

Passion selon Gamaliel (Gospel of Nicodemus, Évangile de Gamaliel, Évangile de Nicodème, second or "long" version)

In French, decorated manuscript on parchment

France, c. 1450-1500

*ii (paper, f. i, marbled) + 70 + ii (paper, f. ii verso, marbled) folios on parchment, original foliation in red roman numerals [cited in this description], center top margin, *ii-vii, *ix-xxx, *xxx bis-lxxii, missing the first and last leaf in the first quire, and an undetermined number of quires at the end (collation, i^s [-1 and -8, f. i and f. viii, with loss of text] ii-ix^s), horizontal catchwords copied in the lower margin centered below the second column of text, no leaf or quire signatures, ruled very lightly in lead with the top and bottom horizontal rules full across on some folios and with single full-length vertical bounding lines (justification, 160 x 123-113 mm.), written below the top line in a bold batârde script in two columns of twenty-two lines, a few elaborate cadel initials in the top line of text, majuscules within text carefully touched with pale yellow wash, red folio numbers, alternately red and blue paragraph marks, one- to two-line red initials, slightly cockled, some yellowing and occasional stains, ink slightly smudged on f. xliv, but still legible, overall in excellent condition. Quarter bound in modern leather and marbled paper, separated at front hinge, but otherwise in good condition. Dimensions 257 x 180 mm.*

This is one of only sixteen manuscripts (all others in public collections) of a French prose version of the apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus, an account of Christ's Passion, including his trial, death, Descent into Hell, and Resurrection. Widely read in the Middle Ages, very occasionally included in French vernacular Bibles, it circulated in many Latin and vernacular versions, influencing countless other texts. It was of enormous importance, considered in its day a truthful historical record emphasizing Christ's humanity and prompting devotion focused on details of his Passion.

PROVENANCE

1. Written in France in the second half of the fifteenth century based on evidence of the script, which is a very bold slanted example of a batârde script with a few decorative cadel initials in the top line (e.g. ff. ii verso, xviii, and lx); the format of this manuscript, with its very narrow widely spaced columns is unusual. Overall, although the decorative initials are very simple, this was a high quality copy, with sophisticated script, fairly good parchment, and ample margins; there are a few corrections to the text, but no marginal comments of any kind.
2. European Private Collection.

TEXT

[f. i now missing] ff. ii-lxxii verso, incipit, "Raco[n]pte maistre Gamaliel que Ihesu Crist estoit partis de Bessage ung samedi et estoient avecques lui ses disciples et ses apostres et fut a lentrete de la ville de Jherusalem et dist a saint Pierre et a saint Phelipe quilz sen alassent en la ville de Jherusalem et quilz lui amenassent une sonnete quilz trouveroient liée avecques son poulain ... Seigneurs te Abederon narez ponit de paour, car nous le saurons bien faire. Or faites doncques. En ///"; [f. viii now missing] f. ix, incipit, "///Cest assavoir Nichodemus et Joseph Airimathie et plusieurs autres sains hommes, et quant ils furent venuz Pylate yssist au conseil et fist porter

devant lui les signes ... Il vit Sathan et enfer qui trembloient de paour et oyt la grant contempcion quilz avoient ensemble et va crier haultement aux ennemiz. Seigneurs deables vous mengigriastes et desceutes //"

Passion selon Gamaliel (also circulated with the titles, *Évangile de Gamaliel* and *Évangile de Nicodème*); long version (or second version) of the French translation of the apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus; this manuscript lacks the prologue (found in some, but not all copies), and is missing one leaf at the beginning and at least one quire at the end, since it now begins with f. ii, and ends abruptly with the catchword, "faulcement"; it is also missing the folio originally foliated as f. viii. At least five manuscripts of this text also included the *Vengeance de Nostre-Seigneur*, a prose version of the *Chanson de la Vengeance de Nostre Seigneur* (Micha, 1969); since the end of this manuscript is lacking, it is possible that it may once have also included the *Vengeance*.

Printed in Paris, Denis Meslier, 1491, GW M29653 (possibly this version), and Paris, Jean Tréperel, 1497, GW M29656, which incorporates the "long version" (Gounelle and Izydorczyk, 1997, no. 185, also report a 1492 edition by Jean Tréperel, not listed in the British Library ISTC), and in the sixteenth century, Lyon, Jean de Chandenev, 1510, frequently reissued, including Lyon 1515, 1527, Poitiers, 1524, etc. (Gounelle and Izydorczyk, 1997, no. 186).

There is no modern published edition of this translation (Le Merrer, 1968, is an unpublished dissertation). It has been identified in only fifteen manuscripts, not including this one; the Jonas Database (Online Resources) lists twelve manuscripts, additional manuscripts are listed in O'Gorman, 1997, and Ford, 1973 (see also Micha, 1969, p. 1291), as well as in three manuscripts in Occitan and two in Catalan (Izquierdo, 1997, p. 160; and Hershon and Ricketts, 2007). Le Merrer has argued, based on Grenoble, Bibliothèque Municipale, MS 50 (olim 468), the oldest manuscript of the French translation, and Paris, BnF, MS 29445, a fifteenth-century copy of the Occitan version, that the French translation is based on the Occitan, and scholars have generally accepted this idea (Hasenohr, 1981, 378). The Occitan version of this translation was edited by Hershon and Ricketts in 2007 (not available for consultation).

The *Gospel of Nicodemus* probably originated as a Greek text in the early fourth century (although it survives only in later manuscripts); its tradition in Western Europe is based on the Latin translation which dates from the fifth century, and which was represented by three major textual forms, and then in numerous vernacular versions. In the version that circulated most widely in the Middle Ages, it tells the story of Christ's Passion, Resurrection, and Ascension, followed by the story of Joseph of Arimathea, and an account of Christ's Descent into Hell. Its account of the Harrowing of Hell in particular was widely used by medieval authors (including Jacobus de Voragine in the *Legenda Aurea*), but it also supplied details missing in the canonical Gospels, such as the names of the thieves crucified with Christ, Dismas and Gestas, and the name of the soldier who pierced Christ's side, Longinus, and provided a more elaborate account of the events from the moment of Christ's death on the cross to his burial, amplifying the role of Joseph of Arimathea and emphasizing Mary's sorrow. Its impact on Western European thought and culture in the Middle Ages was undeniable; the preliminary Census of Latin manuscripts (Izydorczyk, 1993) included 424 extant manuscripts, and twelve "recently lost" manuscripts. The Latin transmission is still being studied; Tischendorf, 1876 is the standard edition by default, although it is in need of revision (Kim, 1973 was based on a single manuscript).

The comprehensive volume of essays edited by Zbigniew Izydorczyk in 1997 highlights the importance of this text and its influence on medieval vernacular literature, with contributions discussing the Latin text and its circulation and influence in French, Occitan, Italian, Old and Middle English, Norse, High and Low German, and Dutch, and in Ireland and Medieval Wales. The earliest vernacular versions are the Old English (from the early or mid-eleventh century), and an Irish version from the twelfth or early thirteenth centuries; in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries there were many translations in verse – in Old French, Occitan, Old Norse, High German, etc., and versions in prose throughout Europe in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

There were numerous French versions of the Gospel of Nicodemus, including three verse renditions, two dating from the thirteenth-century by André de Coutances and Chrétien, a short prose version that circulated in two distinct recensions (ed. Ford, 1973), the long prose version found in this manuscript, and paraphrases and versions found incorporated into other texts. As mentioned above, the second or long prose version seems to have been a translation of an Occitan translation (ed. Hershon and Ricketts, 2007), which was based on the Occitan poem, *Sens e rasos d'una escriptura*. It survives in only three Occitan manuscripts, but circulated more widely in French, and is found in sixteen French manuscripts (including this one), as well as in two Catalan manuscripts, which were most likely also translations of the Occitan version. This version is a narrative of the trial, death, and Resurrection of Christ emphasizing the role of Nicodemus and his uncle Gamaliel, a teacher of law and a member of the Jewish council. Gamaliel is the narrator of the story, and this version thus often circulated as the *Evangile* or *Passion selon Gamaliel* (Gospel or Passion according to Gamaliel).

Many of the scriptural texts classified today among the "Apocrypha" (texts excluded from the Canon of the Bible), were not regarded in the Middle Ages in the pejorative sense that they acquired during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. While generally recognized as not part of the Canon because of their unknown authorship, they were regarded as texts useful for spiritual edification, and the Gospel of Nicodemus especially seems to have been considered a trustworthy source of information. It is even, though extremely rarely, found copied in Bibles in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Zbigniew Izydorczyk, the modern authority on the text, concludes that most late medieval readers saw it as a "humanly pious rather than divinely inspired text," but still one that was highly regarded as a truthful historical record witnessing the trial and Passion of Christ and the Harrowing of Hell, especially important in the late Middle Ages, when the interest in Christ's humanity and details of the Passion were increasingly the focus for devotion.

LITERATURE

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ONLINE RESOURCES

JONAS: Répertoire des textes et des manuscrits médiévaux d'oc et d'oïl: *Évangile de Nicodème* (2e version dite longue)

<http://jonas.irht.cnrs.fr/oeuvre/oeuvre.php?oeuvre=10693>

Manuscripta Mediaevalia (Berlin, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin - Preußischer Kulturbesitz, MS gall.
qu. 159)

<http://www.manuscripta-mediaevalia.de/dokumente/html/obj31160134>

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