

Unique
at penn

Nothing can more effectually contribute to the Cultivation & Improvement of a Country, the Wisdom, Riches, & Strength, Virtue and Piety, the Welfare & Happiness of a People, than a proper Education of Youth, by forming their Manners, imbuing

30
Thursday
Aug 2018

A Woodblock on Pilgrimage: From Flanders to Philadelphia

POSTED BY ADMINUATPA IN POSTS

≈ LEAVE A COMMENT

[Ed. note: we are very grateful to Dr. Patricia Stoop, visiting Brueghel Chair at the University of Pennsylvania / Universiteit Antwerpen for contributing this post.]

At the beginning of this year, the Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts of the University of Pennsylvania purchased a unique and fascinating woodblock (c. 12.5 × 9.5 inches). Apart from the fact that for mysterious reasons over the course of time, a strip of about half an inch was cut off from the left end of the block—this was already the case when it belonged to a private owner in Eindhoven (Noord-Brabant, the Netherlands) in the 1950s—the woodblock is in excellent condition.

♣ WELCOME

Welcome to Unique at Penn, part of the family of University of Pennsylvania Libraries blogs. Every week this space will feature descriptions and contextualization of items from the collections of the University of Pennsylvania Libraries. The site focuses on those materials held by Penn which are in some sense “unique” - drawn from both our special and circulating collections, whether a one-of-a-kind medieval manuscript or a twentieth-century popular novel with generations of student notes penciled inside. See the About page for more on the blog and to contact the editor.

♣ RECENT POSTS

- Blue Skies to Red Seas
- “If a Woman Had Been Mayor”
- A Woodblock on Pilgrimage: From Flanders to Philadelphia
- Etta Winograd: Artist of the Figurative and the Fantastical
- A Collection of Korekushon

♣ ARCHIVES

- August 2019
- February 2019

 Follow 



Woodblock (UPenn Object Coll. Box 27)

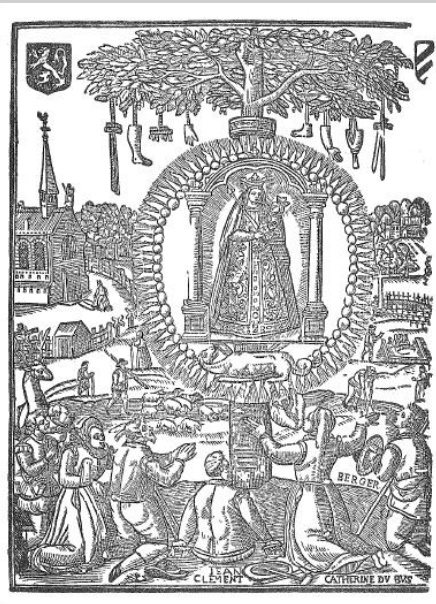


Image from M. de Meyer, "Een oude bedevaartprent van Scherpenheuvel" in *Volkskunde* 13 nr. 3, 1954, p144

The devotional print is related to Scherpenheuvel (literally 'Sharp Hill', most often called 'Montaigu' after the French), which since the beginning of the seventeenth century was the main pilgrimage center in the Habsburg Low Countries. Its cult goes back to at least the beginning of the fourteenth century. In his continuation of the *Spiegel Historiae* the Brabantine priest and author Lodewijk van Velthem (c. 1260/75–after 1317) mentions a holy oak, which had the form of a cross and stood on the hilltop between the towns of Diest and Zichem, where he was ordained as a priest. The tree was worshipped because of the healing powers ascribed to it:

*Van ere eyken die men
anebede. LVII.*

In desen tiden was ganginge
mede
Tuscen Zichgem ende Diest der
stede

*On an oak that was worshipped.
Chapter 57.*

In these days pilgrimage took
place
to a place almost in the middle
between Zichem and Diest.

- August 2018
- December 2017
- November 2017
- July 2017
- October 2016
- July 2016
- June 2016
- May 2016
- March 2016
- December 2015
- November 2015
- October 2015
- September 2015
- August 2015
- June 2015
- March 2015
- February 2015
- January 2015
- October 2014
- September 2014
- July 2014
- June 2014
- May 2014
- April 2014
- February 2014
- January 2014
- December 2013
- November 2013

Rechte bi na te middewarde.
Daer dede menich sine
bedevarde
Tot ere eyken, dat si u cont,
Die alse .i. cruse gewassen stont
Met .ii. rayen gaende uut.
Daer menich quam overlut,
Die daer ane hinc scerpe ende
staf
Ende seide dat hi genesen waer
daer af.
Som [s]liepense onder den
boem.
Dus quam hem voren in haren
droem
Datsi vanden boem genasen.
Aldus so quamen daer die
dwasen,
Ende die waren meest siec
vanden rede,
Ende vele verlorne daer optie
stede.
Dit duerde wel .i. half jaer,
Sodat menige scerpe hinc daer
Ende menich staf anden boem.

(Book 4, Chapter 57, ll. 4256–
74)

Many went on pilgrimage there
to an oak, that as you should
know
was grown in the form of a cross
with two diverging branches.
Apparently many put their
pilgrim bag and their cane on
the tree
and said that they were cured
thereof.
Some slept underneath the tree.
They believed that in their
dreams
they were healed by the tree.
Thus the fools came there,
mostly sick of mind,
and lost many belongings in that
place.
This took place definitely for half
a year
so that many pilgrim bags
and many canes hung there on
the tree.

Not too long after Velthem's disapproving observation, a small statue of the Virgin Mary was placed in the cross-shaped tree. According to the legend, a shepherd had noticed around 1415 that the statue had fallen down. When he lifted it up in order to take it home, he was unable to move. Only when his master, who was worried because the shepherd had not returned home after work, put the statue of the Virgin back into the tree, was the servant able to move again. In this way the Virgin had shown the spiritual importance of the

- October 2013
- September 2013
- August 2013
- July 2013
- June 2013
- May 2013
- April 2013
- March 2013
- February 2013
- January 2013
- December 2012
- October 2012
- September 2012
- August 2012
- July 2012
- June 2012
- May 2012

✦ AUTHORS

adminuatpa

Alexander Devine

Dianne Mitchell

Lynne Farrington

Jacqueline Burek

John F. Anderies

Regan Kladstrup

Marissa Nicosia

Mitch Fraas

place. In the woodblock the shepherd is depicted in the lower left corner: he is identified by the French word *berger*, which indicates that the prints to be produced from this block were intended for a French-speaking audience.

After the miracle with the shepherd, the site was frequented by inhabitants of the surrounding villages whenever they were sick or a member of their family suffered from illness or pain. As suggested in the short passage from the text by Velthem, the pilgrims hung their support aids on the tree when they did not need them any longer: in October 1603 the tree counted no less than 135 canes. But there was also a lively trade in *ex-votos*: pilgrims could buy representations in gold, silver or tin of the body parts that were cured or needed healing (in the last case it was believed that the representation of the ill limb would take over the disease). These votive offerings were left hanging on the holy tree, as can be seen in the image above the radiant aureole in which the Virgin is depicted.

In the 1580s Scherpenheuvel found itself in the midst of the battlefields of the Dutch Revolt (1568–1648). While occupied by Protestant forces of the Republic of the Seven United Netherlands between 1580 and 1583, the statue of the Virgin fell victim to an act of iconoclasm and was removed. After the town was retaken by the Spanish army, the cult was restored in 1587 by the parishioners of Zichem. (This town is represented in the woodblock both by the striped coat of arms at the left end of the woodblock and the stag with the crucifix at the right end of the block, which refers to St Eustachius, the town's patron saint). By that time the site also had a strong appeal to Spanish soldiers who were wounded or infected by diseases. Via them, stories of miraculous healings spread all the way to France and the north of Spain. One of the people who benefited from these miraculous healings is represented centrally in the lower edge of the woodblock. Hans Clements—or Jean Clement as he is called on the woodblock (both names are derived from the Latin name Johannes)—, citizen of Lucerne in Switzerland, was born crippled. He traveled throughout the Netherlands on his knees, begging, until he arrived in Scherpenheuvel where the Virgin Mary finally answered his prayers and cured his disability.

The story about Hans (or Jean) Clements is one of the most famous miracles that happened in Scherpenheuvel in 1603 and 1604. It is extensively described

Michael P. Williams

Molly Des Jardin

Richard Griscom

Nancy Shawcross

Pushkar Sohoni

Simran Thadani

♣ **LINKS**

- [Penn's Apps on Tap](#)

- [Penn's Rare Books Cataloging Blog](#)

- [Penn Libraries Catalog \(New Franklin\)](#)

- [Penn's Rare Book and Manuscript Library](#)

- [DigitalPenn](#)

- [Penn in Hand](#)

- [Schoenberg Database of Manuscripts](#)

♣  **LATEST FROM PENNRARE**

- [Move Forward May 25, 2020](#)

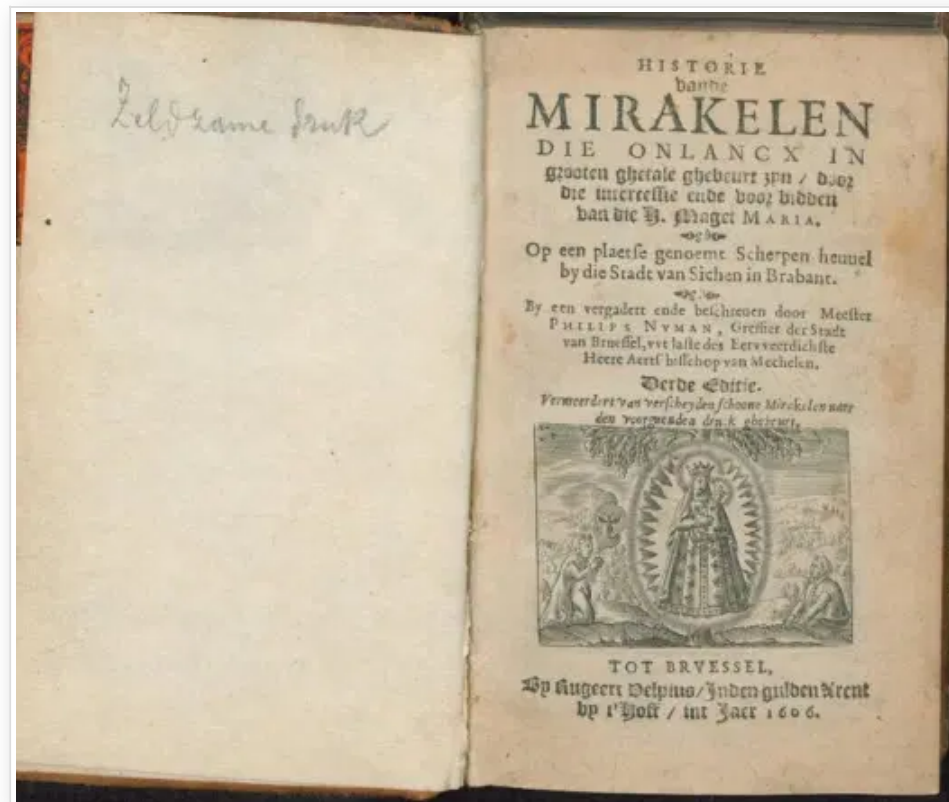
- [Lydia Sigourney's Rags and Ribbons May 20, 2020](#)

- [Musical Bridge May 18, 2020](#)

♣ **SUBSCRIBE TO UNIQUE AT PENN**



by Philips Numan (c. 1550–1627), humanist writer and town secretary of Brussels, in his collection of miracles ascribed to Our Lady of Scherpenheuvel: *Historie van de mirakelen die onlancx in grooten ghetale ghebeurt zijn door die intercessie ende voer bidden van die H. Maget Maria op een plaetse genoemt Scherpen heuvel by die Stadt van Sichen in Brabant* [History of the miracles that happened recently in large numbers by the intercession and mediation of the Holy Virgin Mary in a place named Scherpenheuvel near the city of Zichem in Brabant]. Numan collected the miracles by order of the archbishop of Mechelen, Mathias Hovius (1542–1620). The first edition was printed in Louvain by Rutger Velpius in 1604. The image below is taken from the third edition printed by the same printer in 1606. Besides the publication in Dutch, Numan wrote a French version for the local nobility and a Spanish one intended for the court. Not much later an English translation was printed (1606). A Latin version was published by the famous humanist Justus Lipsius (1605).



- The third edition of the *Historie van de mirakelen* (Brussels: Rutgeert Velpius, 1606). Copperplate engraving. Copy of the Heritage Library of the Ruusbroec Institute, Antwerpen, RG 3091 I 13. In the middle Our Lady of Scherpenheuvel is depicted in the same radiant aureole as can be found on the woodblock. She is accompanied by Hans Clemens to her right and Catherine du Bus, who is exclaiming the message of the devil.

The second great miracle is depicted in the lower left corner of the woodblock: there we see a woman on her knees, her arms spread while she expresses the message of the devil. The woman is identified as Catherine du Bus, a woman from Lille, France, who was able to speak Hebrew and Greek, although she never studied those languages, a clear sign that she was possessed by the devil. While being exorcized, she made predictions about the siege of the city of Ostend, which at the time was occupied by the Dutch rebels. During the process, which initially failed a number of times, the devil—in both the woodblock and the copperplate engraving he is pictured in a speech balloon—via Catherine’s mouth shouted to eyewitnesses that they were wrong in believing that the Spaniards would be able to win the siege. After eating a fragment of the oak tree of Scherpenheuvel, however, the devil was forced out, and on 22 September 1604 the Royal Spanish troops of Archduke Albert of Austria (1559–1621) took over Ostend, all thanks to the intervention of the Virgin of Scherpenheuvel.

Miracles like these established the fame of Scherpenheuvel as a pilgrimage site on a greater level than a regional one. In 1603, after they had heard that the Virgin had wept blood, the Archduke and his wife Isabella (1566–1633), who are depicted in the lower right corner of the woodblock (which is quite exceptional in devotional prints from Scherpenheuvel), visited the place for the first time and took it under their protection. In order to spread the devotion, books such as Numan’s and other devotional representations were mass produced. In the meantime a small wooden chapel was built for the statue of the Virgin in front of the oak in 1602. As we see in Velthem’s text, the worshipping of a tree was not much appreciated by the Catholic priests. Only two years later this wooden chapel was replaced by a larger, stone version. Likely it is this chapel that is depicted on the woodcut. In 1607 Albrecht and Isabella, out of gratitude for the expulsion of the Calvinists from the Southern Low Countries, decided that

Scherpenheuvel had to be transformed into a fully-fledged pilgrimage site. In order to stimulate this they commissioned the building of a new basilica as a symbol of the Counter Reformation. The foundation stone of this new church was laid by them on 2 July 1606, the Feast of the Visitation of the Virgin. It is usually this basilica, which still is the destination of many pilgrims to this day, which is represented on devotional prints from Scherpenheuvel such as the example below.



— Jean Clement and other pilgrims being healed by Our Lady of Scherpenheuvel, with the new basilica in the background. Printed by Johannes I van den Sande (1600–c. 1675), after 1620. Antwerpen, Ruusbroec Institute, Collection Alfons Thijs, KP 31.17.

This observation may help us in dating the woodblock. Contrary to the date of c. 1750 offered in the catalogue of Samuel Gedge Ltd. (from whom the Kislak Center acquired the piece) it is more likely that the woodblock is from a much earlier date. The fact that the woodblock does not depict the new basilica that was built from 1609 onwards (and consecrated in 1627), but instead the chapel that stood at the pilgrimage site before, indicates that the woodblock was produced in the short period between 1603/04, the years in which the miracles of Hans Clements and Catherine du Bus took

place, and 1609 when the chapel was torn down in order to replace it with the new basilica, or certainly before 1627 when the new basilica was consecrated. Given the fact that devotional prints such as this woodblock were intended to propagate the cult of both the Virgin and the pilgrimage town, it seems to make little sense that one would not depict the impressive new church on devotional prints after it was completed. Moreover, the striking similarities in iconography with the copperplate engraving in the third edition of Numan's *Historie* printed in 1606 as well as with a devotional print from 1602 and especially an approbation by the church on 17 November 1604 (see below) seem to support a dating in the first decade of the seventeenth century.

–Patricia Stoop



- Copperplate engraving by the Antwerp engraver and print publisher Adriaan Huberti (active between 1573 and 1614) from an ecclesiastical approbation (1604) showing Our Lady of Scherpenheuvel in the oak, the three miracles ascribed to her, and archduke Albrecht and his wife Isabella. Under the mandorla with Our Lady one can see the little stone chapel that is also

depicted at the woodcut. The coats of arms are those of Zichem (under the mandorla), Brabant (left) and the princess of Oranje-Nassau, the Lords of Zichem (right). Brussel, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, MS 20614, fols 2v–3r.

References

Bowen, K.L., *Marian Pilgrimage Sites in Brabant: A Bibliography of Books Printed Between 1600–1850* (Leuven: Peeters, 2008).

De Meyer, M., 'Een oude bedevaartprent van Scherpenheuvel', *Volkskunde: driemaandelijks tijdschrift voor de studie van het volksleven*, 55 (1954), 144–45.

Duerloo, Luc and Marc Wingens, *Scherpenheuvel: het Jeruzalem van de Lage Landen* (Leuven: Davidsfonds, 2002).

Duerloo, Luc, *Dynasty and Piety: Archduke Albert (1598–1621) and Habsburg Political Culture in an Age of Religious Wars* (London: Routledge, 2012).

Samuel Gedge LTD, *Catalogue xxv*, no. 20.

SHARE THIS:

Twitter

Facebook

RELATED

[Blue Skies to Red Seas](#)
In "Posts"

[Eastward Ho! The English Bible of Germantown's Founder Returns to Philadelphia](#)
In "Posts"

[Ann Perrin's album is far from commonplace](#)
In "Posts"

[← Previous post](#)

[Next post →](#)

LEAVE A REPLY

The conclusions and views presented on posts within "Unique at Penn" reflect those of their writers and do not represent the official position of the University of Pennsylvania or the University of Pennsylvania Libraries.

[Blog at WordPress.com.](#)