JACQUES MILET, *Istoire de la destruction de Troye la Grant*
In French, manuscript on paper
Northern France, c. 1475-1500

10 folios on paper (with watermark close to Briquet no. 1686, "Armoiries: Trois fleurs de lis": Châteaudun, 1474, Senlis, 1474, Paris, 1476-78, Beauvais, 1478, Lyon, 1485, Notre-Dame du Parc, 1488), modern foliation in pencil, top outer recto, no ruling visible, text written in a gothic cursiva script in dark brown ink in a single column of thirty-one to thirty-six lines, some damage to the outer lower corners of ff. 1, 3-6 and corresponding losses of text on ff. 5-6, some wormholes, puncture marks visible in upper margins, some damp-staining, faint transfer of text (ff. 4-5, 8-9) and blue painted initials (ff. 1-2) from former binding surroundings. Unbound. Dimensions 270-280 x 198-207 mm.

These leaves are the sole known survivals from a lost copy of a popular and groundbreaking medieval drama, the first French mystery play to adopt a classical, non-religious subject. Given the text's early reception, interest, and innovation, it seems relatively understudied and marginalized from scholarship on medieval drama. These previously unknown fragments warrant closer study alongside the work's other manuscript witnesses. Manuscript copies of this play are rare on the market (only two copies in the last century recorded as sold in the Schoenberg Database).

PROVENANCE

1. Evidence of script and watermarks indicate an origin in France in the late fifteenth century, quite possibly Northern France, judging from the watermark.

2. These leaves were used as waste paper within an old binding. It is possible that they were situated in their present order when they were cut up as waste paper. Within the order in which they are now sleeved, the first eight leaves comprise four pairs of leaves that were once bifolia. This is particularly evident in the corresponding inner edges of ff. 6-7, which must have been the central bifolium of a quire in the original manuscript, and similar alignments of edges indicate that ff. 3 and 10, 4 and 9, and 5 and 8 were bifolia as well. The patterns of transfer of both text and initials also suggest that these pairs might have been adjacent within this binding.

3. Private Continental Collection.

TEXT

Though foliated according to their original order, the leaves are presently arranged in a different order within numbered sleeves. With reference to their sleeve numbers, this is the original order: 9, 10 (with leaf reversed), 2, 6, 3, 7-8, 4 (with leaf reversed), 5, 1 (with leaf reversed).

ff. 1-10v, beginning imperfectly, "[Priam:] //Et le ferai a ton deuis / Or te pars dycy [crossed out by scribe: "mon b"] il est temps … De vous bien [g]arde[r] enuers eulx / Car se ma[l] vous y aduenoit//"; f. 2, beginning imperfectly, "[Cloantus:] //Nous auons fait totalement / Ce que vous auez commande … Vng homme si treffort auoir / Si le fault par fraude conquerre. Dyomedes//";

f. 3, beginning imperfectly, "[Achilles:] //Mais lon congnoistra le plus fort / Car ains vne annee et demye …; Priam. … A vous le ne veul contredire / Quant vous este voulu pener//"

These leaves contain three textual fragments of Jacques Milet's *Istoire de la destruction de Troye la Grant.* F. 1r-v corresponds to ll. 9794-9842, f. 2r-v to lines 10582-10640, and ff. 3-10v to lines 11731-12215 within Stengel's 1883 edition (Stengel, pp. 157-8, 171-2, 189-96). Stengel's edition reproduces the 1484 print edition of *Istoire*, now lost, and there is still no critical edition (the edition mentioned by Jung, 1996, p. 602, has not yet appeared). Jung lists thirteen manuscripts containing Milet's *Istoire*, eleven in European libraries, and two in American libraries, all but one dating from the fifteenth century. First printed in Paris in 1484 by Jehan Bonhomme (Hain, 11160), the *Istoire* was reprinted twelve times within a century of its composition (see Runnalls, 1999, for the complete list). Two manuscript copies of the *Istoire* have been on the market in the last century; both are now housed in university libraries.

The French poet and playwright Jacques Milet (c. 1425-1466) studied first in Paris, where he became a bachelor (1447) and master of the arts (1448), and then studied law in Orléans from 1450 to 1452. During his time in Orléans, Milet wrote his *Istoire de la destruction de Troye la Grant*, completing it in June of 1452 and dedicating it to Charles VII, Charles, duke of Orléans, and Charles, count of Maine. He subsequently entered into royal service, in which he was engaged between 1452 and 1455. Milet's literary achievements brought him to the attention of Italian humanists, and he corresponded and exchanged Latin verses with Leonardo di Piero Dati and others. Upon Milet's early death in Paris in 1466, his friend and fellow poet and playwright Simon Gréban mourned his passing and memorialized his literary career in his *Complainte faite pour la mort de Jacques Milet*. He subsequently received commemoration from fellow poets Octovien de Saint-Gelais, Guillaume Crétin, Jean Lemaire, and Jean Bouchet. Milet's best known work, then and now, is his *Istoire*, but Gréban's *Complainte* attributes other works to him as well, including a Latin epitaph for Agnès Sorel, mistress of Charles VII, in 1450 and a long allegorical French poem, *La Forêt de Tristesse* in 1459.

Milet's *Histoire* was an innovative literary undertaking that appears to have met with early acclaim. The first mystery play in French seriously treating a non-religious, antique subject, it comprises nearly 30,000 lines in a variety of verse forms that Milet apportioned for a performance spanning four days. Milet's chief source for his play was Guido delle Colonne's *Historia destructionis Troiae* (1287), itself a Latin prose translation and adaptation of Benoît de Sainte-Maure's *Roman de Troie* (c. 1180), composed in French octosyllabic verse. Though no record of the play's performance survives, its manuscript circulation – which greatly exceeds that of most surviving medieval play texts – and its early success in print – it was the first mystery play printed and was frequently reprinted thereafter – suggest that it was quite popular in the century following its composition. Milet frames the play with an assertion of the Trojan legend's significance to his French audience and particularly his dedicatees; the play's prologue explicitly furnishes a Trojan genealogy for the French royal line. In keeping with this framing of the material, the *Istoire* displays Trojan sympathies, furnishing touching laments of the deaths of Priam and Hector and portraying Achilles as a villainous coward.

The three textual fragments contained within these leaves belong to the second day's performance, which centers on the figures of Hector and Achilles. It begins with the commencement of the Trojan War and concludes with the death and burial of Hector, and it is structured around four battles and the councils convening between them. The material covered here offers fragmentary coverage of the Trojan and Greek councils leading up to the second battle, a Greek council dedicated to plotting the death of Hector that precedes the third battle,

and the events of the truce between the third and fourth battles, which include a conversation between Hector and Achilles in which Hector challenges Achilles to single combat and a proposal issued by Agamemnon for an exchange of prisoners. The final fragment concludes with a Trojan council debating the return of Briseida (beloved of the Trojan Troilus) to the Greeks as part of this prisoner exchange.

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