

[ANONYMOUS], *Histoire de la Passion de Notre Seigneur*; [ANONYMOUS], *La beaute de lame raisonnable*; ROBERT CIBOULE, Sermon in French

In French, illuminated manuscript on parchment

Northern France (Paris?), c. 1460-1480

*i* (parchment) +162 + *i* (parchment) folios on parchment, modern foliation in pencil top outer corner recto, complete, but quires 19 and 20 are bound in reverse order (collation, i-xx<sup>s</sup> xxi<sup>2</sup>), horizontal catchwords, lower margin, below last words of the text, very faint signatures occasionally remain with a letter designating the quire and a roman numeral, the leaf, ruled in red or brown ink with the top and bottom horizontal rules full across and with single full-length vertical bounding lines, prickings in the top and outer margins, ff. 116-end (justification, 197-195 x 142-137 mm.), written in a regular batârde script in forty-one long lines probably by at least two scribes using similar formal scripts (e.g. possible change of hand at f. 81), majuscules in text touched in yellow, rubrics in bright red, line-fillers in red and blue, alternately red or blue paragraph marks and two- to three-line illuminated initials in burnished gold on red and blue grounds with white tracery throughout, TWENTY LARGE ILLUMINATED INITIALS WITH PARTIAL BORDERS, six- to three-line alternately blue and dark pink with white highlights on gold grounds, infilled with sprays of realistic flowers or strawberries on highly polished gold grounds with partial borders of small colored flowers and fruit and tiny burnished ivy leaves on hairline stems, ONE LARGE HISTORIATED INITIAL WITH THREE-QUARTER BORDER, f. 1, ten-line white-patterned blue initial, depicting the Trinity enthroned flanked by seraphim and adored by figure of a kneeling lay woman, with a narrow blue and gold bar-border extending from the initial the full-length of the page, all framed by a three-quarter illuminated border with delicate flowers, leaves, blue and gold acanthus and burnished ivy leaves on hairline stems, miniature on f. 1 rubbed, margin f. 1, torn and repaired, vertical crease in quires one and two, interfering with legibility on a few folios, minor worming at the end, some wear, smudging and other signs of use throughout (some small initials smudged at the beginning of prayers indicating devotional kissing), but generally in very good condition. Bound in 19<sup>th</sup>-century English half Russia and watered cloth over pasteboard, leather covering of bottom outer corners missing (one laid in), hinges worn, textile covering back board partially lifted, spine with five raised bands, tooled in blind with filigree ornament between each band. Dimensions 298 x 215 mm.

This is an important manuscript including three devotional texts in the vernacular – all unedited (and indeed largely unstudied) and extant in very few manuscripts. Presumably made for the lay woman shown kneeling in the opening miniature, it is an excellent example of an elegant high quality manuscript from Paris in third quarter of the fifteenth century, distinguished by its very broad margins (prickings remain), elegant script, and accomplished illumination.

## PROVENANCE

1. The manuscript can be dated on the basis of internal evidence after 1452 (see f. 143, date mentioned in the second text); the style of the script and illumination supports an origin in Paris, c. 1460-1480; the illumination shows the influence of manuscripts illuminated by the Maître François, active in Paris in the third quarter of the century. The opening miniature on f. 1 depicts a kneeling laywoman, dressed in black trimmed in brown with a tall conical hennin, surely the woman who commissioned the manuscript or for whom it was made.
2. Name, f. 1, of a seventeenth-century (?) owner, "Bruisset (?)" (now scribbled over).

3. London, Sotheby's, 18 June 1990, lot 119 to Tenschert.
4. Belonged to Joost R. Ritman (b. 1941), Amsterdam, the Dutch businessman and distinguished collector of art and books, who acquired it from Sotheby's in 1990, 29 November 1990, lot 116; his bookplate, inside front cover, Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica MS 129; described in *Medieval Manuscripts in Dutch Collections* (see Online Resources).
5. London, Sotheby's, Ritman Sale, 6 July, 2000, lot 34.
6. Inside front cover, in pencil, "D2301, inside back cover, notes in pencil include, "141/10091/AIAGT; 35P27; and small notes from BPH, Cat Sothebys London, 29. 11. 90, nr. 116; 84894 BPH MS 129; and pencil notes in margin, f. 1 (in French, presumably from a French dealer).

## TEXT

ff. 1-131v, *Prologue en hystoire de la passion de nostre seigneur et sauveur Ihesu crist*, incipit, "A lonneur et reverence de la sainte trinite et de la glorieuse vierge marie ..."; f. 2, *Cy commence la narracion de la passion nostre sauveur ibesu crist bien au long de clairee*, incipit, "Scitis quia post biduum pascha fiet et filius hominis tradetur ut crucifigatur. Cest a dire vous autres mes disciples ... nous puiissons regner en ta gloire, Amen"; [Ends at the top of f. 131v; remainder blank];

*L'histoire de la Passion de Nostre Seigneur*, an anonymous account of the Passion of Christ, interspersed with moral reflections, prayers and miracle stories; it includes numerous quotations from the Church Fathers and Hugh of St. Victor (d.1142). One of its principal sources was the sermon on the Passion, "Ad Deum vadit," by Jean Gerson (1363-1429), preached to the French King and court on Good Friday in 1403 (Hasenohr, 1988, p. 292). Gerson's very long sermon, (twenty-six pages in the modern edition), in essence a sustained meditation on the Passion, was a popular text, surviving in twenty-three manuscripts (see Boulton, pp. 52-3, and p. 62, no. 20, with bibliography and editions).

The text in this manuscript includes two references to dates: the story of a woman who died in Tours in 1409, and a reference to the thirty-second year of "this present schism" ("de ce present scisme") -- presumably the Papal Schism which began in 1378 -- suggesting 1409-10 as the year of composition of the text. The author informs readers that he is a member of a religious order, that he had studied at Toulouse, and that he heard of a miracle about the sacramental wine from the King of Aragon who told him of it in Barcelona.

Unpublished and unedited, the text is recorded in at least four other manuscripts, two of which are certainly later than this copy (we thank Margriet Hoogvliet for sharing her notes on this text; see also the Jonas Database, Online Resources; Boulton, 2000, p. 60, no. 5; and Warner and Gilson, II, 1921, p.325): Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, MS 2039, dated 1544, from the Célestins of Paris, London, British Library, MS Royal 19.B.VI, c.1510-15; Paris, BnF, MS fr. 970, fifteenth century; and a manuscript sold at Sotheby's, 24 June 1980, lot 64, Rouen? c. 1475 (afterwards A.G. Thomas, cat.42, 1981, no.6).

Numerous accounts of the life of Christ and especially of His Passion circulated in French in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (Boulton, 2000, pp. 60-62, lists twenty-two examples; see also Hasenohr, 1988, pp. 291-296). Perhaps the most popular is the text said to have been made in 1398 for Isabelle of Bavaria (ascribed in some manuscripts to Gerson), known today as "La Passion Isabeau," or "La Passion de 1398," which survives in more than thirty manuscripts. Another example is found in Paris, MS Mazarine 948, possibly closely related, but not identical, to the text in this manuscript (although Boulton, 2000, cites the text found in the Mazarine manuscript as examples of the text in the manuscript described here, pp. 56-7, the two seem to be different texts; the matter needs further study). The text in our manuscript includes long passages from a third example of a French Passion text, Jean Gerson's popular sermon, "Ad deum vadit."

ff. 132-145v, *Cy commence unq petit traictie quon dit la beaute de lame raisonnable*, incipit, "La beaulte de lame raisonnable attentement considere est bon commencement... Car se tu fais cecy le roy desirera ta beaute. Car ilz est con seigneur et con dieu au quel soit honneur et gloire ou siede des siecles. Amen"; f. 145, incipit, "En ce petit liuret on peut veoir comme en vng miroir lestat de laime raisonnable ... quel par sa benoi te grace tu soies b[ea]tifiee en gloire pardurable. Ipso concedente qui est deus gloriosus in secula seculorum, Amen"; [Ends top f. 145v; remainder blank];

*La beaute de lame raisonnable* ("The beauty of the rational soul"), an anonymous mystical treatise on the soul; unpublished and known in only two other copies, Verneuil-sur-Avre (Eure), BM, MS 1 (we thank Margriet Hoogvliet for bringing this to our attention), and Semur-en-Auxois, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 16 (see Jonas Database); the author's sources include the Song of Songs, Aristotle, St. Augustine, St. Gregory, Origen, St. Bernard, Hugh of St. Victor and Richard of St. Victor (d. 1173). The text must date after 1452; on f. 143r there is a story, said to have occurred in 1452, of a boy in Evreux who saw his dead father in the form of a little bird that asked him to tell his mother to pray for him, followed by an account of a priest in 1449 who saw a vision of a burning knight of Picardy who exhorted him to a holy life and sent him on pilgrimages to shrines of the Virgin at Lyesse and Montfort.

The text deserves careful study and comparison with *Le Livre de Sainte meditation en conaissance de soi* by Robert Ciboule (ca. 1403-1458) (unedited, but with excerpts printed in Combes, 1933; discussed in Hasenohr, 1988, pp. 284-285). Hasenohr has stressed that this longer work is the first – and the only – spiritual "summa" written in French in the Middle Ages, that develops, in clear and lucid language, a sophisticated theory of contemplation. In her discussion, she mentions the text in this manuscript, by the title, *Traité des conditions de l'âme raisonnable*, known to her in one manuscript (probably the Verneuil-sur-Avre copy, see below), as a condensed version of Ciboule's longer treatise (p. 285, note 52, expresses her plans of an edition, which has not yet appeared).

The appearance of this text in the manuscript described here with the following text, a sermon attributed to Ciboule, is of special interest.

Following the text on f. 145 there is a short passage, concluding on f. 145v, that begins with advice to the reader that "in this small book one can see as in a mirror the state of your soul" (a common motif in devotional literature). Although in this manuscript this passage appears to be

the end of *La beaute de lame raisonnable*, it is possible that it is an incomplete copy of the text beginning on f. 243 in Verneuil-sur-Avre (Eure), BM, MS 1, which may be a French translation of the *Soliloquium* of St. Bonaventure (see Hasenohr, 1988, p. 285).

ff. 146-162v, *Sensuit ung sermon damour esprituelle fait par maistre Robert sybole*, incipit, "Amicus meus venit de via a me luce undecimo capitulo [Luke 11:6], Selon les saintz docteurs en lestat de Juste il y a deux choses, Lune est charite, Lautre est ferveur de charite... et vueille amender les mauvais," Amen, Explicit."

An unpublished sermon, here attributed to Robert "Sybole," that is, Robert Ciboule (1403-1458); it has been identified in three manuscripts by Nicole Marzac (Marzac, 1971, appendix I; not included among the sermons by Ciboule listed in Combes, 1933): Paris, BNF, MSS fr. 1920 (attributed to "Jehan Jarson," that is, Jean Gerson), fr. 2457, and fr. 9611, and in Ardèche, Archives départementales, MS 4, a sixteenth-century manuscript that includes a text on the Passion attributed to Gerson (not the text in this manuscript); this manuscript is of particular importance, given its date and its attribution to Ciboule.

Robert Ciboule (1403-1458), was born in Breteuil in Normandy. After studying at the University of Paris, he led a long and illustrious career in the service of the Church and the French monarchy. As chancellor of Notre Dame (from 1451) he was active in the reform of the University. He was the author of many works, including commentaries on Aristotle's *Politics* and on the *Book of Romans* in Latin, and a number of spiritual treatises in the vernacular, most still unedited (among them, the *Livre de perfection*, and the *Livre de sainte meditation en congnoissance de soy*) and about a dozen sermons. Like Gerson, most of his works seek to edify and inspire, rather than to instruct, and are an important expression of trends in late medieval devotion.

## ILLUMINATION

The text opens with a ten-line historiated initial (48 x 65 mm.), depicting the Trinity, enthroned, Christ's hand raised in blessing, holding an open book between them, with ranks of seraphim in red behind, and a laywoman, dressed in brown and black with a tall hennin kneeling in prayer before them. The opening page is surrounded with a very fine three-quarter ivy leaf border. In addition, there are twenty very large illuminated initials placed at major sections of the text; these are carefully executed and depict realistic flowers (including sprays of violets and other flowers with their leaves and stems) on highly polished gold grounds, with short borders of delicate black hairlines, sprinkled with burnished gold ivy leaves and occasional flowers or fruits.

The miniature, although small, and with some damage, especially to the faces of the figures, shows an obvious debt to the style and compositions of the Maître François. In particular, the figures of the Trinity (although here with the Holy Spirit represented as a dove rather than a third figure), holding an open book, with a rank of red seraphim behind, as well as the palette, with the use of the dull lavender for the cloak, is similar to the depiction of the Trinity in the much more lavish copy of the *City of God* in French attributed to Maître François, Paris, BnF, MS fr. 18, 234v (Avril and Reynaud, 1993, cat. No. 16, and p. 49).

Maître François was a productive and influential illuminator whose workshop served the bibliophile needs of the court and prominent citizens of Paris during the third quarter of the

fifteenth century. This artist takes his name from a letter written in August 1473 by Robert Gaguin to Charles de Gaucourt, entrusting the "egregius pictor Franciscus" with the designs of the pictures and the program of the images of the *Cite de Dieu* mentioned above. The letter lauds him as an accomplished artist worthy of the praise of Apelles. His success resulted in the widespread emulation of his style among Parisian illuminators, and he must have had a large and active workshop and many followers.

The quality of these initials suggests the manuscript was illuminated by highly skilled professionals. The smaller illuminated initials, red and blue paragraph marks, decorative line endings, and accomplished script are equally skilled, and together make this a highly attractive example of a deluxe fifteenth-century vernacular devotional manuscript made for a wealthy and devout laywoman.

All three of the texts in this manuscript exemplify the flourishing vernacular religious culture that is such an important aspect of fifteenth-century France. They are especially important given their relationship to treatises by two giants in the history of late medieval spirituality -- Jean Charlier Gerson (1363-1429) and Robert Ciboule (1403-1458) -- both devoted to pastoral care, and authors of treatises in French as well as Latin. Jean Charlier Gerson (1363-1429), Chancellor of the University of Paris, and a canon of Notre Dame, was the author of numerous learned works in Latin (and known for his defense of conciliarism), but also a number of important practical works of theology, many of which he wrote in the vernacular for his sisters and other religious women. As noted above, the first work in this manuscript, *L'histoire de la Passion de Notre Seigneur*, draws heavily on his Passion sermon, the "Ad deum vadit." Robert Ciboule (1403-1458) was an important thinker who is probably less well-known today than he deserves to be; like Gerson, he was committed to vernacular spirituality. Treatises by the two authors often circulated in the same manuscripts, and their interrelationship -- certainly worthy of further study -- is well illustrated by the texts included here.

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## ONLINE RESOURCES

Medieval Manuscripts in Dutch Collections (Amsterdam, BPH MS 129)

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

IRHT, Section Romane: JONAS, Répertoire des textes et des manuscrits médiévaux d'oc et d'oïl

<http://jonas.irht.cnrs.fr/accueil/accueil.php>

Histoire de la Passion (incipit, "Scitis quia post biduum")

<http://jonas.irht.cnrs.fr/oeuvre/oeuvre.php?oeuvre=9836>

La beaulte de l'ame raisonable (Miroir de l'âme)

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