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[Commonplace Book of Romain Lenon]

In Latin, manuscript on paper

Castres, France; 1499 or later [early 16th century]

ff. 181, foliated in modern pencil, i-v, 1-176, and paginated very sporadically in 19th- or early 20th-century ink (pp. 160, 240, 318, 319), complete, consisting of four sections each composed of quires of eight leaves, preceded by a quire of six flyleaves (collation: i⁶, ii-xi⁸, xii-xvi⁸, xvii-xxi⁸, xxii-xxiii⁸, f. v is parchment, conjoint with the front pastedown, the back pastedown also parchment), section I with leaf signatures "A"- "k", the sections II-IV with vertical catchwords, some quires in each of these with catchwords on both the second and last leaves of the quire, indicating that the eight leaves were composed of two sheets, each folded into four and nested one within the other, written in brown ink in a gothic cursive script, usually with 18-21 long lines (justification c. 100 x 40-45 mm.), ruled in brown ink, rubrics in red, one- to three-line initials in red. Bound in original brown leather blind-stamped all over with a fleur-de-lys tool, over thin pasteboards, re-backed with olive leather in the 16th (?) century, the spine lettered in gilt "HOMELIE / MANUSCR[IT] / 10. [sic] SIECLE" (both covers with worming and wear, but the blind-stamps still legible). Dimensions c. 145 x 70 mm.

A fascinating "ledger-format" pocket-sized Commonplace Book, signed numerous times by the scribe and owner Romain Lenon of Péronne, a monk of the Celestine monastery of St. Peter's, Castres, whose two main texts are surprising bedfellows (one legal, the Decretals, the other theological, Gregory's commentary on Ezekiel), and whose numerous additional texts reveal Romain's interest in recent French history, romance, and elephants, among other subjects.

PROVENANCE

1. Written by Romain Lenon, of Péronne (about 25 kilometers northwest of Castres), at the Celestine monastery of St. Peter's, Castres (near St.-Quentin, about 60 km north of Soissons), in the diocese of Soissons: signed by him numerous times in the text (ff. 4, 17, 23, 28, 44, etc.); with his colophon at the end of the main text: "Scriptus fuit per manum fratris Romani Lenon celestini in monasterio principis apostolorum Petri in monte de Castris [signed calligraphically:] Romain Lenon" (f. 120v); signed in French in a calligraphic hand at the end of the first main text "Je suys de Chastres" (f. 80v); and signed in the script of the main text "Romanus Peronensis" (f. 159v). Lenon does not appear in the Bénédictines de Bouveret, *Colophons de manuscrits occidentaux des origines au XVI^e siècle*, and is therefore apparently a previously unrecorded scribe. One text, referring to the bridges of Paris, is dated 1499, which provides a terminus post for the present compilation.

2. Among the many notes on the front flyleaves is one (f. iv) referring to King Philip VI Valois (1328-50) and the monastery of St. Clare, Pont-Sainte-Maxence, about 10 kilometers north of Senlis and 40 kilometers southwest of Soissons.
3. Maggs Bros., London, c. 1960s, with their annotations on the back pastedown.
4. Harry and Virginia Walton Collection, Covington, Virginia, USA; Walton MS A-2415, their penciled inventory number, doubtless bought from Maggs in the 1960s (not in Faye and Bond).

TEXT

ff. i-v, Numerous brief added notes and verses, including "Versibus Hesiodi ad Greco in Latium ab Herbertino clero traducta": Virtutem posuere dei (sic) sudorem parandam ...";

ff. 1-80v, Paraphrase of the Decretals, incipit, "Distinctio 1. Humanum genus duobus regitur naturali videlicet iure et moribus ¶ Ius naturale est quod in lege ... Distinctio 32. Nicolaus papa. Nullus missam audiat presbiteri quem scit concubinam ... ¶ Item Alexander III ... subintroductam mulierem. ¶ Romanus" (see Kuttner, *Repertorium der Kanonistik [1140-1234]: Prodromus corporis glossarum*, Studi e testi, 71, Vatican, 1937, p. 261, this version is distinguished from other abbreviated Decretals by the opening words "Ius naturale est quod lege");

ff. 81-114v, "Incipiunt extracta quedam de libris decretalium et primo de prologo. Rex pacificus pia misericordie disposuit ... *Libro primo de constitutionibus Capitulo 4.3 Ex consilio Meldensi*. Canonum statuta custodiantur ... causa cessante cessat effectus.";

f. 114v, A contemporary added excerpt from Solinus, *Collectanea rerum mirabilium*, XXV.2-7, concerning elephants, incipit "De elephantibus. Solinus sic ait. Elephanati iuxta sensum humanum intelligitur habent ... ne quod animal interimant conflictu fortuito. Habet Solinus.";

ff. 115-119, About twenty added excerpts attributed to St. John Climacus, incipit "De oblivione ultionis illati mali. Climachus. Memoria malicie est furoris consummatio ... continua quod malicia. Item ibidem. Imprudens irrationalis et dolosus ...";

ff. 119v-120, A list of prayers for the nocturns of Matins on Sundays, incipit "Dominicis diebus in primo nocturno. 1. Sancta et vera trinitas benedicat et salvet amicis nostras. 2 Benedictione perpetua ... In secundo nocturno ... In tercio nocturno ... Ad gaudia vite eterne perducat nos christus rex glorie. Amen";

f. 120-120v, Further excerpts attributed to St. John Climacus, followed by the colophon and signature of Romain Lenon (see under Provenance);

ff. 121-159v, Excerpts from Gregory's commentary on Ezekiel, incipit "Incipiunt excerpta ex omeliis sancti Gregorii papa super Ezechilem. Vox psalmodie cum per intentionem cordis agitur per hanc omnipotenti domino [sic] ad cor iter paratur. Agit hoc divina misericordia ut ex una

eademque re ... in conspectu dei speciem boni operis macula prave intentionis. [cf. Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, LXXVI, cols. 785-1072] Finiunt extracta. f[rater] Romanus [in red:] peronensis";

f. 160 is frame-ruled, otherwise blank;

f. 160v, Excerpt from Pope Innocent III, *De miseria condicionis humanae*, incipit "Innocentius libro de vilitate [sic] conditionis humane contra gulosos ait. Initium vite hominis aqua et panis [Ecclesiasticus 29:28]. Gulosis autem non sufficiunt fructus arborum ... cupiditatem replendam.";

ff. 161-165v, Aenius Sylvius Piccolomini (Pope Pius II, 1458-64), incipit "Excerptum de libro Enee Silvii poete in libro suo De libro duobus amantibus. Preciosiora sunt interdum parvi corporis vascula. ut gemme lapillique testantur. ¶ Qui nunquam sensit amoris ignem aut lapis est aut bestia. ¶ Hec in prologo. Sequentia de libro sunt. Iuvenes animos de amore audire delectat. ... ¶ Finit excerptum Enee Silvii poete ad Marianum de duobus amantibus in quo sunt multa utilia et fructuosa." (*Enea Silvio Piccolomini. Historia de duobus amantibus*, edited and translated into Italian by Donato Pirovano, Contributi e proposte 55, Turin, 2001);

ff. 166-172, Excerpts from Robert Gaguin (1433-1501), heading (on facing page), "Sequentia excerpta sunt de cronicis Gauguinii", some of the excerpts with headings, e.g. "Robertus Gauguinus ad divinam virginis Mariam"; "De tumulo Clodovei regis Fancorum"; "Epigramma Ludovici regis undecim" (King Louis XI, 1423-83) (f. 166v); "De pontis Parisiensis ruina" (in 1499) (f. 168v); "De Carolo octavo" (King Charles VIII, 1470-98) (f. 170v); interspersed are some excerpts without headings, including ones on the longitude and latitude of the bridges (of Paris?) (f. 169); notes on Charles VIII's betrothal to Margaret of Austria and marriage to Anne of Brittany (f. 171v), his death at Amboise--giving the date 1497 (sic)--, and on his successor King Louis XII (d. 1515) (f. 171v); the final piece is "Lutetia Parisiorum edifacatur ante christi natalem terentium nonaginta quinque annis";

The following pieces were all apparently added on blank pages somewhat later than the main texts, and do not have rubrics or red initials.

ff. 172v-173, Further short excerpts from Gaguin, with a heading, "Guaguinus in cronicis";

ff. 173v-176, Further extracts from Decretals, incipit "Ex Decreto. Distinctione .37. ... Distinctio 49. ... De consecratione. Distinctio .1. ...", the last is headed "Eadem parte distinctione 90. Cyprianus" and begins, "Neque ad Chayn neque ad munera eius ...";

ff. 176v, Further notes from Gaguin's Chronicle, including a list of Italian cities and a note of the birth in October 1499 of Claude of France, future queen of Louis XII;

Back pastedown, two short verses: a proverb very similar to one that is usually attributed to Anthoine Loysel (1536-1617), but in a hand too early for it to have been derived from him: "Quy preste non ra. Quy ra non tost. Quy tost non tout. Quy tout non gre"; and Martial's Epigram I.37 Ad Bassam: "Marcialis. Ventris onus misero. nec te pudet excipis auro: Bassa bibis vitro carius ergo cacas."

A Commonplace Book does not contain a standard text or collection of texts, but represents a personal, eclectic, selection of short pieces collected together by and for a particular owner. Such books therefore provide an unusual window into the lives and interests of specific individuals, and thus offer a wealth of research potential. The Beinecke Library at Yale University dedicated an exhibition to commonplace books in 2001; its introduction begins: "For centuries, philosophers, scholars, lawyers, doctors, theologians, artists, and poets have gathered the memorable thoughts and words of others and organized them in commonplace books. These treasure houses of ancient and modern knowledge preserve quotations, anecdotes, maxims, jokes, verses, and magical spells, as well as astrological predictions, medicinal and culinary recipes, devotional texts, and mathematical tables—in short, subject matter of every stripe. As such, they have played an integral and abiding role in Western intellectual life throughout the ages."

The Renaissance humanist Erasmus (1466/6-1536), a contemporary of Romain Lenon, has left us his thoughts on such manuscripts. Writing in relation to the daughters of Thomas More, he says: "As they flit like so many little bees between Greek and Latin authors of every species, here noting down something to imitate, here culling some notable saying to put into practice in their behavior, there getting by heart some witty anecdote to relate among their friends, you would swear you were watching the Muses at graceful play in the lovely pastures of Mount Helicon, gathering flowers and marjoram to make well-woven garlands."

The present manuscript reveals a monk of widely diverse interests. The two largest sections of the manuscript include summaries of the Decretals and Pope Gregory's Commentary on Ezekiel, one legal and the other theological. With these are a number of secular texts: excerpts from Robert Gaguin's chronicle, mainly concerning fifteenth-century kings of France as well as details about the bridges of Paris; Piccolomini Tale of Two Lovers, a Latin romance in the style of Boccaccio, and even a single excerpt from Gaius Julius Solinus, a Roman rhetorician who flourished in the fourth century, on elephants. There are as well prayers to be said at Matins on Sundays and an excerpt from Pope Innocent's twelfth-century Misery of the Human Condition. The picture of Romain Lenon that emerges from this manuscript is one of a curious chap, keenly interested in the modern world around him, with a lively imagination, and at the same time devout with a theological bent to his thinking.

LITERATURE

Among the many books and articles on medieval and Renaissance commonplace books are:

[Anon.] *Renaissance Commonplace books from the Huntington Library: a listing and guide to the microfilm collection*, Marlborough, 1994.

Colclough, Stephen. "Recovering the Reader: Commonplace Books and Diaries as Sources of Reading Experience," *Publishing History*, 44 (1998), 5-37.

Cox, J. S. (ed.), *The English Fifteenth-Century Commonplace Book*, St. Sampson (Guernsey), 1989.

Havens, Earle. *Commonplace Books: A History of Manuscripts and Printed Books from Antiquity to the Twentieth Century*, New Haven, CT, Yale University Press, 2001.

Moss, Ann. *Printed Commonplace-Books and the Structuring of Renaissance Thought*, Clarendon Press, 1996.

Toulmin Smith, Lucy, ed. *A Commonplace Book of the Fifteenth Century, Containing a Religious Play and Poetry, Legal Forms*, 1886 (reprint, 2009).

Youngs, Deborah. "The Medieval Commonplace Book: the example of the commonplace book of Humphrey Newton of Newton and Pownall, Cheshire (1466-1536)." *Archives*, 25 (2000), 58-73.

ONLINE RESOURCES

The Beinecke Library exhibition of commonplace books (2001):

<http://www.library.yale.edu/beinecke/compb.htm>

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