

**GUILLAUME PETIT, *Le viat de salut* (The Road to Salvation)**

**In French and Latin, illuminated manuscript on parchment**

**Central France (Tours), 1526**

ii (modern paper) + 78 + ii (modern paper) folios on parchment, modern foliation in pencil, 1-78, complete (collation i-ix<sup>s</sup> x<sup>6</sup>), horizontal catchwords, ruled in dark pink ink (justification 87 x 51 mm.), written in brown ink in very small and fine humanistic script on 23 lines, incipits of chapters mostly in Roman capitals, rubrics in red and blue (f. 1v), 1- to 2-line initials in liquid gold alternating on red and blue grounds, line-fillers alike, THIRTY-FOUR VERY FINE ILLUMINATED INITIALS, 2- to 5-line, of two types: initials in blue modeled with white, decorated with flowers in colors on liquid gold grounds, and initials in white modeled with gray, decorated with very fine stylized fleurs-de-lys, arabesques, winding stems and leaves, on liquid gold grounds, on f. 4v a cartouche in the form of a scroll drawn in brown ink and red wash presenting four lines of verse, very few stains and signs of use, in overall excellent condition. ORIGINAL BINDING of deep pink velvet over pasteboards, place mark and pastedowns in light blue silk, gilt edges, velvet slightly worn along the hinges of the front cover and spine, otherwise in excellent condition. Dimensions 122 x 75 mm.

When King Francis I traded his freedom in exchange for the confinement of his two seven- and eight-year-old sons, Henry and Francis, sent into Spain as hostages in 1526, this royal manuscript accompanied them. Composed expressly for the instruction of the young French princes by the king's confessor shortly before their departure, this appears to be the only copy in manuscript of a work that also circulated in print. Written in elegant humanistic script and decorated with high quality all'antica initials, it is a veritable jewel, made even more desirable by its delightful, original pink velvet binding, an exceptionally well-preserved example of Renaissance textile binding.

## PROVENANCE

1. The title page of the manuscript contains the same text as in the first published edition of the work, detailing that it was printed in Troyes on May 15, 1526 (f. 1). The manuscript was made in the same year in 1526 in Tours for the two elder sons of King François I, when they were sent for imprisonment in Spain in exchange for their father, who had been captured at the Battle of Pavia (see the discussion below).
2. Cheltenham, England [Middle Hill], Sir Thomas Phillipps Collection (1792-1873), MS 792, his collector's stamp a lion rampant on the second front flyleaf. Sir Thomas, a self-described "vello-maniac," attempted a "frenzied quest to preserve every scrap of paper and vellum fragment he could locate." (see Basbanes, p. 120). In the fifty-plus years that he collected, Sir Thomas amassed over 50,000 books and 100,000 manuscripts, perhaps the largest private library ever. In doing so, he nearly bankrupted himself and drove his family deep into debt. The complete story of Phillipps' acquisitions and the dispersal of his library required five volumes to narrate (Munby, 1951-60).
3. Modern booksellers's marks on the front flyleaves.

## TEXT

ff. 1-78, incipit, "LE VIAT DE SALUT tresnecessaire et utile a tous crestiens pour parvenir a la gloire eternelle. Imprime a Troyes par lauctorite de Reverend Pere en dieu, monsieur Levesque dudict lieu. Lequel a commande a son senne dernier Mil V<sup>cc</sup> xxvj Celebre le xv<sup>e</sup> de may. A tous Curez chappellains, vicaires, et maistres descole Avoir ce present livre pour lire ou faire lire au prosne les dymenches et festes; Et aux escolles, aux enfans capables de l'entendre ... Aymez voz ennemys dit Jesuchrist, priez pour eulx et leur faictes plaisir," *FINIS*; [f. 78v, blank].

Guillaume Petit, *Le viat de salut*. Guillaume Petit wrote *Le viat de salut* (The Road to Salvation) in 1525/1526, shortly before he had it published in Troyes by the local printer Jean Lecoq; a copy of this rare first edition survives as Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Rés. D.80374 (Higman, 1996, P13, USTC 10372. Another edition, undated, is listed in Pettegree, Walsby, and Wilkinson, 2007, no. 42988, USTC, no. 9823, with the suggested date of 1515, but this appears to be an error; against this, see Higman, 1996, P15, who instead suggests a date of 1527). At least nine editions of *Le viat de salut* were published by 1544, in Troyes, Longueville-devant-Bar, Paris and Lyon (USTC, Online Resources; the Longueville edition of 1526/1527 has been digitized, Online Resources).

Petit addressed his work, as the title page informs us, to all priests and schoolmasters whose responsibility it was to teach others through sermons and at schools. His work is divided into three treatises about faith, hope and charity, all three which are "necessaires pour la salvation d'ung chascun chrestien" (f. 2v). Following the title page (f. 1) and the introduction (ff. 1v-2v), the first treatise, ff. 2v-33v, is about faith providing the Apostles' Creed in Latin and in French prose and verse, then explaining each part of it at length. The second treatise, ff. 34-56v, is about hope and prayer, including a detailed discussion on each part of the Pater Noster prayer in French ("oraison dominicale"), followed by a summarized version "pour les simples gens, Affin que plus facilement ilz puissent entendre et Retenir Le Pater noster" (f. 46), and a chapter about praying to the saints. The third and final treatise, ff. 57-78, discusses in detail the Ten Commandments and how to live according to them.

Guillaume Petit (1470?-1536) wrote *Le viat de salut* in reaction to the spread Lutheran teachings in France, especially in northeastern France in the diocese of Troyes, which was under his jurisdiction. It has been suggested that the work is a response to the *Oraison de Jesuchrist* by the Protestant reformer Guillaume Farel, a manual of devotion inspired by the writings of Luther and printed in Paris around 1525, thus dating the creation of *Le viat de salut* very shortly before it was printed (cf. Garnier-Mathez, 2006, p. 60, n. 14; Higman, 1998, p. 93; see Online Resources for a copy of Farel's work illuminated by Etienne Colaud in Paris around 1525-1531 for Anne de Montmorency, Constable of France, Paris, BnF, MS Français 19246). Written in French, *Le viat de salut* was destined for the laity, as was his translation of the Hours of the Virgin into French, which he prepared for the King's sister, Marguerite de Navarre.

Guillaume Petit, also known as Parvy (a deformed version of the Latinized form of his name, Parvus), was an important French humanist and one of the founding members of Collège de France. Petit was born in Montivilliers in Normandy and joined the Dominican order in Rouen. According to a mention by Guillaume Budé in a letter to Erasmus, he was related to the famous Parisian *libraire* Jean Petit (d. 1540). In 1502 Guillaume Petit received the degree of Doctor in

Theology at the faculty of Paris, and in 1509 became confessor to King Louis XII (r. 1498-1515). He assisted Queen Anne of Brittany at her death bed in 1513 and officiated at her funeral at Blois, Paris and Saint-Denis. King Francis I (r. 1515-1547) also chose Petit as his confessor, chaplain and preacher at court, and appointed him bishop of Troyes in 1518, and later in 1528 bishop of Senlis. In 1518, François I charged Petit with the task of compiling the first inventory of the royal library at Blois, which would later become the Bibliothèque nationale de France (see Delisle, 1868, pp. 175-177). In 1521, Petit pronounced at court the recent condemnation of the propositions made by Martin Luther, and around this time he was named *inquisiteur général* for France (Tremblot, 1941, pp. 12-13). Guillaume Petit was an accomplished Hellenist, and his cultivated taste in art is revealed by the copy of Leonardo's *Last Supper* that he commissioned for the cathedral of Troyes, painted in Milan in 1523-1524.

The circumstances of the making of our manuscript are quite extraordinary. King François I had been captured at the Battle of Pavia on February 24, 1525, by the army of the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, and was then held captive in Madrid. After signing the Treaty of Madrid on January 14, 1526, he was allowed to return to France on March 17 in exchange for his two elder sons, François (later Francis III, duke of Brittany) and Henri (later Henry II, king of France). The two princes were only eight and seven years old at the time, and the four years of captivity in harsh conditions that would follow scarred them for life. We are grateful to Patricia Stirnemann for having identified our manuscript as part of the small library that was prepared for the captivity of the princes in Spain. Four other manuscripts that Stirnemann has identified along with the help of François Avril are: a summary in French of the *Institution d'un prince jusqu'à l'âge d'adolescence* by Erasmus, Chantilly, Musée Condé, MS 316 (Online Resources), in which the three sons of François I are depicted on f. 18v, and two Evangelaries, bearing their arms, one for each prince, of which one is still in Spain, Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional, MS Res. 51 (Online Resources) and another now in Rome, Biblioteca Casanatense, MS 2020 (Stirnemann, 2001, pp. 26-28). A third Evangelary in the group is Paris, BnF, MS nouv. acq. lat. 2668.

Our manuscript was made in Tours in 1526 by the same professional artisans who realized the other manuscripts for the royal hostages. In addition to the very similar script, initials and line-fillers, another comparable detail is the cartouche in the form of a scroll drawn in ink and wash on f. 4v in our manuscript, on ff. 26, 28, 29 in the Chantilly manuscript, and on f. ix in the Madrid manuscript. Moreover, it is notable that when the princes were finally returned to France after their captivity in Spain, it was Guillaume Petit, the author of the work in our manuscript, whom François I appointed as their personal tutor.

## LITERATURE

Bédouelle, G. "Guillaume Petit, humaniste, théologien et politique," *Mémoire dominicaine* 12 (1998), pp. 63-73.

Delisle, L. *Le cabinet des manuscrits de la Bibliothèque impériale*, I, Paris, 1868.

Available online

<https://archive.org/details/lecabinetdesmanu01deliuoft/page/n5/mode/2up?view=theater>

Garnier-Mathez, I. "Fausse parodie, vraie controverse: renversement de connivence dans la réécriture des Placards (1535)," *Seizième Siècle* 2 (2006), pp. 57-78.

Higman, F. *Lire et découvrir: La circulation des idées au temps de la Réforme*, Geneva, 1998.

Higman, Francis M. *Piety and the People: Religious Printing in France, 1511-1551*, St Andrews Studies in Reformation History, Florence, 1996.

Pettegree, A., M. Walsby, and A. Wilkinson. *French vernacular books: Books published in the French language before 1601 = Livres vernaculaires français : Livres imprimés en français avant 1601*, Leiden and Boston, 2007.

Stirnemann, P. "Entry 6. "Sommaire," en français, de l'*Institution d'un prince* jusqu'à l'âge d'adolescence d'Erasmus," *L'Art du manuscrit de la Renaissance en France*, Paris, 2001, pp. 26-28.

Techener, L. *Bibliothèque champenoise*, Geneva, 1972, pp. 55-56.

Tremblot, J. "Les armoiries de l'humaniste Parvy," *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 1 (1941), pp. 6-29.

## ONLINE RESOURCES

USTC: a digital bibliography of early modern print culture

<https://ustc.ac.uk/>

Chantilly, Musée Condé, MS 316

<https://bvmm.irht.cnrs.fr/mirador/index.php?manifest=https://bvmm.irht.cnrs.fr/iiif/307/manifest>

Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional, MS Res. 51

<http://bdh-rd.bne.es/viewer.vm?id=0000135163&page=1>

Guillaume Petit, *Le viat de salut*, Longueville-devant-Bar, 1527 (Gallica)

<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k15118600>

"Guillaume Parvy" (Petit), Wikipedia

[https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guillaume\\_Parvy](https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guillaume_Parvy)

Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS fr. 19246 (Gallica)

<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b10525879b>

TM 1149

