

An Analysis of an Unidentified Latin Manuscript in the Grinnell College Special Collections

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The manuscript



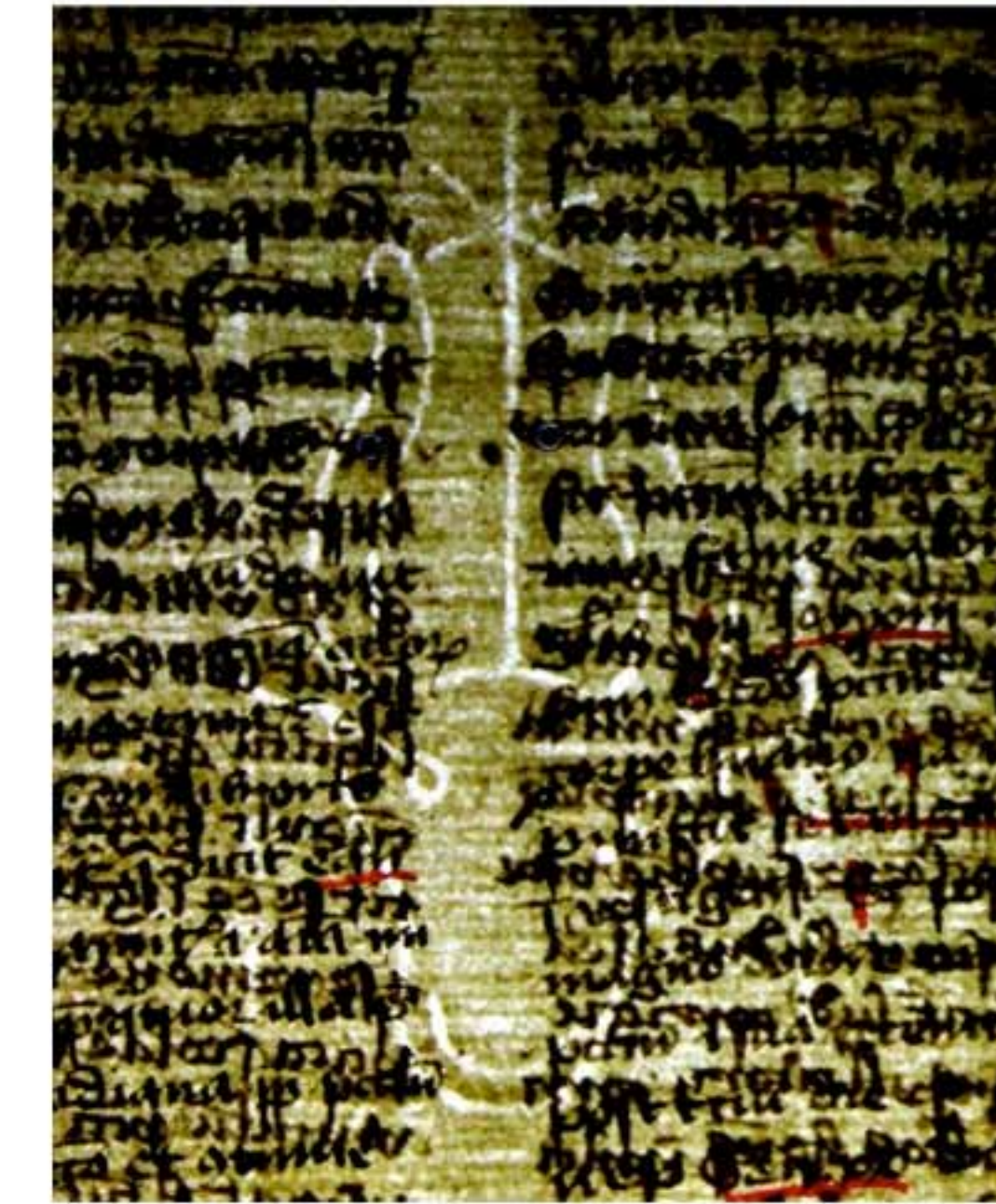
The project centers around a manuscript, called the *Codex Grinnellensis maior*, housed in the College Special Collections. Its journey from late medieval Europe to 21st-century Iowa is a mystery. Two wooden boards covered in pig-skin protect around 550 pages of text on paper, written out in several hands. The work is entirely in Latin and has been executed in a style of handwriting that is difficult for a modern reader to decipher. Because of these factors, the manuscript remains uncataloged and so is practically unknown to students, scholars, and specialists.

My questions

In approaching this manuscript, I formulated several questions that I wanted to attempt to answer through my work.

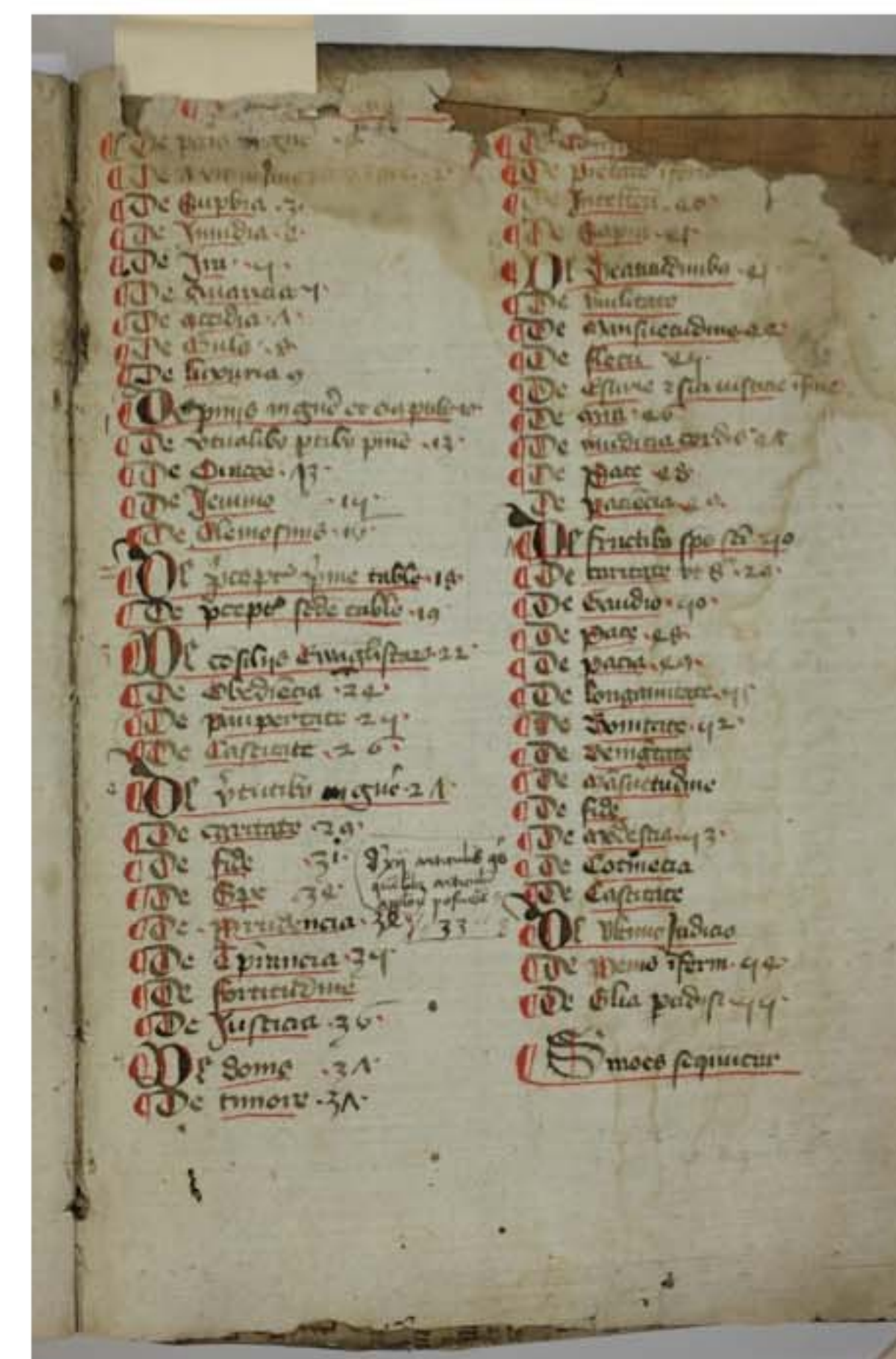
- where and when was the work carried out?
- why and for what type of reader was it created?
- what is the text, and is any of it unique to this manuscript, or was it all copied from an older work?

In the course of my research, I also wanted to make as thorough a report as possible on the contents of the manuscript, so that it can be properly cataloged and made accessible to researchers both on campus and worldwide.



The paper itself can give many clues about when and where the manuscript was created. Many papermakers employed watermarks to distinguish their products from others'. These have been closely studied by specialists since the 19th century and so there are numerous works on the subject that can help to provide places, dates, and sometimes names associated with a particular mark. There are at least four separate watermarks in the Grinnell codex, including a flower, two different bull's heads, and a she-dog.

How these questions are answered



Evidence from both the text and the book as an artifact assists in answering these questions.

The final leaf in the manuscript contains a table of contents - a rarity in such works - which lists subjects such as "on gluttony", "on charity", and "on the birth of the Virgin Mary", as well as the page on which they begin. I am using this table in conjunction with my page-by-page analysis to see how the titles and the texts themselves correspond. This also provides information about the types of texts included and who might have read and used them.



The style of handwriting and the types of abbreviations used can also provide information as to the date and place of production and the purpose of the work.

I am working to transcribe a sermon on the Beheading of John the Baptist to compare it to other copies of the text. By looking at how word order, the use of abbreviations, and other text-related specifics differ, more evidence for the conditions of production, and even for the "textual genealogy" (the descent of the original text to this one), may present itself.

Findings so far

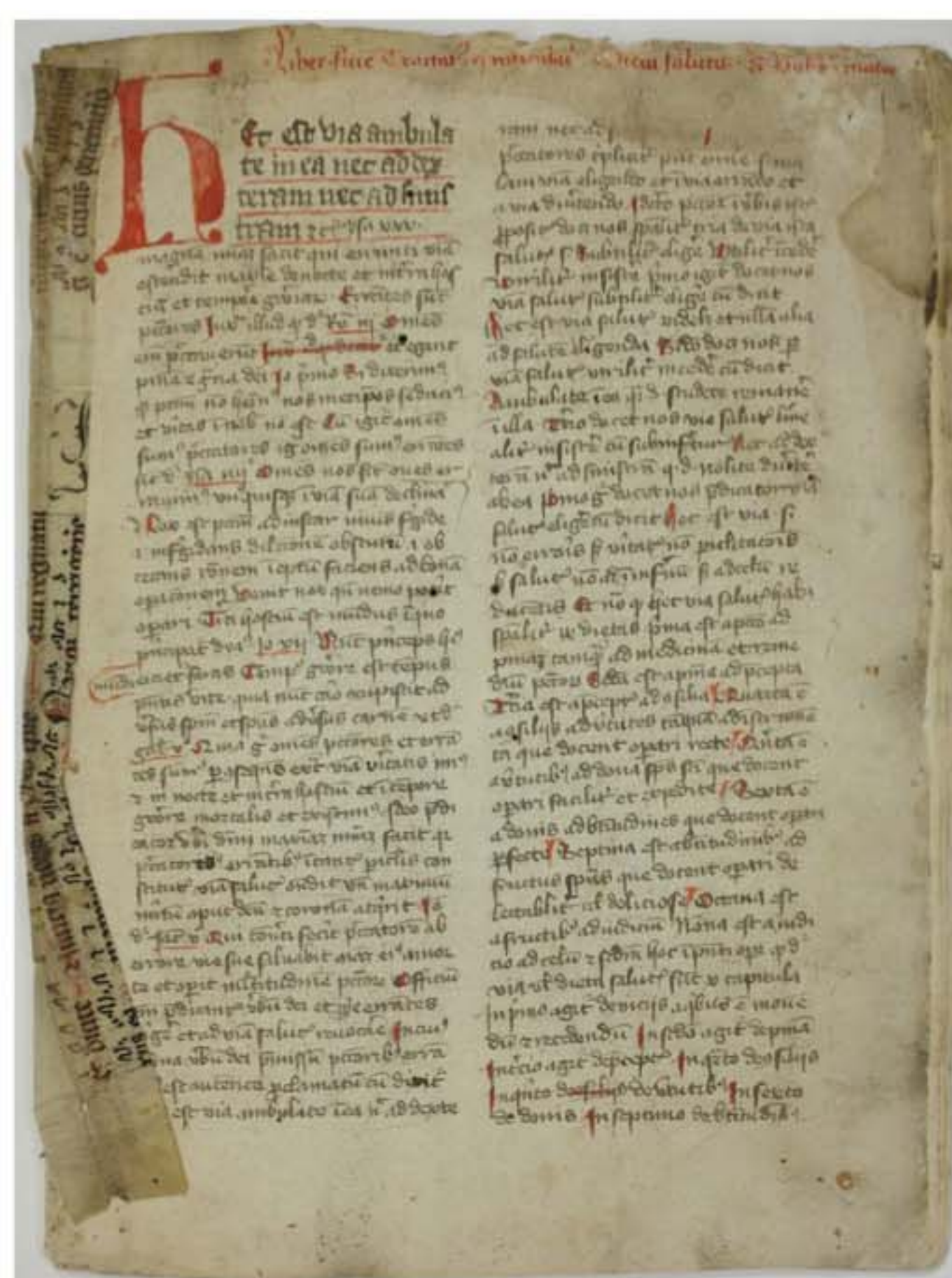


Looking at how the book was put together can also be helpful. If the portions of the text that are done in different hands correspond to the division of the gatherings of leaves that make up the work, then this could point to the manuscript's production in a workshop that employed several scribes to expedite the process.

A leaf from another manuscript written on sheep-skin has been pasted on the inside of each cover, containing a religious text accompanied by notation used in chanting. This pair of leaves appears to date from the late 14th or early 15th century, providing a date before which the main text can not have been produced. This earlier manuscript fragment could still give clues about the place of production of the codex.

In my research to date, I have determined that this manuscript was probably a work of the mid-15th century, perhaps executed in northern Germany. The materials that make up the book (paper, watermarks) and the handwriting point to this date and general geographical area.

The first 120 pages contain the *Dieta salutis* or *Way of salvation* by Guillaume de Lancia, a work on the vices, virtues, and many other religious topics. This is followed by numerous sermons on Christ, the Virgin, biblical events, and the lives of saints, as well as short prayers. Judging by the contents and the presence of a table for easy reference, there is a good chance that this book belonged to a priest, who may have used it in writing his own sermons.



I wish to acknowledge and thank Chris Jones of the Grinnell College Archives and Special Collections for his expertise in taking these photographs and editing them for me.