

# LES ENLUMINURES

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Sermons attributed to MAURICE DE SULLY (perhaps by WILLIAM DE BLOIS?);  
*Descensus Christi ad inferos* (Christ's Descent into Hell); *Lettre de Pilate à l'Empereur Claude* (Letter of Pilate to the Emperor Claudius)  
In French, with some Latin, illuminated manuscript on parchment  
Northwestern France (Normandy?), c. 1300-1325 (likely c. 1300)

*i* (paper) + 89 + *i* (paper) folios on parchment, modern foliation in pencil in Arabic numerals [cited in this description], lower outer margin recto, 1-89, accompanied by modern pencil quire signatures, A-m, missing the first leaf in the tenth quire and the last two leaves in the twelfth quire (collation i-ix<sup>s</sup> x<sup>s</sup> [-1, following f. 72, with loss of text] xi<sup>4</sup> xii<sup>8</sup> [-7 and -8, likely cancelled blanks]), no catchwords, ruled in lead with top and bottom horizontal rules full across on most folios and with single full-length vertical bounding lines and intercolumnar lines (justification, 160-165 × 110-120 mm.), written below top line in a Gothic vernacular bookhand (*textualis libraria*), in two columns of 29 lines, rubrics in red, majuscules heightened with a touch of red, initials of 1- and 2-lines alternately red and blue with pen work in the opposite color, two 4- or 5-line parted red and blue initials with pen decoration in red and blue on f. 1 and f. 73, ONE LATER ILLUMINATION in 11 lines on f. 1, (c. 55 × 57-60 mm.) in full color on gold ground, depicting God enthroned before a starry sky, with symbols of the four Evangelists at the four corners; some loss of pigments and crackling of gold leaf, frequent scribal corrections, copied on parchment showing clear grain patterning, natural edge-gaps and occasional holes, along with medieval sewn repairs and modern conservator interventions to repair damaged leaves, some loss of text due to parchment damage and repairs (f. 1: sermon prologues, f. 36: sermon 29, f. 55: sermon 49, f. 89: end of *Lettre de Pilate*), some areas of fading or flaking ink, overall in good condition. Bound in late-nineteenth or early-twentieth century red velvet over pasteboards, spine with four raised bands, some wear, but in good condition. Dimensions 220 x 155 mm.

A witness to the lively role the vernacular played in religious life in France during the High Middle Ages, this manuscript constitutes a newly discovered witness to three important Old French texts. It includes a famous sermon cycle that is one of the earliest extant works of French prose and the earliest complete collection of model sermons addressed to the laity. The sermons are copied with two French translations of non-canonical biblical texts by a single scribe in a distinctive hand, with parchment features and repairs of interest to materially focused researchers. This is one of only five manuscripts that includes the full set of sermons.

## PROVENANCE

1. Copied in France, c. 1300-1325, likely c. 1300, based on the evidence of the script and penwork initials, although the main hand is challenging to date with features suggesting a scribe trained in copying documentary materials. Paleographical and linguistic evidence suggest an origin in Northwestern France, perhaps in Normandy. Stylistic evidence suggests the miniature is a much later addition.
2. Private Collection.

## TEXT

ff. 1-72v, [Latin prologue], *Coment <creitre> se icit contenir en sa uie*, incipit, "Dominus ac saluator noster dilectissimi post salutiferam passionem et gloriosam resurrectionem suam ... domine tu omnia nostri tu sanctis quia amo te dirit ei pasce oues meas;" [ff. 1-3, French prologue], *De la feste saint Piere*, incipit, "Seignors preuiores ceste parole ne fu pas dite a mon seigneur saint piere ... Tercio predicatio siu. Si ista habuerimus bonum Gaudium ad quiremus;" [f. 3-3v, On the Credo], *La credo*, incipit, "Nos creons la sainte ternite Le pere et le fis et le saint esperit ... Ecce quod erit in fine sine fine. Quod nobis prestare dignetis in saecula seculorum. Amen;" [ff. 3v-6v, On the Pater Noster], *La pater noster*, incipit, "Pater noster qui est in celis santificetur nomen tuum. Nostre pere qui est el ciel saintifie soit li tiens nons ... Libera nos a malo bonum corporris [sic] bonum in hoc seculo bonum in futuro bonum quod est iusticia bonum quod est gloria. Amen"; [ff. 6v-69v, Sermons] *De lan reneuf de la circonsion*, incipit, "Postquam consummati sunt dies octo ut circumcidentur [sic] puer uocatum est nomen eius Jesus [Luke 2:21]. Seignors i cest ior de hui siest li premier ior de lan ... Ecce quod erit in fine sine fine. Quod nobis prestare digneris in secula seculorum. Amen"; [ff. 69v-72v, Epilogue], *Sarmon*, incipit, "Anima mea liquefacta est. ut dilectus locutus est ... Mais li apostles qui desus nos sont par luer fortes euures sont les montaignes ou sainte [final leaf damaged, but appears to conclude] [n]e el ciecle des <c..hes> Amerz//"

Sermons in Old French, with some Latin, formerly ascribed to Maurice de Sully (d. 1196), but recently attributed to William de Blois (d. 1206) (Huchet, 2020, discussed below); edited Robson, 1952; the text now ends imperfectly in the epilogue, with one leaf missing.

The text opens with prologues in Latin (f. 1) and French (ff. 1-3), followed by French and Latin explanations of the Creed (f. 3r-v) and Pater Noster (ff. 3v-6v), and sixty-five sermons for the liturgical year (ff. 6v-69v), including the Temporal (Circumcision, Epiphany, eleven Sundays following Epiphany and Lent, Palm Sunday, Easter, five Sundays of Eastertide, Ascension, Pentecost, twenty-four Sundays, Advent (four Sundays), Christmas), Trinity, the Dedication of a church, and selected feasts from the Sanctoral (Purification, John, Peter, Assumption, Michael, All Saints), and concluding with five sermons for the Common of Saints. Opening with the Circumcision, January 1, rather than with the first Sunday in Advent, is characteristic of manuscripts of this sermon cycle. It closes with an epilogue (ff. 69v-72v) not included in Robson's edition, and possibly unique to this manuscript. Each sermon begins with the biblical them in Latin, before turning to the French text. The order matches that in Robson's edition with one exception: sermon 22 (Pentecost) is followed by sermons 24, 25, 23, i.e., the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 1<sup>st</sup>, Sundays after Pentecost (labelled here as the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup>). The reorganization reflects the normal order of medieval liturgical books, from which Robson's *Sens* witness, and two others, deviate (Robson, 1952, pp. 1, 22, 64).

ff. 73-85v, incipit, "Ce avint el quinzime an que Tybere cesar auoit este empereres de rome ... Car il uost tout mander a Claudie cesar a rome sie scrit tele chartre";

French translation of the Latin A recension of *Descensus Christi ad inferos* (final section of the *Gospel of Nicodemus*); ed. Ford, 1973.

ff. 85v-89v, incipit, “Ponce pilate a Claudie Cesar son empereor salus. Nouuellement auint que li juif ... [final leaf damaged, but appears to conclude] le fis et <le saint esperit> uit et [regn]e el ciecle des ciecles. Amen.”

*Lettre de Pilate à l'empereur Claude*, in French; ed. Fein, 2015.

The sermon collection opening this manuscript represents the earliest complete collection of model sermons addressed to the laity (the slightly earlier sermons of Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) being composed for monks), and one of the earliest extant works of French prose. Their longstanding attribution to Maurice de Sully (d. 1196) – the bishop of Paris who was responsible for the building of the cathedral of Notre Dame – has been debated for decades by scholars; most recently, Huchet (2020) has argued that they may be by William de Blois (d. 1206), Bishop of Lincoln (1203-1206), who began his career in the household of Bishop of Durham, and nephew of King Stephen, Hugh de Puiset (c. 1125-1195). The collection offers very short sermons covering a full year of Sundays and feast days, suitable for use by less learned priests of the diocese (Bériou, 1981, p. 313).

Maurice de Sully composed a Latin sermon cycle between 1168-1175. The French sermons in our manuscript differ so significantly from these Latin sermons that scholars now speak of them as an adaptation of the Latin sermons, rather than as a translation; the Latin and French sermons each include passages absent from the other (especially the conspicuously lengthy French text), as well as slightly different sermons. Scholars have disagreed on which version constitutes the original, but the scholarly consensus today believes the French sermon cycle is the later of the two, dating from the later twelfth or early thirteenth century (Zink, 1976, p. 33 summarizes the positions). The vernacular tradition is especially complex with significant variation between copies. Nonetheless, its sole edition was based upon a single witness – Sens Cathedral Chapter, now Paris, BnF, MS fr. 13314, ff. 1-102 – with differences provided in a critical apparatus (Robson, 1952, p. 75), and has therefore attracted significant criticism (Zink, 1976, p. 34; see also Huchet, 2020).

The French sermons are attested in as many as 64 manuscripts containing a varying number of sermons from a single sermon to more than 60 sermons, but with only four manuscripts that include the full set of sermons known and studied by scholars (JONAS, Online Resources, listing 64 witnesses including this manuscript; Huchet, 2020, pp. 331-333, lists 43). Our manuscript is only the fifth complete copy known. No scholars have engaged with it. A new edition by Huchet is underway, and this newly discovered and complete witness will be crucial to that edition. All other known copies are held by institutional repositories located in Europe, and copies rarely appear on the market: the Schoenberg Database lists only four manuscripts described as including this sermon collection since 1825.

A pair of shorter, anonymous works conclude the manuscript. The first (ff. 73-85v) is a French translation of one of the plethora of versions of the Latin A recension of *Descensus Christi ad inferos* (itself the final section of the non-canonical *Evangelie de Nicodème*). Strikingly, several witnesses of this text appear in manuscripts that also include excerpts from the sermons attributed to Maurice de Sully (Meyer, 1906). Closing the codex (at ff. 85v-89v) is a French translation of one of the *Descensus'* common appendices, the pseudepigraphic *Lettre de Pilate à l'empereur Claude*. These two works were exceptionally popular during the Middle Ages in Latin, with the French

versions known from, respectively, ten and eleven other witnesses, all now held by institutional repositories in Europe. Since this pair of texts (in their French versions) appear together in only four other witnesses, all Anglo-Norman and likely English in origin, their presence here suggests a potential Anglo-Norman connection for our manuscript.

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## ONLINE RESOURCES

ARLIMA

<https://www.arlima.net/>

Evangile de Nicodème and Lettre de Pilate, London, British Library, Harley MS 2253  
[http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Harley\\_MS\\_2253](http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Harley_MS_2253)

Jonas-IRHT/CNRS

Sermons dit de Maurice de Sully (64 manuscripts, including this one)

<https://jonas.irht.cnrs.fr/oeuvre/2431>

Evangile de Nicodème (11 manuscripts)

[https://jonas.irht.cnrs.fr/consulter/oeuvre/detail\\_oeuvre.php?oeuvre=5091](https://jonas.irht.cnrs.fr/consulter/oeuvre/detail_oeuvre.php?oeuvre=5091)

Lettre de Pilate (5 manuscripts)

[https://jonas.irht.cnrs.fr/consulter/oeuvre/detail\\_oeuvre.php?oeuvre=23293](https://jonas.irht.cnrs.fr/consulter/oeuvre/detail_oeuvre.php?oeuvre=23293)

Schoenberg Database of Manuscripts

<https://sdbm.library.upenn.edu/>

Sermons, Paris, BnF, MS fr. 01822

<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8425997k>

Sermons, Paris, BnF, MS fr. 13316

<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b90609002>

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