

HENRICUS SUSO, *L'horloge de sapience*; JEAN GERSON, *La Mendicité spirituelle* (part), *La Pitieuse complainte*, and Sermon; devotional text in French  
In French, decorated manuscript on parchment  
Northern France or the Loire Valley, c. 1440-1460

ii (paper, i recto glued to marbled paper) + 264 + ii (paper, ii verso glued to marbled paper) folios on parchment (high quality, even, white and thin), modern foliation in pencil top outer corner recto, lacking three folios at the beginning, otherwise complete (i<sup>s</sup> [-1 through 3, with loss of text, + one leaf, f. 1, later replacement] ii-xxxiii<sup>s</sup> xxxiv<sup>2</sup>), horizontal catchwords lower margin to the right of center, trimmed in a few quires, leaf and quire signatures remain in quire eleven, with a letter designating the quire and a roman numeral the leaf, ruled in red ink with the top two lines full across and single full-length vertical bounding lines (justification, 152-148 x 105-104 mm.), written below the top line in an accomplished bâtarde script in thirty long lines with decorative ascenders and descenders and cadel-flourishes, f. 1, modern calligraphic title page (added), majuscules in text carefully touched with pale yellow, red rubrics and paragraph marks, red and blue bar line-fillers with white tracery and gold balls, approximately forty five- to two-line gold initials (most five- or four-line), outlined in black, alternately filled with blue or red, on grounds of the contrasting color which follow the shape of the initials, all embellished with white tracery, in excellent condition apart from cockling, most folios white and pristine, f. 252, stained in the bottom margin. Bound in 18<sup>th</sup>-century mottled calf over pasteboard probably in Germany, yellow and blue head- and tail-bands, edges dyed red, marbled endpapers and pastedowns, elaborately gold-tooled spine with five raised bands, and red label, "Horloge de Sapience MS," and added paper label, "LB 139," in very good condition apart from wear at the edges. Dimensions 228 x 154 mm.

This handsome manuscript includes the French translation of the celebrated devotional text, the "Clock of Wisdom" by the Dominican mystic, Henry of Suso. Copies of this text are seldom available on the market; the French translation is especially rare; only this manuscript and one sold at Sotheby's, 25 November 1969, lot 470, are recorded in the last fifty years. Including shorter texts by the reforming French chancellor, Jean Gerson, the codex demonstrates the importance of devotional texts in the vernacular to the religious life of the laity in fifteenth-century France.

## PROVENANCE

1. Written in Northern France or the Loire valley in the middle of the fifteenth century, c. 1440-1460, judging from the script and the style of the initials. In all respects, this is an excellent example of the high-quality manuscripts of vernacular texts copied for the upper echelons of French society in the fifteenth century, including the nobility, the court, and possibly wealthy merchants and their wives. Hallmarks of these manuscripts, well-exemplified here, are the use of an accomplished, decorative bâtarde script with flourishes and cadel-initials, very fine parchment, and in this case, competent gold initials (many manuscripts of this type, of course, are more elaborate productions, known for their illuminations, and it is possible that this manuscript once began with an illuminated page, now missing; in its place is an inserted leaf with a modern calligraphic title page).

This French translation of a very popular Latin devotional text, together with French texts by Jean Gerson, demonstrates the flourishing vernacular religious culture in fifteenth-century France. Interestingly, Brussels, Royal Library, MS IV.111, probably

the most famous copy of the *L'Horloge de Sapience* because of its extensive cycle of illuminations (studied by Spencer, 1963, and Monks, 1990), which is contemporary with the manuscript described here, also includes additional devotional material, including numerous texts by Gerson.

2. The manuscript was in Germany by the eighteenth century (date of the present binding).
3. Belonged to Joost R. Ritman (b. 1941), Amsterdam, the Dutch businessman and distinguished collector of art and books, who acquired it from Sotheby's, 1 December 1987, lot 35; Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica MS 102 (pencil notes, back flyleaf, f. 11); briefly described in *Medieval Manuscripts in Dutch Collections* (Online Resources).

## TEXT

ff. 1-246v, //La loy est es cuers de plusieurs testament reffroidie ... vous sa doctrine du saint esperit. [f. 5, first initial] Assavoir est que ceste matiere ou maniere de parler entre sapience et le disciple fut ... [f. 7, chapter one], *Cy commence le premier chapitre ou quel il est parle comment les enfans et les esleuz de la diuine sapience sont trais a dieu merueilleusement et comment lactuer de cest liure fut trais en sa ieunesse. Le premier liure ou chapitre de cest liure, incipit, "Hanc amaui et exquesivi a iuentute mea ..."; f. 155, Cy commence le second liure qui traictie de la matiere de la diuersite des doctrines et de plusieurs diuers escoliers, incipit, "Sapienciam antiquorum. Jadiz fuit ung disciple qui souuerainement desiroit a la congnoissance de sapience ... Et a la fin ma gloire en la quelle ie regne avec mon pere et le saint esperit de siecle en siecle pardurable. Amen. Cy finist le liure de lorloge de sapience;*

Henricus Suso, *L'Horloge de sapience*, the French translation of the *Horologium sapientiae* by an anonymous Franciscan master of theology, who was a native of Lorraine, and a member of the convent of the Observance in Neufchâtel; there is no critical edition of the French text, which was printed in Paris by Antoine Vérard in 1493 and 1499, in two further editions (without date), and in 1530 (Künzle, 1977, pp. 255-258). Critical edition of the Latin text by Künzle, 1977, who lists 233 extant manuscripts, and a further eighty-eight, now lost, and 150 including extracts of various lengths (pp. 105-214, 229-49); the French translation survives in at least sixty-five manuscripts, not including this one (Ancelet-Hustache, 1966, listing fifty manuscripts and Künzle, pp. 253-4, listing an additional fifteen). Modern English translation by Colledge, 1994, as *Widom's Watch Upon the Hours*.

ff. 247-250, *Ensuit vne deuote meditacion de lame qui de pechie veult retourner a lestat de grace par la consideracion de la mort et des penies denfer. Et premierement lame comme toute espouentee pense en parlant a elle mesmes et disant ce que sensuit, incipit, "Qui sera mon loial amy mon feable secours a mon derrain besong a la destroicte heure de mon departement de mon corps ... de chascune parole oiseuse";*

Jean Gerson, "Meditation de l'ame qui pense a son departement du corps," from his *La Mendicité Spirituelle*; ed. Glorieux, 1966, 7.1, pp. 269-72; the text in this manuscript departs from the printed edition at the end; text is edited in Glorieux as part of no. 317 (*La Mendicité spirituelle*), listing twenty-nine manuscripts; see also no. 319a, noting its circulation as an independent text in nine manuscripts; Sinclair, 1988, no. 6499 lists four manuscripts (and notes that this is not a

complete list). The text is a lengthy prayer or "meditation" on death, written from the point of view of the soul at the moment when it leaves the body.

ff. 250-253, *Ensuit vne deuote meditacion en forme de oroison pour lame qui est contrite et repentant. Et veult retourner a dieu en grant compunction de cuer*, incipit, "Ihesus vray espoux de virginite. Ihesus de chastete loyal amy ... ie te puisse et pardurablement adourer et cherir. Amen. Deo gracias.

Jean Gerson, "La Pitieuse complainte," a prayer composed c. 1399 or 1400 for his sisters, and then incorporated into *La Mendicité spirituelle*; ed. Glorieuex, 1966, 7.1, no. 315, pp. 213-16; Sonet, 1956, p. 180, no. 998, and updates (Sinclair, 1978, Sinclair, 1987, and Rézau, 1986), listing eleven manuscripts, including the famous illuminated *L'horloge de sapience*, Brussels, Royal Library, MS IV.111, ff. 226-7 (Spencer, 1963 and Monk, 1990) but not including this manuscript.

ff. 253-254, *Ensuiuent huit tres deuotes consideracions por la persone qui desire contempnez le monde et aimer dieu*, incipit, "La premiere que on vest venu de tres ville et orde matiere puante ... et de bon cuer et humble seruiront dieu";

Not identified in Sonet, 1956 or its updates (Sinclair, 1978, Sinclair, 1987, and Rézau, 1986), or in Sinclair, 1979, 1982, 1988, but the language is reminiscent of Gerson's (compare, for example his "Neuf considerations ou avis pour la conduit chrétienne," written c. 1396 (Glorieux, 1966, no. 292).

ff. 254-264v, *Ensuit vng tres deuot sermon en bortant a contempner le monde et a prier uolentiers pour les trespases*, incipit, "Beati qui lugent mathei quinto [Mt. 5.5]. Dit ce theume. Ceulx sont bienheureux qui le cuer ont douloureux ... icelluy qui est benedictus in secula seculorum. Amen."

Jean Gerson, Sermon for All Soul's Day, 2 November 1401, "au peuple de St. Severin"; ed. Glorieux, 1968, 7.2, no. 344, pp. 549-560, listing twelve manuscripts; see also Mourin, 1946. In keeping with the other texts by Gerson included here, this sermons stresses the rejection of the world.

This manuscript, and others like it, is a concrete manifestation of the popularity of vernacular religious texts in fifteenth-century France among the men, and importantly, the women, at the highest levels of society – the court, the nobility, and probably also wealthy merchants. The same patrons who sponsored translations of Latin classics and historical texts were eager to read not only contemporary devotional texts such as this one, but also the Bible in their own language. The *Horologium sapientiae* was the only contemporary work included among the books Geert Grote (1340-1384) recommended as essential reading to his followers. It is interesting to compare many of the humble copies of this text in Latin and Dutch with elegant French copies such as the manuscript described here, or the richly illuminated Brussels *L'Horloge de Sapience*.

Henricus Suso (c.1295-1366), or Heinrich Seuse, was a German mystic and Dominican friar, honored with the titles "Prince of mystic theologians" and "Angelic mystic." Following his early studies at the Dominican Convent in Constance, he studied at the Dominican *studium generale* in Cologne, where he came under the influence of Meister Eckhart, whose writings he was later to defend against charges of heresy. Suso experienced visions of God from a young age, and his writings which explore the mystical experience remain his most important legacy. During his

lifetime, he was also known as a popular preacher. At first harshly ascetic, he gradually emphasized detachment rather than mortification as central in the Christian discipline. His mysticism was expressed in terms of the contemporary literary romantic cult of the minnesingers (explaining his epithet, "Sweet Suso"). He was beatified in 1831. In addition to sermons and letters, his most important works are those that are known as the *Exemplar Seuses* – an autobiography, *Das Büchlein der Wahrheit* ("Little Book of the Truth"), and *Das Büchlein der ewigen Weisheit* ("The Little Book of Eternal Wisdom") – , and the *Horologium sapientiae* ("The Clock of Wisdom").

The *Horologium sapientiae*, here in the French translation, *L'horloge de sapience*, is dedicated to Hugo de Vaucemain, allowing us to date the prologue between 1331 and 1341, probably c. 1334, while Hugo served as master general of the Dominicans; the work itself may be a few years earlier, c. 1330. Throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries it was tremendously popular text, surviving in hundreds of manuscripts in Latin and in translations in French, Dutch, and English, as well as in other languages. The French translation was completed in 1389 by an anonymous Franciscan master of theology, who was a native of Lorraine, and a member of the convent of the Observance in Neufchâtel.

Written as a dialogue between Wisdom (*Sapientia*) and her disciple, the author, the *Horologium sapientiae* is thus in part a semi-autobiographical account for laymen and novices of Suso's own mystical experiences. The text tells of his devotion to Wisdom (Christ, the Bride in the Song of Songs, and other manifestations of the Divine) in a manner that echoes a knight's devotion to his lady, with love guiding all of his actions, and with their betrothal his aim. The clock in the title reflects the guidance exercised by Wisdom on her disciple (Ford, 1990, volume 2, p. 367), and is also an emblem of the soul and body, which require supervision and regulation to function properly. In the course of the work, Suso also incorporated criticisms of the faults and weaknesses of the Church and the universities in his day. The text is divided into twenty-four chapters, and focuses on guiding the reader towards marriage to Wisdom and thus union with God. Wisdom begins the book with chapters encouraging the disciple to study and imitate the Passion, and in the word of one scholar, the Passion narrative "overshadows the entire text" (Monks, 1990, p. 31). This emphasis on the Passion helps to explain its popularity in circles associated with the *Devotio moderna*.

Jean Charlier Gerson (1363-1429) was born at the village of Gerson near Reims. He entered the famous College of Navarre at the age of fourteen, obtaining the degree of Licentiate of Arts, and began his theological studies under two highly celebrated teachers, Gilles des Champs (Aegidius Campensis) and Pierre d'Ailly (Petrus de Alliaco). Gerson graduated bachelor of theology in 1384, and in 1392 obtained his Doctorate in Theology. In 1395, he was elected Chancellor of the University of Paris. He was one of the primary legal authorities at the Council of Constance, which ended the Great Schism, and he is known today chiefly for his defense of conciliarism. He died at Lyon on July 12, 1429 in the Celestine monastery governed by his brother.

His principal works can be divided into three categories: legal tracts to unite the church and end the western schism through a general council, practical works of theology to instruct the laity and other religious in improving their spiritual life, and mystical treatises to lead Christians to a closer relationship with God. In his mystical theology knowledge and union with God

depended on love and the desire for that union. The modern edition of his works by Glorieux comprises ten volumes. Despite his great Latin education, he also wrote in the vernacular and defended the vernacular as a suitable language for theological treatises (a characteristic he shared with Thomas a Kempis and with Geert Grote). His extensive writings on many moral and religious topics led him to be one of the most widely copied and published theologians in the first fifty years of the printing press.

Two of the selections from Gerson in this manuscript circulated both as independent texts and as part of *La Mendicité spirituelle* ("Spiritual beggary"), a long treatise on the spiritual life written c. 1400 that survives in numerous manuscripts. Brian Patrick McGuire has said of "La pitieuse complainte," "It is a wonderful little prayer, in the tradition of St. Anselm, calling upon God's grace and expressing a sense of helplessness and defeat but also hope" (McGuire, 2005, p. 108). Gerson was writing in this case not for monks or even for learned students of theology, but for his own sisters and other non-aristocratic lay women. His concern for providing religious instruction for ordinary people is evident in the texts included in this manuscript.

## LITERATURE

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## ONLINE RESOURCES

Medieval Manuscripts in Dutch Collection (as Amsterdam, BPH 102)

<http://www.mmdc.nl/static/site/>

Christian Classics Ethereal Library, Suso (short biography and selected works)

<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/suso>

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