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Summary

In this study, Hendrik Herp's *Spiegel der volcomenheit* ('Mirror of Perfection', 1455–1460) and its transmission in manuscript and print are considered from the perspective of the late-mediaeval Franciscan Observance reform movement. The Franciscan Observance has never previously been studied as a literary movement in the Low Countries. In this respect, Herp's *Spiegel* is a gateway to understanding the influence of the Franciscan Observants – within the context of the broad fifteenth-century observance movement – on the late-mediaeval cultural and religious landscape of the Low Countries.

The *Spiegel* is the product of Herp's intellectual background and the religious developments of the time; the surviving manuscripts and printed versions of the text are what remains of its relatively rapid and wide dissemination. In order to discover more about the dynamics underlying the creation and distribution of the text, an innovative method has been used that combines two existing methods with a third, new method.

The chronology of the reception of a late-mediaeval work, described by Frits van Oostrom for Dirc van Delft's *Tafel van den kersten ghelove*, provides a foundation for interpreting the history and initial reception on the basis of Herp's biography and for approaching the distribution of the text in manuscript and print as a second reception phase. The notion of 'distribution circles', introduced by Daniel Hobbins in his study of the publication and dissemination of the work of Johannes Gerson, can be applied to this second phase – the dissemination of the *Spiegel*. The monasteries and convents, and the networks of the Franciscan Observants active in the Netherlands from the 1440s on, constituted one of the first distribution circles for Herp's *Spiegel*. The 15th-century Observance movement, of which the Franciscan Observance was a part, formed an international distribution circle of unprecedented size.

In order to be able to interpret the transmission of the *Spiegel* in terms of distribution circles, we first need to gather the relevant information. This involves looking at three determining aspects for the reception of a text in manuscript or print, namely the origin of the codex and the intellectual networks associated with it, the book as an entity in which the collected texts influence each other's functionality (*Mitüberlieferung*) and, finally, the material text. The term 'material text' refers not so much to the codicological aspects as to the presentation of the text written in ink (and its form in the material carrier). All this information makes it possible to analyse the distribution and reception of a late-mediaeval text, in this case Herp's *Spiegel*.

I Author and text

In Chapter 1, Herp's biography and the history of the *Spiegel* are presented in parallel. Herp's biography positions him as a Franciscan Observant. Initially, as rector of the Brethren of the Common Life, he was part of the Devotio Moderna movement, but in 1450 he joined the Franciscan Observance movement. A few years later, when he was guardian of the Observants' monastery in Mechelen, Herp wrote the *Spiegel* at the repeated request of a devout lady. From later sources we know that she was a benefactress of Herp's monastery. Herp certainly did not sit still after completing the text. He was involved in administrative matters and founding new monasteries, and in 1470 was eventually made provincial vicar of the Cologne observant province. Herp's life history is the backdrop to the study of the transmission of the *Spiegel*.

The way in which Herp fulfilled his spiritual daughter's request for a 'brief doctrine and instruction' (*corte leere ende onderwijs*) on how to lead a perfect life tells us that he did not write it only for her, but that he had a wider audience in mind from the outset: the *Spiegel* became a substantial text that Herp expressly made accessible to the laity as well as to members of religious orders. The well-structured manual guides the reader along the path that leads from the renunciation of all material things that bind the soul to this world to actual mystical ascension and access to union with God. For the sake of clarity, Herp wrote about the renunciation process (*sterven*, spiritual dying) separately from actual mystical ascension (union). He describes the renunciation process in the first part of the *Spiegel* (*XII Stervinghen*). Union with God is dealt with in the three ways of life that form the second part, namely *werkende*, *gheestelick schouwende* and *overweselick schouwende*, the active, contemplative and super-essential contemplative life. This separation meant that the text was flexible in use: the first part could easily be used separately or combined with other spiritual literature, as a 'passe-partout' text. Herp uses examples from monastic life; he sees them as relevant for laypersons too. He warns against the dangers of bodily asceticism and against Satan's attempts to deceive through visions. Preparation for mystical union is central in the *Spiegel*, and practices such as *toegeesten* (a form of ejaculatory prayer) play an important role.

II The earliest distribution

The broader reception envisaged by Herp is directly confirmed by the dissemination of the earliest surviving *Spiegel* manuscripts. These vestiges of the earliest transmission of the *Spiegel* show that, shortly after its completion, the text was being read in various places by readers from a variety of backgrounds. This chapter sets out two lines of study that are explored further in Chapters III and IV: first, the link between the dissemination of the *Spiegel* and Franciscan Observance and, second, the dissemination of the text in communities where observance played a role and in which the striving for strict observance of the Rule was supported by spiritual literature.

The first line is evident in the earliest dated codex containing the *Spiegel*. In this manuscript, Herp's mystic handbook was transmitted together with another text produced within the Franciscan Observance movement: *Vander kersten ewe*. This text, writ-

ten by a Franciscan Observant who has remained anonymous, is a practical guide to leading a good life. The combination of *Vander kersten ewe* with the *Spieghel* shows that Herp's work was immediately transmitted in the context of Franciscan Observance.

The second line is formulated on the basis of a *Spieghel* manuscript belonging to the Maastricht Tertiaries of Saint Michael and Saint Bartholomew, and a manuscript owned by the Carthusian monastery in Amsterdam. With their interest in religious literature and their silent way of life, the Carthusians played an important role in the fifteenth-century Observance movement. The Maastricht Tertiaries joined the reformist Chapter of Zeppenren. Jan de Test, their priest and confrere, copied the *Spieghel* as part of the library he was building. The Tertiaries were thus subject to various Observant spheres of influence: their own Chapter, influenced via the statutes by the Chapter of Utrecht, founded within the *Devotio Moderna* movement, and the Franciscan Observance. The role that literature played in the pursuit of strict observance that transcended the religious orders is explored in more detail in Chapter IV.

III The *Spieghel* and the Franciscan Observants

This chapter explores the relationship between the transmission of the *Spieghel* and the Franciscan Observance in terms of distribution circles. The growing network of monasteries and convents reformed or founded by the Franciscan Observants formed an infrastructure through which texts could be brought into circulation. The members of the religious orders often visited other monasteries and convents, and the regular Chapter meetings were an ideal opportunity for introducing new texts. As an important and active leader in the Franciscan Observance, Herp would have had a hand in the distribution of his mystical handbook.

The *Spieghel* manuscript from the Jericho monastery of the Canonesses Regular in Brussels is an accurate reflection of Herp's travels and administrative activities. In 1467, Herp founded a new Observants' convent, Boetendaal, in the Sonian Forest. From this year on there was contact between the Franciscan Observants and Jericho, and in the 1470s various Observants travelled from Boetendaal to Jericho to preach to the nuns. It is almost certain that the Franciscan Observants gave the *Spieghel* to the Canonesses Regular as an extension of their pastoral care. The sermons of the Observants, written down by the nuns, often contain themes that are also found in the *Spieghel*. This common discourse confirms that Herp's *Spieghel* is an Observance text. The interaction between the personal, verbal pastoral care and the literature that the nuns could read themselves (in the absence of their spiritual caretakers), is essential to the understanding of the transmission of religious texts.

In Tertiary communities where the Franciscan Observants were responsible for the spiritual welfare of the nuns, the *Spieghel* was read more frequently. At the St. Clara/Nazareth convent in Leiden and the Clara Convent at Hoorn, the Observants handed out the *Spieghel* to the women in their pastoral care. It is likely that Herp already had the increasing pastoral duties of the Franciscan Observants in mind when he wrote the *Spieghel*. They could use the text in various ways: in Leiden, the *XII Stervinghen* served as a framework text in a carefully compiled anthology of texts that was mainly intended for a female readership. In Hoorn, as in Jericho, the full text was conveyed to the women.

Once the Observants has distributed the *Spiegel* in a community, it soon reached other readers. The availability of a text in a convent or monastery enabled further dissemination to other nearby communities and laypersons. This is probably how a copy of the *Spiegel* came to be in the possession of the Tertiaries of St. Catharine at the Oude Hof in Alkmaar. This was the only community of Tertiaries belonging to the Utrecht Chapter from which a manuscript of the *Spiegel* has survived. The convent was located next to the Middelhof, where the Franciscan Observants were the pastors, and the Jonge Hof, which, as part of the brotherhood of Franciscan Observants, also maintained close contacts with the nearby Observants' monastery.

IV Literature and observance

The Franciscan Observance movement was not an isolated, separate phenomenon. In almost every religious order at the end of the fourteenth century and the beginning of the fifteenth century, a movement evolved advocating a return to the original Rule. The Carthusian Order, the members of which already led an exemplary life, had no need of reform and underwent the strongest growth in the fifteenth century. Other reform movements also evolved. These included the Devotio Moderna movement, which became increasingly institutionalised and monasticised as time went on. Communities adopted a stricter Rule and joined together in congregations to ensure effective supervision of their compliance with the stricter Rule. Observance had a slightly different meaning for the members of each order, but the pursuit of strict observance of the Rule was a strong common foundation that made cooperation possible between individual orders and congregations. Thus the Franciscan Observants were 'supervised' in this respect by other observants, and they assisted in the reform of communities outside their own order.

The intensification of pastoral care in these communities in order to support and internalise this new way of life was accompanied by a growing interest in spiritual literature. For pastoral caretakers, the distribution of literature was a means of supporting their pastoral duties. For the members of a community, literature led to a deepening of their inner life. The use of literature, like the Observance movement itself, transcended the various religious orders. Moreover, the presence of an Observant community also meant that local townspeople had greater access to literature. The unprecedented growth of spiritual literature in the vernacular lends the fifteenth-century Observance movement a dimension that is unique in comparison to other reform movements.

Herp's *Spiegel* and its distribution can be understood in this context. The fifteenth-century Observance movement functioned as an extensive international distribution circle for the text. The Middle High German translation was produced within the Dominican Observance movement, and the translation was disseminated in communities where reforms had been introduced. A similar pattern can be seen in the Low Countries, where the text was read and copied in communities that had moved from the Third Rule of St. Francis to the stricter Rule under the name of St. Augustine, in convents where the nuns found new inspiration to live according to the Rule that was already in place, in some cases inspired by becoming part of a Chapter.

The mysticism that Herp describes in his *Spiegel* aligned perfectly with the aims of the fifteenth-century Observance movement: the text familiarised readers with mysticism in a way that inspired confidence. It advocated caution with respect to visions and bodily ascesis, and focussed on the preparation for and practice of mystical ascension. The nature of the text minimised the risk of disruption to community life, and the introduction of observance made it possible to explore mystical aspects, and therefore mystical literature. Observance and/or the adoption of a strict(er) Rule was a legitimation of a particular way of life. The importance that authorities, and also individual townspeople, attached to strict observance reflects the level of awareness in society with regard to observance. An Observant community thus benefited society as a whole. The aim of observance was inner reform and the renewal of the Church according to the model of monastic observance. Texts such as Herp's *Spiegel* – suitable for the laity as well as members of religious orders – played a prominent role in this.

V The *Spiegel* in print

Certain aspects of the dissemination pattern of the *Spiegel* are even more evident with regard to the printed version. The *Spiegel* in print must be seen in the context of a much broader literature 'offensive' by the Franciscan Observants, for which they made use of the printing press. By seeking active contact with commercial printers, the Observants could now continue, on a large scale, the work they had begun with the transmission of the manuscript (i.e. their involvement in providing literature to laypersons and the members of religious orders); a single print run produced many copies instead of just one.

The first printed edition of the *Spiegel* appeared in 1501 in Antwerp. It was printed by the widow of Roland van den Dorpe. She was the first female printer in the Netherlands. Given the biographical information on Herp that she provides on the title page, and the contact between the Antwerp Franciscan Observants and other printers such as Gerard Leeu, it is likely that the widow had contacts with the local Observant monastery. Henrick Eckert van Homberch, the printer who reprinted the *Spiegel* in 1502 and 1512, also printed various other texts for the Franciscan Observants. The direct involvement of the Franciscan Observants in the publication of the *Spiegel* is not apparent until the edition of the Leuven printer Jan Waen in 1552. He included an introductory letter by the Franciscan Observant Adriaan van Mechelen of Brussels, who explicitly used the text in the fight against the Reformation. The Counter Reformation also sought the reformation of the Catholic Church, so the *Spiegel* continued to function in a context of reform.

The function of the *Spiegel* as a text that could support the personal equivalent of institutional reform is also evident from the surviving individual copies of the above editions. A number of copies are from the Beguine Convent in Diest, where Nicolaas van Esch introduced reforms in the sixteenth century. Other copies were in the possession of (religious) women, who read it individually or together. A number of copies are annotated in Latin, which shows that the printed *Spiegel* was also used by male readers, probably priests who heard confessions and monastic teachers. This confirms their role in the dissemination of texts.

VI The *Spiegel* reproduced

The fifteenth century was a period of great religious dynamism. There were many ways in which individual believers could adopt the Christian religion and participate in religious life. This diversity and pluriformity are also reflected in fifteenth-century observance: the overarching tenet could be put into practice in different ways. In addition, the intensification of pastoral care brought an unprecedented growth in spiritual literature in the vernacular, and these texts could themselves be used in an almost infinite variety of ways. On the one hand this was done through the format of the texts (material text), and on the other hand by combining them with other texts.

By studying these aspects at meta-level, the final chapter reveals the fifteenth-century diversity in the field of literature and the choice available to readers within the transmission of a single literary work. Herp's *Spiegel* signified an appropriation and adaptation of fourteenth-century mysticism to the fifteenth-century circumstances of mass religious participation, and a rapprochement between the monastic orders and the outside world. By subsequently presenting the *Spiegel* in a certain way and combining it with other texts, the text produced each time was adapted to a particular situation. A table of contents made it possible to select a chapter first, and initials and rubrics determined the extent to which the reader could navigate through the text and the way in which the structure of the *Spiegel* was interpreted. In Leiden, for example, parts of the *Spiegel* were combined with texts for female readers, and in Delft Sister Lijsbet copied the entire *Spiegel* with different titles, which highlight the functional character of the text in a (spiritual) reformation. A combination with texts designed for practical instruction emphasised the more practical, instructive aspects of the *Spiegel*; a combination with Ruusbroec's *Brulocht* emphasised the mystic dimension of the text and its relationship to older mystical texts.

Final remarks

Franciscan Observance, and 15th-century observance in the broad sense, was of fundamental importance in the development of late-mediaeval culture and literature in the Low Countries. The present study pays full attention for the first time to this neglected movement, according Herp's *Spiegel* the place it deserves in the history of literature. Considering the (Franciscan) Observance movement as a central element of fifteenth-century culture fundamentally alters our perception of the literature and reading culture of the time, and provides an important counterpart to the influence of the *Devotio Moderna*, enabling a more balanced evaluation of the developments in spiritual literature. We can take a more differentiated view of the period. The Franciscan Observants were actively involved in the provision of literature, wrote many new works aimed at readers from different levels of society who were engaged in different religious ways of life, and they were actively involved in the transmission of the texts. Within this context, Herp's *Spiegel der volcomeheit* fulfilled a pioneering role.