

Early modern code-switching between Latin and the vernacular: a Low German religious community investigated

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Kloster Lüne, Handschrift 15
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Texts from the edition: *Netzwerke der Nonnen. Kritische Edition der Briefsammlung der Lüner Benediktinerinnen* (Hs. 15, ca. 1460-1555), hg. von Eva Schlotheuber und Henrike Lähnemann, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2025. [Open access pdf](#). Diplomatic text and English summaries in the [Digital Library of the Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel](#). Cf. particularly the introduction on education and language.

Further reading: Chapter 3 (Education) and 4 (Love & Friendship) in: Henrike Lähnemann & Eva Schlotheuber: *Unerhörte Frauen. Die Netzwerke der Nonnen*. Berlin: Propyläen 2025 (paperback), or English: *The Life of Nuns. Love, Politics, and Religion in Medieval German Convents*, transl. by Anne Simon, Cambridge: Open Book Publishers 2024, [Open access html](#), [pdf](#), and [audiobook versions](#) <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0397>. Linguistic background Timo Bülters / Simone Schultz-Balluff, Codemixing in den Lüneburger Frauenklöstern, in: *Historisches Codeswitching mit Deutsch: Multilinguale Praktiken in der Sprachgeschichte*, ed. by Elvira Glaser, Michael Prinz u. Stefaniya Ptashnyk, Berlin / Boston: de Gruyter 2021, pp. 175–210.

Letter 212

Gertrud von Eltzen in Lüne Convent to Gertrud von Eltzen in Medingen Convent, after 1489, before 1496
The subprioress of Lüne writes to her relative and namesake in Medingen and asks after her health and that of their relative, presumably Lucia von Eltzen. She thanks her for the gilded devotional images. She sends money for the gloves which the Medingen abbess recently sent to the prioress of Lüne. She apologizes for her long silence towards the Medingen abbess and asks for the message to be passed on orally. She sends pickled fish and lets the abbess decide if she wants to share them with the recipient and her young relatives.

Lüne, Kloster Lüne, Hs. 15, Quire 16, fol. 9v. Latin and Low German.

Address and Greeting formula aligned with the liturgical season

Gertrud von Eltzen in Medingen

Fontem inundantis pietatis Jesum Christum, qui nobis in hoc vernali tempore paschalis iocunditatis reseravit vinarium sue suavitatis, pro salutatione condigna amicabilem vestre caritati premissum!

To Gertrud von Eltzen in Medingen

The fountain of overflowing mercy, Jesus Christ, who has opened to us in this springtime of Easter festivity the wine-cellar of his sweetness, as an appropriate greeting amicably sent in advance to Your Grace!

Health Update

Precordialissima N, *ik do caritati vestre fruntliken to wetende, dat ik, permittente divina bonitate Dei, byn in bona sospitate, idipsum affectere ik van juw unde van user leven amitem* Lucia von Eltzen *to wetende* tempore longo secundo beneplacitum divinum.

Most dearly beloved N, *I kindly inform your Grace that, thanks to God's grace, I am in good health and I hope to learn the same from you and our dear cousin* Lucia van Eltzen, as God pleases, for a long time to come.

Thanks for Previous Letters & Gifts

Ceterum, preamantissima amita, regratior vestre innate caritati pro multis et innumeris beneficiis, *sunderghen vor de groten lefmodicheyt, de gy my lest bewiseden* cum illis pulcherrimis foliis deauratis, in quibus manifestius declamastis fidele et benivolum cor vestrum cum caritate plenum,

dat is my noch nicht vorgheten, ik mud juw des dancken toto tempore vite mee, unde kan des ock nicht vorgheten quamdiu vixero, nam quotiens ea intueor oculis corporeis totiens mirum et inauditum gaudium experior interius, *unde darvan werd myn herteken sepius recreert,*

wente wan ik aliqua molestia vexcert byn ex multis occupationibus, *unde den illos principes gloriosos ansee, so lad ik my dunken, wo se my pondus totius meroris statim allevieren, unde darvan wert juwe leve jo m r unde meer aucmentert* in corde meo, *unde konde ik juw versa vice worane tho willen wesen, dat wolde ik ex toto corde gherne don,*

et nil opto aut desidero men allene, dat ik juw illam caritatem gruntliken opere mochte exhiberen, de ik cum stilo cotidie exprimere, quia secundum dictum beati Gregorii „Probatio dilectionis exhibitio est operis“, tam insufficientiam meam *wil ik admitteren* summo largitori omnium gratiarum, a quo omne datum optimum et omne donum perfectum descendit,

Moreover, most beloved cousin, I thank your in-born kindness / Grace for many and countless gifts, *especially for the great kindness you have recently shown me* with those beautiful gilded leaves in which your faithful and dear heart expresses itself with great love;

I have not forgotten this yet, rather I have to thank you all my life and I cannot forget it as long as I live, because as often as I behold them with my physical eyes, I experience a wondrous and unheard-of joy inside; *and from this my little heart is often revived,*

for when I am tormented by various burdens and tasks, *and then look* at those glorious princes, *it seems to me that they immediately relieve* the burden of my sorrow. And by this, your love is increased more and more in my heart; and if I could do something for you in return, I would do it with all my heart,

and I do not wish or desire anything, except to show you my love in many deeds, which I try to express in everyday style, just as blessed Gregory says: "The proof of love is the deed". Because of my imperfection, I will seek the help of the greatest giver of all grace, from whom come all good deeds and all perfect gifts.

de mote hunc intime caritatis affectum vorvullen unde juw causa mei geven tot et tanta gratiarum munera, quanta celum continet gaudia et arva profert flores et gramina, quatenus in hoc ameno tempore in novitate vite cum omnibus elementis ipsius gloriose resurrectionis congratulantis renovari valeatis homine in utroque, ut post huius vite transsitarie curriculo pervenire valeatis ad amena paradise gaudia.

Business

My karissima, ik sende juw ad presens dat gelt vor dat paar hanschen, dar reverenda dompna vestra venerande dompne nostre lest wede tho hulpe quam, unde we synt humiliter begherende, dat gy us leffliken excuseren jeghen ere werdecheyt, dat we dar so langhe wede tartert hebben,

hoc evenit ex multis innumeris occupationibus, dat we des nene mathe hebben konden juw aliqua to schrivende, vor so dorske we us des nicht presumen, dat we in se sulven hedden schreven, darumme dat id so langhe tyd vorgan iß, idcirco hebbe ik maximam fiduciam do juw unde lave certliken, dat gy dat causa nostri wol willen to gude maken unde er vivo stilo bed declareren intentionem nostram, wen we er konnen schreven hebben.

Gift

Ock sende ik juw pisciculos conditos unde nimium obnix, dat gy de willen don reverende dompne vestre ex parte nostra, dar schal se sick medeconfortert, Deo ad laudem, unde wel venerabilis caritas sua juw unde user lutken amiten Lucia von Eltzen wad van gheven, dat wil ik eius benivolentie ghansliken atmitteren, wente ik hebbe dat sepsissime uth juwen schriften vorstan, dat se juw materne et pie vor is in omnibus, darumme so dubitere ik dar nicht ane, quin vobis optime administrat quitquit acquirere potest.

Taking Leave

Nil plus.

Cum hoc valeatis in Jesu Christo sponso nostro, qui vos inebriet lacte suavitatis et dulcedinis in hac labili vita, ut post hoc satiari mereamini melle sue divinitatis in presentia sancte Trinitatis. Amen.

He may fulfil this intimate feeling of love and give you on my behalf as many and as great gifts of gratitude as the heavens contain joys and the fields bring forth flowers and grasses, so that in this time of renewal of life you may rejoice in the renewal of mankind in body and soul with all the elements of the glorious resurrection, so that after passing through this life you may attain the joys of Paradise.

Dealing

My dearest, I send you here the money for the pair of gloves with which your reverend Domina recently helped out our reverend Domina; we humbly request that you, Reverend, would kindly apologize to us for delaying this for so long;

that came out of an almost innumerable series of affairs, so that we had no rest in writing to you even briefly; therefore we have not dared to suppose that we could write to her ourselves, since it has been so long now; therefore, we place the utmost trust in you and believe that you can arrange our matter well for us and that you can explain our concerns better in a personal presentation than we could have written to you.

Exchange

We are also sending you candied fish and we kindly ask that you present them to your reverend domina as a gift from us for her to enjoy, praise God, and if your esteemed friend wants to give some of it to you and our young cousin Lucia von Eltzen, I would like to leave that entirely to her willingness, because I have often gleaned from your letters that she is motherly and faithfully in charge of everything; therefore I have no doubt that she will best distribute among you all that she can obtain.

and Sign-Off

Enough of it!

With this I bid you fare-well in the name of our Bridegroom Jesus Christ, who will make you drunk with the milk of sweetness and meekness in this mortal life, that afterward you may deserve to feast on the sweetness of His divinity in the presence of the Holy Trinity, Amen.

Letter 189

Nun from Kloster Lüne to a nun in a neighbouring convent. Friday after Jubilate, unknown year. Thank for letter of condolence

The sender expresses joy upon hearing that the recipient is in good health; she too is well. She offers heartfelt thanks for the many kindnesses received, especially for the consoling letter and the small devotional image, which brought comfort to her grieving soul. As a token of their bond, she sends a small basket of delicacies and preserved fish. Like Jonathan for David, she would gladly give her cloak, but since that is not possible, she sends one of her veils instead. She asks that it be received in the same love with which it was sent. May Christ add to it a bridal garment adorned with pearls and precious stones.

Lüne, Kloster Lüne, Hs. 15, Lage 15, fol. 6r. Latin and Low German.

Greeting formula aligned with the liturgical season

In paschalibus festis ex intimis precordiorum¹ affectibus exultare et iubilare ac resurgentem regem glorie cum omni creatura collaudare, reverenda ac religiosa domina, michi utique in prenominato rege glorie visceretina² dilectione preamanda!³

During these Eastertide with the deepest feelings of my inmost organs to exult, rejoice, and to praise the rising King of Glory together with all creation, honourable and devout Lady, beloved by me above all others in the aforementioned King of Glory with deepest affection.

Health Enquiry

Quoniam ex scriptis vestris favorabilibus sum certificata de statu vestre valitudinis, in hoc venerabilitati vestre⁴ congaudeo ex fundo cordis, et utinam, Deo largiente, talia per multorum annorum curricula audire possum; hoc foret michi non modica letitia, et idem notifico reverentie vestre de successu meo, quod annuente divino auxilio consisto in sospitate, reverenda et my preamanda domina.

Having been informed by your encouraging letters of your good health, I rejoice with all my heart and pray that, God willing, I may continue to receive such news from you for many years to come; this would bring me no small joy. Likewise, I share with Your Reverence that, by divine grace, I too am in good health, most honourable and deeply venerated lady.

Reference to Earlier Exchange

Quantas innumeras ymmo eximias grates teneor vestre venerabilitati exsolvere pro multis caritativis beneficiis michi totiens exhibitis penitus ignoro; non sufficio calamo exprimere nec verbis ullo modo declarare, maxime nunc pro littera vestra valde consolatoria michi una cum pulcherrimo folio destinata, unde anima mea turbata dulciter est recreata;

I cannot begin to express, neither with pen nor speech, the countless and overflowing words of thanks I owe Your Honour for the many loving favours you have so often shown me, especially now for your most comforting letter and the beautiful leaf you sent, which sweetly refreshed my troubled soul.

et hanc vestram missivam quam pro magno clenodio suscepi et cum lacrimatibus oculis preletitia legi atque relegi illam de verbo ad verbum, de sillaba ad sillabam et prenimia suavitate

I received this writing as a precious treasure and read it again and again with tear-filled eyes, overwhelmed with joy, word by word, syllable by syllable, and I cannot tire of it, so sweet is it to me. It

¹ The Latin term *praecordia* refers anatomically to the inner organs surrounding the heart, and more specifically to the diaphragm as the seat of breath. In medieval usage, it acquires a metonymic sense, denoting courage or deep emotional resolve. The spelling “precordia” reflects a common medieval orthographic simplification, where classical diphthongs such as *ae* are rendered as *e*. The prefix *prae-* serves as an intensifier, as in *praeamandus* (“exceedingly lovable”), a gerundive form derived from *amare* (“to love”).

² Adjektive derived from *viscera* (“entrails”).

³ Following the *ars dictandi*, each complete letter begins with a formal salutation. In the conventual context, this greeting is liturgically anchored, referencing the church calendar to provide both temporal and spiritual orientation.

⁴ In accordance with monastic protocol, the nuns employ the formal second-person plural in address and refer to one another using honorifics appropriate to their office, here, that of the prioress. The sender also refers to herself in the plural, a convention that underscores communal identity.

saturari non valeo, nam videtur michi, quasi oretenus cum mea precordialissima matre ac amita VGken⁵ sim locuta,⁶ *unde dat is my up myn herten kamen,*

wente reverentia vestra heft so meer de aldererste wesen, de my in his tribulationibus meis consolert heft, unde dat mut ik venerabilitati vestre beken-nen unde regracieren quamdiu vixero.

Quia secundum illud dictum vulgare: „Semper in tribulationibus et necessitatibus probandi sunt amici.“⁷ *Unde dat hebbe ik vullenkomen by juw bevunden.*

felt as though I had spoken in person with my most beloved mother and aunt, the dear V.G., and this deeply moved my heart.

For Your Reverence was the first to comfort me in my sorrow, and I must acknowledge and thank you for this for as long as I live.

As the vernacular proverb says: “In times of distress, true friends are revealed.” And I have experienced this fully in you.

Exchange of Gifts

Quit igitur nunc proinde reverentie vestre respondere queam, quod possit esse equivalens apud me, prochdolor non invenio,

uti libenter, karissime mee atque precordialissime unigeniken, (fol. 6v) darem pro xenio precioso, *alze reverentia vestra eget.*

Attamen pro inditio caritatis immense, qua anima mea conglutinata est anime vestre, veluti anima Jonathe conglutinata est anime Davidis et dilexit eum Jonathas quam animam suam, ita ego diligo vestram reverentiam in visceribus Jesu Christi,

in cuius testimonium transmitto venerabilitati vestre unam fiscellam cum apothecalibus et aliquos pisciculos conditos *dar scal sick* reverentia vestra *mede conforteren*, Deo ad laudem, michi ac aliis multis ad salubrem atque diutinam consolationem.

Et si foret michi possibile, quod ego tantilla possem me expoliare tunica nostra⁸ et reverentie vestre eam prestare, quemadmodum Jonathas fecit Davidis, hoc ex fundo cordis libenter facerem. Itaque, si non possum dare vestimentum, idipsum tamen, quod michi est possibile, non negligam reddere.

Sicque ad presens dirigo reverentie vestre unum velum, *den hebbe ik* ob vestri dilectionem *namen* de nostro capite, *unde sende juw den* in maxima caritate et peto obnixe, *dat gy den in der sulven leve willen recipieren, dar ik juw den anesende;*

konde ik reverentie vestre *darmede senden* queque salutaria anime et corporis ac meum

What I could offer in return to Your Reverence that would be worthy and within my means, alas, I cannot find.

Yet I would gladly give you, my dearest and most dearly beloved one-and-only, a precious gift befitting Your Honour.

But as a token of the immeasurable love with which my soul is bound to yours, just as Jonathan’s soul was bound to David’s, whom he loved as his own soul, so do I love Your Reverence in the innermost depths of Jesus Christ.

As a witness to this, I send Your Honour a small basket of remedies and some preserved fish, that Your Reverence may be strengthened thereby, to the praise of God, for my benefit and that of many others, and for lasting consolation.

And if it were possible for me, lowly as I am, to take off my garment and give it to Your Reverence, as Jonathan did for David, I would do so most willingly from the bottom of my heart. And since I cannot give you a garment, I will not fail to give what I can.

Therefore, I send Your Honour at this time a veil, which I have taken from my head out of love for you, and I send it with the greatest affection, earnestly asking that you receive it in the same love with which I send it.

⁵ The abbreviation “VG” refers to a nun from the convent of Walsrode who spent time at Lüne (cf. Letter 148), indicating a network of spiritual and epistolary exchange among North German women’s convents. The suffix *-ken*, appended to initials or names, functions as a Low German diminutive equivalent to the High German *-chen*. It marks familiarity and personal connection, often used for individuals known within the conventual network.

⁶ The phrase used to confirm the authenticity of a personal letter appears in other examples (e.g., Letters 215 and 223), serving as a standard epistolary device.

⁷ The proverb “Friends are tested in adversity” is cited in other letters (e.g., 13 and 44) and also appears in Latin in devotional texts, including multiple instances in Thomas à Kempis’ *Opera* (ed. Pohl, vol. 4, 1918, p. 80).

⁸ The phrase “our tunic” refers to the monastic use of “we”, see above, and also references the sender’s and recipient’s shared religious habit.

viventem cor, *wat ik dat gherne dede*, idcirco flagito, ne illud spretui habeatis.

Heavenly

Et ille imperialis belliger inclitus et gloriosus, qui in stola glorificati corporis sui preclarus atque formosus resurrexit de tumulo,⁹ *de mote* reverentie vestre ex parte mea *darto geven* vestem nuptialem gemine caritatis¹⁰ margaritis ac lapidibus preciosis intextam, *dar gy eme froliken inne moghen enjegen ghan*, dum nos ad celeste convivium invitaverit in hoc exilio,

scilicet in perceptione venerandi sacramenti, ac demum digne mereamini introire ad nuptias illas paschales,¹¹ ubi deliciae affluunt, ubi premia non deficiunt, ubi spirat odor cynamomi et balsami ac totius suavitatis, ubi electi (fol. 7r) ab uberibus consolationis sponsi immortalis saturabuntur et torrente voluptatis potabuntur, ibique contemplari mereamini facie ad faciem Dominum dominorum, in Syon celebrando cum omnibus electis paschalem sollempnitatem in secula seculorum.

Farewell

Nil plus etc.¹²

Cum his valeat vestra reverentia sana et incolumis in eo, qui pro nobis mortuus est et resurrexit, qui vos in hominis utriusque prosperitate ac salute corroboret ac confirmet temporibus longevis.

Raptim ex Lune sexta feria post lubilate.¹³

If I could also send Your Reverence a remedy for soul and body and my living heart, how gladly would I do so. I therefore beg you not to despise it.

Reward

And may that renowned and glorious imperial warrior, who rose gloriously and beautifully from the grave in the stole of his glorified body, grant Your Reverence in my stead the bridal garment of double love, embroidered with pearls and precious stones, in which you may joyfully go forth to meet him when he invites us to the heavenly banquet, here in exile,

through the reception of the venerable sacrament, and finally grant you worthy entrance to those Easter wedding feasts where joy overflows, where rewards never fail, where the fragrance of cinnamon, balm, and all sweetness wafts, where the elect are nourished from the breasts of the immortal Bridegroom's consolation and are refreshed by the stream of delight, and where you will be granted to behold the face of the Lord of Lords face to face, when you celebrate the Easter feast in Zion with all the elect, for ever and ever.

Greetings

Nothing further for now, etc.

With this, I wish Your Reverence health and well-being in him who died and rose again for us, who may strengthen and sustain you in well-being and salvation of both body and soul for a long time to come.

Hastily written in Lüne, on the Friday after Jubilate Sunday.

⁹ The image of Christ rising with the victory banner is the most frequent motif in the visual culture of the Lüneburg convents. Examples include the Lüne Easter Tapestry (1504–1508), the sculptural and painted decorations in the Wienhausen nuns' choir, and marginal illustrations in the Medingen Easter prayer books (cf. Kohwagner-Nikolai, *Per manus sororum*, 2006, pp. 367–375).

¹⁰ Die *gemina caritas* („Zwillings-Liebe“) findet sich schon bei S. Augustinus Hipponensis in ep. 109, §1, in: Augustinus von Hippo, *Epistulae*, hg. von Goldbacher, Bd. 2 (1898), S. 635.

¹¹ The letter concludes with a hymn-like passage that transitions into rhymed prose, a stylistic hallmark of devotional writing in the Lüneburg convents. See Henrike Lähnemann, *Reimprosa und Mischsprache*, in *Wolfram-Studien* (forthcoming).

¹² The phrase indicating the end of the letter due to time or space constraints is a standard epistolary closure.

¹³ „lubilate Deo omnis terra“ is the Introit for the third Sunday after Easter.

Letter 190

A Nun at Lüne Convent to Nuns at Ebstorf Convent, including a Relative of Gertrud von Eltzen, after 26 July 1497. Letter of Condolence

The sender begins by assuring the recipients of her good health and expresses her hope that the sisters at Ebstorf are likewise well. Her heart aches as she tenderly recalls the recipient and mourns the death of the subprioress of Lüne, Gertrud von Eltzen. Though all have been deeply affected by this loss, she acknowledges that Gertrud's relative must suffer most acutely. She recounts that since the reform of the convent at Lüne, she had never been apart from the subprioress for more than an hour. Even after Gertrud's death, she remained by her side and helped carry her to the grave. The pain of bereavement is compounded by her inability to offer the recipient adequate comfort. Yet, she reflects, grief ought to give way to joy rather than tears: Gertrud is undoubtedly now with Christ, who recognises the sorrow of those left behind and leaves them His mother as consolation.

Lüne, Kloster Lüne, Hs. 15, Quire 15, fol. 7r. Latin and Low German.

Greeting formula linked to the Letter Topic

Jesum Christum summum patrem familias, qui a principio plantavit paradysum voluptatis, pro suavi favorabilique salutamine!

Jesus Christ, the supreme head of the household, who from the beginning planted the paradise of delight, for a sweet and gracious greeting!

Health Enquiry

Precordialissime matres,¹⁴ utique michi in eodem nimium medullitus diligende, liqueat caritatibus vestris favente Dei clementia me sanam esse et incolumen, idipsum etiam a vobis totis precordiorum affectibus opto tempore utinam longo.

Most dearly beloved mothers, who are profoundly dear to me in Him, I am pleased to inform you, by the grace of God, that I am healthy and safe; and I wish the same for all of you, from the depths of affection of my innermost being, for a long time to come.

Expression of Grief and Affection

My preamantissime N¹⁵, cor meum penitus arsit et adhuc ardet ex flagranti desiderio intime et tenerime caritatis, quam gero ad vos tam ex motu proprii cordis, quam ob dilectionem precordialissime nostre Gertrudken von Eltzen¹⁶ felicitis recordationis, cuius felicissima anima celum perpetualiter possideat,

My most beloved N., my heart has been set ablaze and still burns with fervent longing from the deepest and tenderest love I bear towards you, both from the movement of my own heart and from affection for our most dearly beloved Gertrud von Eltzen, of blessed memory, whose most blissful soul may eternally possess the heavenly kingdom.

quam nos heu amisimus, unde conturbata sunt omnia interiora viscerum nostrarum, uti non dubito etiam de vobis, quia quidquid in memetipsa experior, hoc optime etiam agnoscere scio de vobis, *dat* dolor cordis vestri *nicht myn enis*,

Alas, we are missing her, wherefore the innermost fibres of our being are shaken, as I am sure it has yours, since whatever I feel within myself, I know with certainty applies to you as well, namely that the pain in your heart is not less than mine;

sed certe vobis est gladius biceps propter lineam consanguinitatis, qua vobis amore tenerimo fuit astricta.

indeed, it is surely a double-edged sword for you, bound to her by the tenderest love of kinship.

Idcirco quantum ego vobis condolui et adhuc condoleo, hoc novit ille, qui est scrutator cordium.¹⁷

How deeply I have mourned with you and still do, only He who searches hearts truly knows.

¹⁴ Die Pluralanrede an die Nonnen des Ebstorfer Konvents zeigt, dass auch persönlich formulierte Briefe grundsätzlich die Gemeinschaft mit einbeziehen.

¹⁵ Die Briefabschriften erfolgten von den Konzepten, bei denen die Adressatinnen nicht vermerkt waren, da die Konzepte als Modellbriefe für andere Trauerfälle gedacht waren.

¹⁶ Die Lüneer Subpriorin Gertrud von Eltzen war mit der Priorin Sophia von Bodenteich anlässlich der Klosterreform am 19. Oktober 1481 aus Ebstorf gekommen. Sie starb am 26. Juli 1496, Die Chronik, hg. von Stenzig (2019), S. 67; 83. Vgl. Brief 20 (Kondolenzschreiben) und Brief 147 (Trauerbrief).

¹⁷ Zu Christus als Erforscher der Herzen vgl. Ps 7,10. Vgl. 1.Par 28,9; Sap 1,6; Rm 8,27; Apc 2,23.

Reference to Previous Communication

Et licet scriptis vobis tunc temporis minime exhibuerim, | fol. 7v | tamen totum cor meum fuit vobis annexum vinculo indissolubili sincere caritatis, et eadem caritas semper urgebat vel compellebat me arripere stilum ex illo tempore, sed, fateor, amaritudo amarissima totidem retraxit et semper prevaluit – nec myrum. Nam ablatum est totum meum temporale solatium, quod pre cunctis terrigenis dilexi velud animam meam propriam, et ultra quam credi potest, *unde se was* vere, vere dimidium anime mee¹⁸ et post Deum tota spes et consolatio mea, *dar ik* refugium *to hadde* in quovis momento, tam in prosperis quam in adversis, etiam sine intermissione. Nam a principio reformationis nostre usque in horam mortis sue *vorled ik se nu so lange* ad spatium unius hore, etiam adhuc post mortem *bleff ik by er, wente dat ik nicht lenger konde, unde droch se sulven* ad locum sepulture.

Unbearable Pain and Consolation

O karissima, illud iaculum acerbissimum, quod tunc transfixit penetralia cordis mei, *do ik se scholde unde muste vorlaten, dat is my noch so versck* quasi hesternae die fuerit infixum, *unde ik kan des spade vorgetten*, etiam nequaquam scriptis valeo explicare, *wo my dat annekomen is*, sed hoc soli Deo constat, *unde dat ik juw do so consolabiliter nicht wesen konde, alze gy wol eget hedden, dat was my eyn sunderick pyne* in corde super omnia. Et quamvis hucusque obitus care nostrae nos turbavit, *so hebben wy doch* causam magis gaudendi quam flendi, quia eam ad regna caelestia premisimus, scilicet de labore ad requiem, de dolore ad consolationem, de languore ad impassibilitatem. Et quali fine ad patriam perrexerit, *dat ik dat scholde scriven*, tunc esset cor meum durius adamante, quia exitus eius et felix finis *wert* in nostro monasterio *nummer ane tranen averdacht, wente allent, dat se* in vita sua affectert *hadde, dat gaf er* pius et dulcis Jesus Christus plenariter, ultra quam credi potestis, *dat se nu* | fol. 8r | *wedder toch*, sed adhortavit viriliter venerabilem dominam et nos omnes, *dat wy se io scolden myd vrouden Domino Deo offereren unde er des gunnen, dat se* toto cordis desiderio *so lange begert hadde unde van eme beden hadde* noctibus et diebus.

Even though I did not show it in writing to you at the time, my whole heart was bound to you by the indissoluble bond of sincere love. That same love always urged me to take up the pen, but I confess, the bitterest sorrow held me back and always prevailed—and no wonder. For I lost all my earthly comfort, whom I loved above all others as my own soul, and even more than can be believed. She was truly half of my soul and, after God, my entire hope and consolation, my refuge in every moment, in joy and in sorrow, without interruption. From the beginning of our convent's reform until the hour of her death, I was never apart from her for more than an hour. Even after her death, I remained by her side until I could no longer, and I carried her myself to her grave.

O dearest one, that most bitter dart which pierced the depths of my heart when I had to leave her still feels as fresh as if it happened yesterday. I cannot forget it, nor can I express in writing how it struck me—only God knows. That I could not offer you the comfort you surely expected was a particular pain in my heart above all else. And although the death of our beloved has troubled us until now, we have more reason to rejoice than to weep, for we have sent her ahead to the heavenly kingdom—from toil to rest, from sorrow to consolation, from frailty to immortality. If I were to write of the manner in which she entered her eternal home, my heart would have to be harder than diamond, for her passing and blessed end are never recalled in our convent without tears. Everything she longed for in life was granted to her fully by the gracious and sweet Jesus Christ—more than you can imagine. She took this with her, but first she exhorted the venerable prioress and all of us with strength, that we should offer her to the Lord with joy and grant her what she had long desired with all her heart and had prayed for day and night.

¹⁸ Ein Freund als 'Hälfte der Seele' findet sich bei Horaz in einem Gedicht über Vergil (Carmen 3,8) und wird von zahlreichen Autoren genutzt, z.B. schreibt Augustin in den *Confessiones*, Buch IV, Kap. VI,22: *mirabar enim ceteros mortales vivere, quia ille, quem quasi non moriturum dilexeram, mortuus erat; et me magis, quia ille alter eram, vivere illo mortuo mirabar. bene quidam dixit de amico suo: dimidium animae suae.* (Ich wunderte mich, dass andere Menschen weiterlebten, da doch jener gestorben war, den ich geliebt hatte, als würde er nicht sterben. Und noch mehr wunderte ich mich, dass ich selbst lebte, da er, der wie ein zweites Ich war, tot war. Einer hat gut gesagt über seinen Freund: ‚die Hälfte seiner Seele‘.)

Heavenly Reward

My precordialissime, hoc scribo vobis tantum pro consolatione, *wente ik late my des dunken, id si my magnum levamen, wan id dyt averdencke, dat id my io* aliquantulum tristitiam meam *mitigert; wente heft* ille piissimus Jesus Christus *er so grote* beneficia *bewiset* in vita, *so wil ik dar nicht inne dubiteren*, quin multa maiora reservavit anime sue in patria; *unde dar gevet juwe herteken up* ad pacem: *se heft hir* per Dei gratiam *wesen dilecta* Deo et hominibus *unde is nu* sine dubio *annumerert* choris angelicis, ut accepit premium laboris, quod hic promeruit, *unde dat wil wy er myd vrouden gunnen*. Et ille, qui est merces omnium sanctorum, *de wel juw ock* premium vestrum *wol reserveren* eo, quod pro gloria nominis sui tam caram et dilectam filiam hic misistis in exilium,¹⁹ et certe reddet vobis vicissitudinem tam hic quam in futuro, quia sibi valde gratum sacrificium extitit, *dat gy se avergeven hebbet unde sint eme darinne navolgen*, sicut ipse amore nostri in hoc exilio reliquit suam dilectissimam matrem toti mundo ad solatium,²⁰ que post eius recessum tunc erat privata omni humano solatio, et nunc est certa spes et tutum refugium desperatorum et miserorum ac solamen omnium ad se confugientium, *de heft he us to troste laten*, ad illam piissimam matrem confidenter accedere; *se bekent* optime amaritudinem cordis vestri et scit vobis compati; *se is* plena gratia et dives in misericordia, quia nullum despicit, nullum repellit, sed omnibus desolatis et tribulatis sinum maternum aperit²¹ dicens: „Transite ad me“ etc. | fol. 8v | In quibus verbis promittit nobis consolationem scilicet „a generationibus meis adimplemini“,²² quod est Christus Jesus, *dar vinde gy inne* omnem consolationem *unde allent wes gy begert* in anima et in corpore, quia omnes vene misericordiarum suarum *stad jegen juw open* et redundant pietate et consolatione, *dar wise ik juw hen*, vere aliud refugium nescio nec in celo nec in terra, *unde de mote juw geven* de abyssu sue infinite misericordie vinum merum sue divine consolationis, mustum interne dulcedinis ac balsamum superaffluentis gratie, *dar gy juwe bittere bedrovede herteken* in

My most dearly beloved, I write this solely for your comfort, for it seems to me a great relief to reflect on it—it softens my sorrow somewhat. If that most merciful Jesus Christ bestowed such great blessings upon her in life, I do not doubt that He has reserved even greater ones for her soul in heaven. Therefore, let your hearts be at peace: here she was, by God’s grace, beloved by God and mankind, and now she is undoubtedly numbered among the choirs of angels, receiving the reward for her labours which she earned here. Let us grant her this joyfully. And He, who is the reward of all saints, will surely reserve your reward as well, for you sent such a dear and beloved daughter into this exile for the glory of His name. He will repay you both now and in the future, for it was a sacrifice most pleasing to Him that you gave her up and followed Him in doing so—just as He, out of love for us, left His most beloved mother in this exile as comfort for the whole world. After His departure, she was deprived of all human consolation, and now she is the sure hope and refuge of the despairing and afflicted, and the comfort of all who flee to her. He left her to us for consolation, that we may approach this most merciful mother with confidence. She knows well the bitterness of your hearts and shares in your suffering; she is full of grace and rich in mercy, for she rejects no one, despises no one, but opens her maternal embrace to all who are desolate and troubled, saying: “Come to me,” etc. In these words she promises us consolation: “Be filled with my offspring,” which is Christ Jesus, in whom you will find all comfort and everything your soul and body desire. All the veins of His mercy are open to you and overflow with compassion and consolation. To this I direct you, for truly I know no other refuge in heaven or on earth. May He grant you from the abyss of His infinite mercy the pure wine of His divine consolation, the must of inner sweetness, and the balm of overflowing grace, so that your bitterly sorrowful hearts in this exile may be refreshed, nourished, gladdened, and comforted, until all your sorrow is turned into joy,

¹⁹ Das Bild von den ehemaligen Ebstorfer Nonnen, die ins Exil pilgern gegangen sind, kommt häufig vor, z.B. Brief 227 oder 346.

²⁰ Gemeint ist: Die Kommunität von Ebstorf hat sich von Gertrud Eltzen damals (1481) getrennt und sie (zum Wohle der Klosterreform) dem Kloster Lüne überlassen, so wie Christus einst seine eigene Mutter zum Trost der Christen auf der Erde zurückgelassen hat.

²¹ Vgl. das Marienlob bei Pseudo-Albertus Magnus, *De laudibus beatae Mariae*, Buch 4, Kap. 23, vollständig zitiert in Brief 146.

²² Die auf Maria übertragenen Worte der Weisheit, Sir 24,26, Responsorium zur Matutin am zweiten Sonntag nach Ostern: *Transite ad me, omnes qui concupiscitis me et a generationibus meis adimplemini*, Cantus ID 006633 (Kommt zu mir, alle, die ihr nach mir verlangt und ihr werdet von meinen Nachkommen erfüllt); damit begrüßt auch Maria in mittelalterlichen Theaterstücken die klugen Jungfrauen.

hoc exilio *mote van vorqwicket, lavet, vrouwet unde trostet werden*, ita, ut omnis tristitia vestra mutetur in gaudium,²³ *so lange dat gy komet ad patriam, dar gy totum fontem inexsuperabilis caritatis*, unde potantur omnes electi,²⁴ *vinden moten in plena perfruitione, dar moten van sadiget werden ante speculum sancte Trinitatis*.

and you reach your true homeland, where you will find the entire fountain of unsurpassable love, from which all the elect drink in full enjoyment, and where you will be satisfied before the mirror of the Holy Trinity.

Final Blessing

Et cum hoc commendo vos prenominato sponso nostro, qui rore sue misericordie irrigare dignetur corda vestra merore et tristitia arida, ut inde virescere ac florere mereamini in salute et sospitate hominis utriusque temporibus longevi. Amen.

And with this, I commend you to our aforementioned Bridegroom, who may deign to water your hearts, dried by sorrow and grief, with the dew of His mercy, so that you may flourish and bloom in health and wellbeing for a long time to come. Amen.

²³ Aus den Abschiedsreden Jesu im Johannesevangelium, Io 16,20.

²⁴ Pseudo-Bernhard von Clairvaux, Liber sententiarum, Nr. 81: *Quinque sunt torrentes [...] iucunditatis et laetitiae, quo potantur electi*. (Fünffach sind die Ströme...des Jubels und der Freude, von denen die Erwählten trinken).