

JACQUES LEGRAND (JACOBUS MAGNI), *Le livre de bonnes meurs* [The Book of Good Manners]

In French, manuscript on paper

France (Burgundy), or Switzerland (Basel?), c. 1450

*i + 139 + i folios on paper, original foliation in ink, top outer corner recto, 1-136, in Roman numerals starting with the first chapter (actually f. 3), modern foliation in pencil, watermark, bull's head with eyes and nostrils (20 × 31 mm.) and with no additional ornament, perpendicular to the chainline, similar to Basel, 1452 (Piccard 71399), apparently complete (collation i<sup>4</sup>, ii-ix<sup>6</sup>), catchwords at the end of each quire, bottom left, bounding lines ruled in hard point, with horizontal rules in lead (justification, 142 x 100 mm.), written in a formal cursive gothic bookhand (close to lettre bâtarde) the first line in a decorative textualis formata in twenty-three long lines, one large parted red and blue initial at the beginning of the text, chapters begin with alternating red and blue initials, sentences are separated by red and blue paragraph marks, blank space of four to five lines between the chapters, damaged throughout from damp with the text space darkened, although text remains legible, and worming, last folio is torn, first folio damaged in the upper half. Bound in a nineteenth-century cartonnage binding with gilded spine and raised split cord, labelled on spine, "Traité des vices et des vertus." Dimensions 214 x 138 mm.*

This manuscript represents the opportunity of acquiring a copy of the *Livre de bonnes meurs* by the French humanist Jacques Legrand. This text was a bestseller in its day, circulating among the ruling elite at the French and Burgundian courts in luxurious, illuminated copies. Its text is of interest, since it appears to contain the first version of the text, written six years before the final edition dedicated to Duke Jean de Berry. It lacks illumination, but is copied in a very elegant calligraphic bookhand that echoes the script of many of the luxury copies.

#### PROVENANCE

1. The evidence of the script and watermark suggests that this manuscript was copied in Burgundy or Switzerland around the middle of the fifteenth century, c. 1450, from the first edition of *Le livre de bonnes meurs*, dated to 1404. The concluding rubric on f. 139 is followed by a name, "Gilibertus qu<...?>," likely the name of the scribe. There is an early exlibris (sixteenth century?) on f. 139v, "Iste liber est <...?>," unfortunately illegible.
2. In 1850, the manuscript was acquired by a French library, where it was rebound in its present cartonnage binding and mistakenly identified as *Traité des vices et des vertus*.
3. Private European Collection.

#### TEXT

ff. i-iii (not foliated), incipit, "Le premier chapitre de la premiere partie parle coment orgueil desplaist a Dieu, fueil [added?: premier]; Le second coment orgueil avugle l'entendement, fueil .... Le iix-e coment on doit penser au jour du jugement, fueil";

Table of chapters; although clearly each entry was intended to be followed by a reference to a folio number, but most were never added and all but the first simply end "fueil" (leaf).

ff. 1-136v, incipit, "Tout orgueilleur se veullent a Dieu comparer en tant qui se glorifient en eulx mesmes et biens quilz ont ... et est a Dieu entre les pechiez le plus desplaisant et celluy qui punyst le plus griefment"; ff. 3v-6v, [chapter 2], incipit, "Comme par orgueil on ne cognois sa misere ne sa fragilite, et cuide ester tropt plus parfait quil nest ... et consequemnent faire plusieus pechiez et maulx"; ff. 6v-10, [chapter 3], incipit, "Quam l'omme est humble lors congnoist que de luy ne rien ne mais fragilite pourete et misere ... pour laquelle humilite avoir moult prouffite asoy bien et congnoistre, comme il fut dit au commencement de ce chapitre"; ... ff. 129-132, [chapter 51], incipit, Sepulture curieuse puet ester segniffiance dorgueil et de vanite ... mais de ta sepulture tu dois ester pou curieux"; ff. 132-136, [chapter 52], incipit, "Se tu penses au Jour du Jugement finable tu feras multeram tis de mal faire ... il appert que pou [sic] vault lesperance de ceulx qui dient que le monde durera moult longuemont." *Deo gracias. Finito libro sit laus et Gloria Christo*; [concluding with a name, presumably the scribe, in a smaller less formal script: "gilibertus qu<..?>].

Jacques Legrand, *Le Livre de bonne meurs*; the work was extremely popular, surviving in at least seventy-three manuscripts, not including this one, many of them illuminated, and thirteen printed editions between 1478 and 1542 (Beltran, 1986, pp. 290-295, and ARLIMA, Online Resources). It was translated into Latin, and published five times in an English translation.

The work survives in two versions, the first dating from 1404, and the second, 1410, dedicated to Jean de Berry, Duke of Berry and Auvergne and Count of Poitiers (1340-1416). It originated as a French adaptation of the last part of the second and the entire third book of Legrand's Latin *Sophilogium*, with three or five principal sections, whose topics are nicely summarized in the title of its Latin translation (1507): *Liber bonorum morum in quo de remedio contra septem peccata mortalia, de statu ecclesie, de statu principum, de morte et de iudicio* – "The book of good manners, regarding remedy against the seven deadly sins, about the condition of the church, the condition of the government, about death and justice."

The edition of *Le livre de bonnes meurs* (1986) by Evencio Beltran was the result of his twenty-two years of work. Instead of a critical edition based on the text of all the surviving manuscripts, Beltran chose to edit the dedication copy, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS fr. 1023 (henceforth: BnF), dated to 1410 and presented to Jean de Berry himself. Four more manuscripts from the Vatican Library (BAV Reg. lat. 1322, 1389, 1961, 1995) were studied by Straub in 1997. Even comparing the text of these four manuscripts has demonstrated that the textual transmission of this text was complex, evident most readily in the text's presentation and arrangement in sections. The text in BnF MS 1023 is divided into three sections. The Vatican manuscripts, in contrast, are all divided into five books (the beginning of their fifth book corresponds to the 27<sup>th</sup> chapter in the second section of the BnF manuscript). The evidence of these manuscripts suggests that Jacques Legrand published two variants of his book: one in 1404, with five sections, and another, slightly reworked and rephrased (one chapter of which he forgot to renumber) in 1410. Both versions include 53 chapters; the earlier 1404 edition, of course, lacks the introduction and dedication to Jean de Berry. These two studies, based on just five manuscripts, must surely be seen as preliminary, and suggest that a more thorough examination of the transmission of this text, based on all the surviving manuscripts, would be of interest (the need for further research is suggested by the presentation of the text by Wijzman, 2011, and the JONAS Database, which appears to contradict the results summarized here; Online Resources).

The text in the manuscript described here corresponds most closely to the Vatican manuscripts, although it already shows traces of Legrand's continuing work on his book between 1404 and 1410. It has five major sections, divided precisely as in the Vatican manuscripts. The wording, however, is sometimes closer to the BnF manuscript. Major discrepancies, such as *homoiooteleuton* in the titles of the first two chapters of the third book (...de bonne vie, etc.), are probably scribal errors, and are therefore not evidence of another, different, version. The manuscript contains fifty-two chapters: chapter five in the fifth book of the BAV Mss., that is the chapter 31 in the second book of the BnF manuscript, is omitted.

Like the other works of Jacques Legrand, *Le livre de bonnes meurs* emphasizes the role of knowledge: combined with Christian morals, antique philosophy should evolve into wisdom and thus become the crowning virtue of the human soul. Christian philosophy is presented as the heir of its Greco-Roman forerunner, which, however, it surpassed in every aspect: "In my opinion," Legrand writes, "what the Christians accomplish for Jesus Christ is precisely the same that poets and philosophers did for the sake of honesty or the communal well-being. No doubt, the service of a Christian is more precious for God."

The book is a fascinating combination of the derivations from ancient and medieval philosophers and scientists, on the one hand, and popular wit and proverbs on the other. For example, in a single page of chapter 13, "How the knights should govern," Legrand quotes from Suetonius' *Life of Caesar*, the *Ethics* of Aristotle, the not-so-well-known Polycrates and elegantly frames these quotations within the excerpts from Deuteronomy, Job, and Augustine's *City of God*. The conclusion, however, is quite simple: What is the difference between king and tyrant? They are both sovereign rulers, but the king rules for his people, whereas the tyrant rules for himself and oppresses his people. Such wealth of sources and the simplicity of the argument guaranteed *Le livre de bonnes meurs* the success it enjoyed. Although the book is full of Latinisms, and consequently numerous neologisms, it was originally written in French (although adopted from its Latin forerunner), demonstrating Legrand's intention to bridge the intellectual gap between clergy and laypeople.

Jacques Legrand was a prolific author of many philosophical and exegetical treatises, but he is best known as an author of three major works. In 1398, he wrote an encyclopedic *Sophilogium* containing twelve books arranged in three main parts, of which "the first part talks about all human and divine sciences, the second part talks about virtues, and the third, about all (human) conditions." Whereas the latter part was converted into *Le livre de bonnes meurs*, the first section of *Sophilogium* became *L'Archiloge Sophie*, a far less popular treatise than its companion: Only five manuscripts of *L'Archiloge Sophie* are preserved.

The figure of Jacques Legrand presents a paradox: an author of an international bestseller, who was almost completely forgotten since the seventeenth century. Only recently has Evencio Beltran resuscitated interest in this remarkable person; an Aristotelian, but also a Thomist, a practicing preacher and a member of the Augustinian order, Legrand naturally devoted most of his attention to rhetoric among the liberal arts, in both Latin and French. The Order of Saint Augustine recognized Legrand's gift, and appointed him as a preacher at the 1396 election of the order's Prior General. His eloquence dazzled Jean de Montreuil, the French scientist and humanist, who once spent six hours listening to Legrand's sermon on Good Friday. The following years brought fame to Legrand. By the year 1400 he had been appointed as the official court preacher by King Charles VI of France, and on the Ascension Day 1405 he preached before the queen. On the tide of success, Legrand started to play a more active role in politics: he criticized the inability of the crown to improve national defense, thus losing the war; he tried,

although unsuccessfully, to promote a peace pact with England. Nothing is known about Legrand's life after 1413.

Legrand clearly felt that the natural wisdom of the ancient world was a remedy for his own "broken" age, and his rhetoric brings him into the company of early humanists such as Petrarch and Coluccio Salutati. His *Sophilogium*, however, was inspired by an earlier encyclopedic treatise, the *Speculum Naturale* of Vincent of Beauvais (ca. 1190-1264). Many other ideas expressed in Legrand's works were the product of conversations with Jean de Montreuil. Upon his death, in 1425, Legrand was awarded the honor of being buried in front of the high altar of the Augustinian church in Paris.

## LITERATURE

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## ONLINE RESOURCES

Hanno Wijsman. "Good Morals for a Couple at the Burgundian Court: Contents and Context of Harley 1310, "Le Livres des Bonnes Moeurs" of Jacques Legrand," in *Electronic British Library Journal*, London, The British Library, 2011, article 6, pp. 1-25.

<http://www.bl.uk/eblj/2011/articles/pdf/ebljarticle62011.pdf>

Digital copy of a manuscript of *Le livre de bonnes meurs*

<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8452640n>

Digital copy of the 1487 printed edition (Antoine Caillaut)

<https://archive.org/details/OEXV776RES>

French humanism and Jacques Legrand

<http://www.augnet.org/?ipageid=1258>

<http://augnet.org/default.asp?ipageid=1504>

"Jacques Legrand," Jonas Database, IRHT

[http://jonas.irht.cnrs.fr/consulter/intervenant/detail\\_intervenant.php?intervenant=398](http://jonas.irht.cnrs.fr/consulter/intervenant/detail_intervenant.php?intervenant=398)

"Jacques Legrand," ARLIMA: Les Archives de littérature du Moyen Âge

[http://www.arlima.net/il/jacques\\_le\\_grand.html](http://www.arlima.net/il/jacques_le_grand.html)

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