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GILLES CORROZET, *Les Sentences, Conseil, et Bons Enseignemens des Sept Sages de Grece* (The Sentences, Council, and Good Instruction of the Seven Sages of Greece)

In French, manuscript on parchment

France, Paris(?), 1573

i + 29 + i (flyleaves on paper) folios on parchment, modern foliation in pencil in top right recto, complete, (collation, i<sup>1</sup>, ii-viii<sup>4</sup>), ruled in lead, 20 long lines (justification 100 x 65 mm), title page written in an intertwined, looping script, executed in two lines and filled in with gold, text written in brown ink, the main text written in lettres anciennes, distichs written in a cancelleresca script, all scripts written by a master calligrapher and exquisitely executed, majuscules in text lined with gold, text box framed with brown ink and gold, introduction to the sages (ff. 2, 6, 10, 14, 18, 22, 26) double framed with brown ink and gold with an intricate weave pattern between the frames, title page (f. 1) written in a bold, looping, and interlocking script in gold, an emblem (f. 1v) drawn in brown ink containing a crown binding a ribbon looped around two crossed pens highlighted with gold, slight show-through of text at f. 11, minor smudging on f. 29v, otherwise excellent condition. Binding, seventeenth century, dark brown morocco, double line gold tooling around border with floral patterns at corners, top and bottom of spine slightly scuffed, otherwise good condition. Dimensions 112 x 82 mm.

This pocket-size, deluxe manuscript is a masterpiece of French calligraphy of the later sixteenth century. Lavish gold embellishments throughout and the calligraphic emblem *Vive la Plume* enrich this manuscript as a work of art. The mixing of antiquarian elements with contemporary cancelleresca scripts produces an elegant contrast of styles. This is the only known manuscript of Corrozet's *Le Conseil*, which survives in just a few print copies. The combination of text and calligraphic mastery make this a unique artistic monument to Renaissance humanism in France.

## PROVENANCE

1. Written in 1573, this manuscript was surely produced in France by a master calligrapher. The range of scripts used demonstrate the skill and versatility of this calligrapher. The tag "Vive la Plume" (Long live the Pen) on f. 1v is known to have been used by several calligraphers in France, notably Esther Inglis (1571-1624). The scripts used in this manuscript can be compared to calligraphic albums produced by the masters Jacques de la Rue (b. ca. 1532) and Pierre Hamon (1530-1569). (See Mediavilla, 2006, pp. 136-193, for a fuller list of French calligraphers of the sixteenth century.)
2. A seventeenth-century owner supplied the book with a fine morocco binding with simple and elegant gold tooling around the borders of the book.
3. Written in pencil on the front pastedown, "Crb.ii.93" is probably a shelfmark from a previous owner. Likewise, a small stamp in purple ink at the top right of the back pastedown reads "BM," perhaps the initials of the same owner.

## TEXT

f. 1-29v, *Les Sentences, Conseil, et Bons Enseignemens des Sept Sages de Grece, Escrit en l'An 1573, Vive la Plume*, incipit, "Le Premier des Philosophes Grecz... temps se trouble. Fin des dictz des Sept Sages de Grece."

The text in this manuscript comes from Gilles Corrozet's (1510-1568) *Le Conseil des Sept Sages de Grece*. The work was first printed in 1544 and was reprinted another thirteen times by 1615. Despite these fourteen editions of the text, only twenty-five print copies are known to survive. While this manuscript copy differs from the 1545 edition in its order of presentation, it may preserve a text from one of the lost copies of the 1558 edition of *Le Conseil*, or it may represent a scribal reworking of the text for a patron or for personal use. In any case, this manuscript is the only manuscript copy of a rare Renaissance text as well as a masterful calligraphic performance. The *lettres anciennes* used evoke medieval textualis scripts and suggest a purposefully archaizing style. However, the style of script used in the distichs remains more contemporary and generally follows Mediavilla's cancelleresca (2006, p. 169).

The tradition of Seven Sages of Greece begins with Plato (c. 430 – 348/7 BCE). He mentions a group of seven sages from Sparta, who lived in the seventh and sixth centuries BCE and formulated two maxims essential to wisdom: "know thyself" and "nothing overmuch" (Protagoras, 343a-b). A fuller set of sayings attributed to the seven sages is attributed to Demetrius of Phalerum (c. 350 – c. 280 BCE) by the fifth century CE writer Stobaeus. A similar collection of sayings is also found in Book 1 of Diogenes Laertius's (fl. third century CE) *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*. The Latin tradition of the sayings of the Seven Sages begins with the *Ludus Septem Sapientum* written by Ausonius in the fourth century. (For a full account of the classical textual tradition of the sayings see Althoff and Zeller, 2006.) Corrozet's edition presents Latin maxims attributed to the seven sages of Greece drawn from Desiderius Erasmus's (1466-1536) collection of sayings first printed in 1515 alongside the *Disticha Catonis*, an immensely popular school text in the Middle Ages and Renaissance. Corrozet has changed the order of the sages (Thales, Solon, Chilo, Pittacus, Bias, Cleobulus, and Periander) from Erasmus's edition (Periander, Bias, Pittacus, Cleobulus, Chilo, Solon, Thales), translated their sayings into French, and added short biographical notes for the sages and brief comments about the sayings. The text of *Le Conseil* thus provides readers with easily digestible moral lessons, such as "Don't make promises," "Help your friends," "Honor your parents." For example, the first saying of Solon, *deum cole* (worship God), in Corrozet becomes (f. 6v) *De tout ton coeur de ta force et puissance / Rens gloire a Dieu honneur et reuerence* (With your whole heart, strength, and might, give glory, honor, and reverence to God.) In the commentary that follows Corrozet links this saying to the first commandment of Moses "I am the Lord thy God." This manuscript retains Corrozet's order of the sages but reworks the order of their sayings and omits several sayings entirely. The idiosyncratic content may represent the sayings the calligrapher or patron found to be choicest.

The small size of this manuscript mirrors the usual duodecimo or sextodecimo size in which *Le Conseil* was usually printed. The use of *lettres anciennes* visually highlights the antiquity of the wisdom contained in the volume, while the cancelleresca script reminds readers of that same wisdom's contemporary applicability. The sumptuous decoration of the title page in gold writing, the "Vive la Plume" emblem, penwork decorations, and gold highlights throughout, all underscore the workmanship and craft lavished upon this deluxe manuscript. The pocket size of the manuscript allowed for portability and private meditation on the moral maxims of the ancients for a wealthy patron.

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