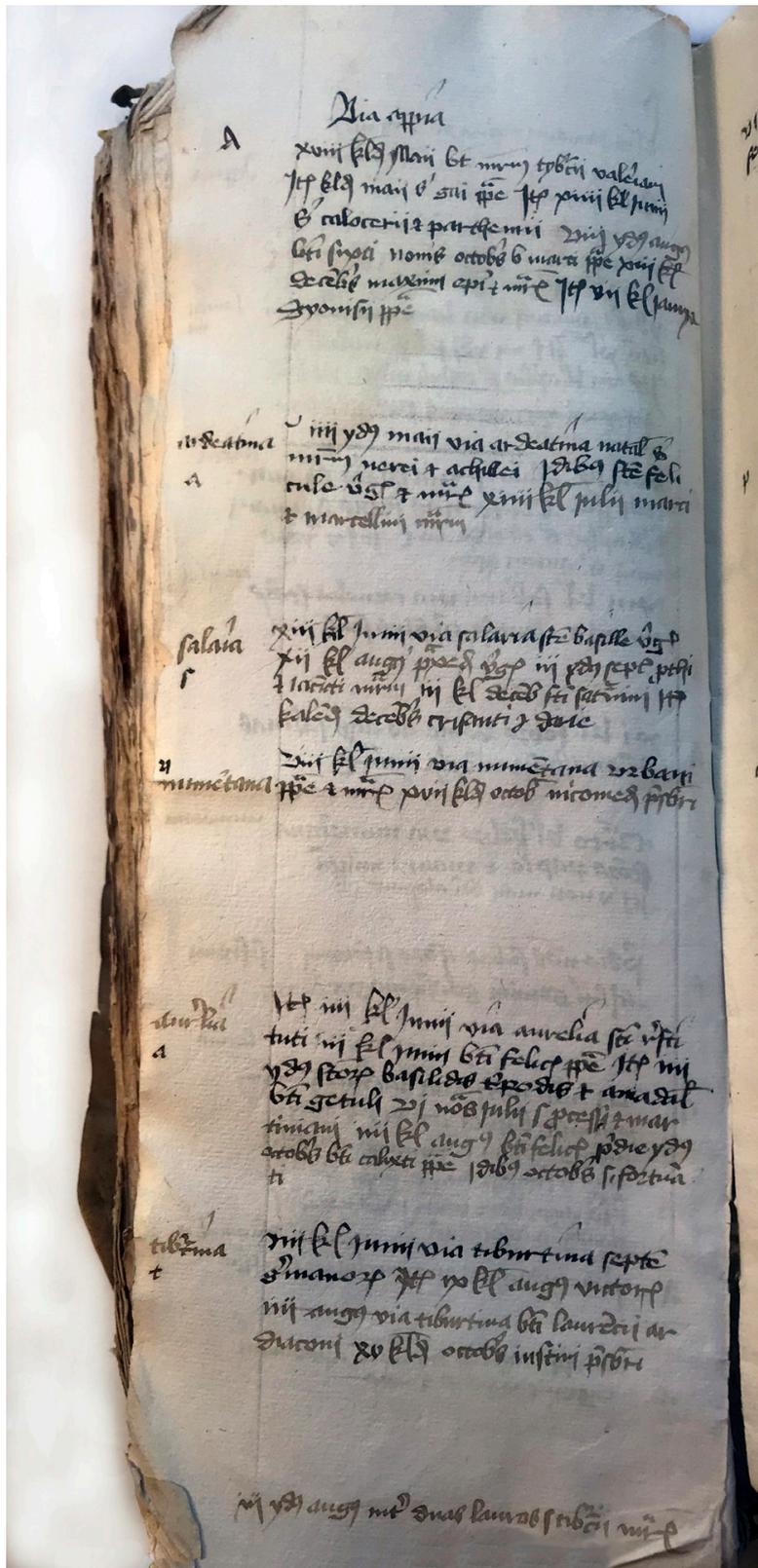


Fig. 2. The first page of *De peregrinationibus Romanis* (C 153, UUB, fol. 170r).

In our catalogue of manuscripts we actually mentioned the folding marks but did not pay any further attention to the relation between the inlays. We simply referred to this little text as the *De peregrinationibus Romanis*, “On Roman pilgrimages”, without connecting it to our Vadstena brothers.²³ However, the text is unmistakably written by Clemens Petri, not at one time, but at several occasions. It features all the versions of his scripture that can be observed in the manuscripts containing his sermons and that have been glimpsed in other places in the present volume. His characteristic *et*-abbreviation, *j*, is here too.

What kind of text is this then? It starts out as a calendar: “*Kalendae* in January, that is the first day of that month.” Then the text mentions “Via Appia, the martyr crowns of 30 soldiers”.²⁴ In the left margin, there is a prominent *A*, in the right margin, it says Appia. Thus, we are walking along the famous Roman road Via Appia. A few lines below, we can read “*L*” in the left margin, in the right margin *Laucana*, which signifies the Roman road Via Labicana. And so it goes on. The letters in the left margin look a little neater and seem to be placed with a certain regularity, maybe in a first stage. In this stage, the larger, blacker and neater notices were probably also written. Then, the list has been completed gradually; in some places, the text has become very cramped, while there is plenty of space left in other places. At certain occasions, errors have been made as well. The explanatory names of roads and places in the margins rather look as if they have been put there secondarily.

But a calendar? No, it doesn't work. After two dates at the beginning of January, two dates in March follow; then we change roads, and start all over with 13 January. Then there is another road again, now the Via Salaria, with 16 January as the first date and 11 May as the last. A pilgrimage? The names of saints and holy places mentioned here are not the usual places of pilgrimage of the fifteenth century; among those, with a few exceptions for the most important burial churches, one would find the penitential churches in central Rome. Nor is this text based on any of the guides for pilgrims that were common in the late Middle Ages. The focus here is on the holy places of the early church, the area of the catacombs and the burial places outside the walls. There is an extensive late antique and early medieval literature concerning these places, but these notes do not resemble any of the many late antique texts I have examined. Moreover, the common view is that in this period, the fifteenth century, the catacombs were hardly even known; they were to have been forgotten already in the seventh–eighth centuries, when relics were moved from the burial places to the churches inside the walls. However, this is not quite true. The major burial churches outside the walls were still in use, and even guidebooks for pilgrims from the high and late Middle Ages sometimes talk of subterranean burial places: San Sebastiano and San Callisto, in particular, are usually mentioned.²⁵

23. MHUU 2, 189.

24. *Kalendis januarij id est prima die ejusdem mensis. – Via appia corone militum xxx* (C 153, UUB, fol. 170r).

25. For example in the Einsiedeln itinerary from around the year 800, edited by among others Walser 1987.

Worth noticing is also that the saints mentioned here, with a few exceptions, do not belong to the really important ones; this, too, suggests that it is not guidebook material. Having identified the saints and read what is said about them, we realise that these notes must go back to the tradition of martyrologies: we get information concerning the date, the location (for the tomb and the martyrrium) and the name, nothing more. Chronologically, our notes date at least some hundred years before the *Martyrologium Romanum*,²⁶ so I have had to compare the notes with what is said in many older martyrologies, first the oldest one, *Martyrologium Hieronymianum* from the mid-fifth century,²⁷ then the more familiar ones from the ninth century, among which the *Martyrologium* by Usuardus is the most common one. In the extraordinary edition by Jacques Dubois of Usuardus, also the content of the most recent predecessors is listed.²⁸ I have also studied another roughly contemporary source, Hrabanus Maurus, who is independent in relation to Usuardus.²⁹ In this way, we can at least understand which saints' days and which holy places the different notes refer to, and in most cases, we can also confirm the dates. Moreover, the fact that these are most often written according to the old Roman calendar, shows that old sources have been used here.

According to my investigation, it is quite apparent that whoever wrote these notes has had access to the *Martyrologium* of Usuardus. Despite the brevity of the notes, there is a number of places where only Usuardus has the information related here. A few examples: "20 January. Via Cornelia, by the saints Marius and Martha and their sons".³⁰ Marius and Martha and their sons are supposed to have been Persian Christians, who came to Rome and were martyred there in the age of Claudius II, that is in the late third century AD. Research, however, suggests that this must have happened under the great persecutions of Diocletian. There is a certain confusion concerning the date of their martyrrium; Usuardus and the old Hieronymian martyrology sets it to 20 January, while many of his sources state that it was the day before. Thus, our manuscript follows Usuardus here. Neither Usuardus nor Hrabanus Maurus mentions the place of their martyrrium. Only Usuardus has Via Cornelia, and he must have picked it up from a legend. Via Cornelia is a name that is rarely used in the Middle Ages, and even the original route of the road is uncertain.³¹ Moreover, the martyrrium of Marius and Martha is supposed to have taken place a few Roman miles outside the city. However, in certain late Medieval pilgrim's tales, Via Cornelia is

26. See for instance the modern edition in *Mart. Rom.* 2001.

27. Concerning the collection *Martyrologium Hieronymianum* (the name is due to an erroneous attribution to the church-father Hieronymus), see Lifshitz 2006. The text is printed in the series *Acta Sanctorum* (Delehay 1931).

28. Dubois 1965.

29. McCulloh 1979.

30. *xiii kal. februarii via cornelia sanctorum marij et marthe cum filiis suis* (C 153, UUB, fol. 170r).

31. It has been assumed to have run east-west on the land now covered by St. Peter's church; see LTUR *Suburbium* II, 150–153.

mentioned among the places in Rome where holy martyrs died. Our scribe, who bases his work on Usuardus, was probably inspired by the directions of the latter that this martyr's grave was in Rome itself. He might even have found support for this thought in some contemporary guidebook.

There is yet another instance suggesting a similar misinterpretation, first in Usuardus, and then by our scribe. It is a question of a date, the location of a place and then a reckoning of saints. Further down on the first page (fol. 170r), along the right edge we see the word *Sifronii*. The note says *pridie nonas februarii* (that is 4 February) *foro sifranii aquilini gemini gelasii magni donati*. This text correlates well with Usuardus, apart from him beginning his note with *Romae* ("in Rome"). According to the editor Dubois, this note can be traced to the *Martyrologium Hieronymianum*, with the exception of the very word *Romae*. But Usuardus has misunderstood his source and added *Romae*, because he seems to have thought that Forum Sempronii was a market-place in the city. Actually, it is a small town in northern Italy today known as Fossombrone. Usuardus also has his very own sequence between the more obscure saints' names, a sequence adapted by our scribe. Just like our scribe, Usuardus also uses the masculine form *Donati* instead of the otherwise normal feminine form *Donatae* (actually, a female martyr is concerned here). Thus, our scribe follows the peculiarities of Usuardus faithfully, except for crossing out the word *Romae*. However, just like Usuardus, he has probably believed that this, too, happened in Rome, otherwise he would hardly have included the note here, among all the Roman martyr-tombs.

Identifying and tracing the sources of all the notes in detail is sometimes difficult, but it is also a fascinating task. It provides a good insight into how the knowledge of martyrs of the early church and saints' tombs was transmitted to the early Middle Ages and brought to a new age through the *Martyrologium Romanum*.

Thus far, I have stayed close to our manuscript C 153. Now, I will venture to lift somewhat from the ground. Maybe it will be more of a guesswork when I pose the question: what was the purpose of these notes? The first page, the one with the most secondary notes, mainly comprises the period from January to May. Page two starts over again with Via Appia, and chronologically, it starts where the notes of page 1 ended. This page mainly comprises notes from May to September, even if there is some later material, above all in the secondary notes. With a few exceptions, the third page contains material mainly from summer and early autumn and moreover, many of the places are more vague and difficult to find.

I think that this curious document might reflect the leisure time of Clemens Petri and Johannes Matthei during their year in Rome. Arguably, they would have managed the usual round-tour to the great penitential churches during the first months of their stay. But what did they do then? Consider two Swedish monastery brothers getting the chance of exploring the traces of the early church in the sacred city, traces they would obviously had read a lot about; they knew the legendary material. Not all, but many of the saints of the early church were also included in the

calendars of the Swedish dioceses, for instance in Linköping, the rite of which was observed by the Vadstena brothers.³² And they have had access to the *Martyrologium* of Usuardus. Then, they have planned their pilgrimages so that they have primarily tried to follow the main roads, and obviously they have begun with the most important one: Via Appia. Lack of knowledge of the topography of the city has led to one or two mistakes, such as Forum Sempronii.

They have started to plan a few months in advance, but the issue of the canonisation took some time. Therefore, they had to make additions by and by, first with the same roads again, then with new ones. On the last page (fol. 171r), they find their way towards the harbour-city of Ostia, but they also solve a few more difficult geographical problems. What is, for instance, *Ad ursum pileatum* (“by the bear with a hat”) where the martyr Candidus can be venerated on 3 October? Or, how should one interpret *Inter duas lauros* (“between the two laurels”) by the Via Labicana, where on 11 August, Saint Tiburtius can be venerated and on 22 December no less than 30 martyrs at the same time?

In the summer of 2010, I had the privilege of spending some time in the library of the Swedish Institute in Rome, with its excellent resources on the topography of Rome. There, I was able to find all these burial grounds and grave-churches (as far as it is still possible) and then also visit them myself. *Inter duas lauros* (“between the two laurels”) was easy to find; it was in the vicinity of the mausoleum of Helen, to the south-east by the Via Labicana. The whole area was once an imperial estate. Above ground, a cemetery was prepared for the *equites singulares*, a kind of imperial elite guard. Below ground level, catacombs were then dug, where many early Christians were to be buried.³³ This was well known in the Middle Ages as well: it is included in every pilgrim’s handbook. *Ad ursum pileatum* (“by the bear with a hat”) is a little more difficult. According to the really old descriptions of Rome,³⁴ it seems rather clear that this refers to a cemetery also known as the Pontian catacomb, just outside the city to the south-west, by the Via Portuense, one of the roads leading towards the harbour area of Ostia.³⁵ But in some of the late medieval guides,³⁶ it is instead located to the eastern parts of the city, just inside the walls. A thirteenth-century inscription in the church S. Bibiana, today situated on via Giovanni Giolitti, immediately south-east of Stazione Termini, reads *Hec est via que it ad locum quod vocabatur antiquo tempore Ursi Pileati et moderno tempore monasterium sancte Bibiane [...]* (“This is the road that leads to the place, which in ancient times was called ‘Of the Bear with a Hat’, and in modern times ‘the monastery of S. Bibiana’”), which shows that the toponym for some reason had been transferred to the church of S. Bibiana.³⁷

32. The Linköping calendar is printed in *Brev. Linc.*, I, 3–14.

33. See LTUR *Suburbium* II, 209–218.

34. The first reference is from the *Depositio Martyrum* from the fourth century AD; it is also mentioned for instance in the *Martyrologium Hieronymianum*. See LTUR *Suburbium* V, 214–215.

35. See LTUR *Suburbium* IV, 213–219.

36. LTUR V, 96; LTUR *Suburbium* V, 215.

37. Forcella 1877, 113, no. 228.

The expression “Ad Ursum Pileatum” probably referred to a tavern-sign or something similar, which was used as a signpost.³⁸ But the burial place is at least mentioned in most of the late medieval guides, even if the pilgrims evidently could be led to different opinions on which way they should go.

Possibly, our little text is merely a writing-desk product. A number of errors and peculiarities might suggest this, as well as the fact that many of the dates quoted lie beyond the time the brothers spent in Rome. Two circumstances, however, suggest a practical use. Firstly, there are the many levels of the notes. They were not excerpted at one single reading of Usuardus, rather, they were filled in at many occasions. Secondly, on the very last page of the inlay and the manuscript, at the top, there is a short note by Clemens’ hand: “*Via* is the same as *platea* (street) which is shown by *Via Latina, Via Labicana*”.³⁹ *Platea* is originally a Greek word, used in the Middle Ages for city streets properly paved with stone. For our brothers, mostly used to muddy riding-paths, *via* was apparently quite the wrong expression for the excellent roads of Rome. This note seems like the result of practical experience.

I am rather inclined to see before me how our brothers wander around the ruffled winter weather of Rome and the mild spring breeze, seeking out the birth places of the church. It must have given them great joy and strength in their difficult task at the curia, and obviously it must have impressed their fellow brothers at the monastery in Vadstena greatly, when they finally returned on 28 September 1488 and were received with many honours.⁴⁰ The gratitude for what had, after all, been achieved at the curia, was significant, even if they had not succeeded completely. Clemens Petri was elected General confessor shortly after his return, and the year after, the ceremonial shringing of Katarina was celebrated in Vadstena under his auspices.⁴¹ Johannes Matthei succeeded him as confessor in 1499. In the *Diarium Vadstenense*, the legacies of both are characterised by warm gratitude and appreciation.⁴²

What I have said about my little pilgrim’s text may to a part be speculative, but I wanted to show how an intense study of a few pages of a manuscript can convey an image of the everyday life of people in the Middle Ages. A manuscript should never be used *only* as a source to be edited or to study a certain text. It should be studied as an object in its own right. It is when we try to understand the relations between the parts, and not least the small and apparently insignificant notes, that the manuscript becomes a living testimony of the people behind it.

38. LTUR V, 96; LTUR *Suburbium* V, 215.

39. *Via dicitur platea, ut patet via latina, via laucana* (C 153, UUB, fol. 175v)

40. The return to Vadstena is related in *Diar. Vadst.* 879. See Ström 2004, 105.

41. On the feast of the shringing, see Fritz & Elfving 2004.

42. *Diar. Vadst.* 947 and 1095.

Bibliography

Abbreviations

Brev. Linc. = *Breviarium Lincopense*.

Diar. Vadst. = *Diarium Vadstenense*, see Gejrot 1988 and Gejrot 1996.

Dipl. Norv. = *Diplomatarium Norvegicum*.

LTUR = *Lexicon Topographicum Urbis Romae*.

Mart. Rom. = *Martyrologium Romanum*.

MHUU = *Mittelalterliche Handschriften der Universitätsbibliothek Uppsala*.

SDHK = Svenskt Diplomatariums huvudkartotek. Online resource. [sok.riksarkivet.se/SDHK].

UUB = Uppsala University Library.

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