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ANONYMOUS, *Traicte du sacrement de mariaige* ... (Treatise on the sacrament of marriage and the education of children)

In French, illuminated manuscript on parchment

France, Paris, after 1533 (dated) and before 1547 (probably c. 1539-1540)

i + 47 folios on parchment, the front flyleaf (now loose from the binding) and the final leaf (ruled, otherwise blank, f. 47) were at some point used as pastedowns, modern foliation in pencil, 1-47, complete (collation i-iii⁸ iv⁸ [-7, lacking one leaf after f. 30, without loss of text] v-vi⁸), horizontal catchwords, no signatures, ruled in brownish red ink (justification 154 x 101 mm), written by one scribe in brown ink in humanistic script in single column on 20 lines, 1-line initials in shell gold on grounds alternating in red and blue decorated with penwork in shell gold, matching line-fillers, one 2-line initial in shell gold on blue ground decorated with white foliage penwork (f. 39v), two 2-line initials in blue decorated with white ribbon and foliage on shell gold grounds infilled with strawberries (ff. 1, 44), two large 4-line initials, one in shell gold on dark brown ground decorated with very fine brown camaïeu d'or representing a flower motif with a dragon's head, the other in blue decorated with white ribbon and foliage on shell gold grounds infilled with flowers and two dolphin motifs (ff. 1, 44), double band border in shell gold and brown framing the text on all pages, on ff. 1v-2 the text is completely effaced and illegible, on f. 1 the text in brown ink and the 1-line initials are partially effaced and retraced later on the first two lines, several stains and signs of use, in overall good condition. Pasteboard covers in paper (no binding to cover them), five sewing bands visible on the spine, late eighteenth- or early nineteenth-century inscription in brown ink on the front cover (see Provenance), two pairs of holes on the covers for ties (no lost), covers and stained, worn, with wormholes and losses in the corners, but the sewing is intact and robust, in overall good condition. Dimensions 209 x 143 mm.

Evidently a unique copy of an illuminated royal manuscript made in Paris around 1539-1540, most likely for Catherine de Medici, wife of Henri, Duke of Orléans (the future Henri II). The treatise combines moral instruction on marriage with urgent dynastic prayers for male heirs, reflecting the political crisis of succession after 1536. The manuscript is especially significant because it captures a critical moment in history; at the time of its creation, the young twenty-year-old Catherine had not yet developed into the powerful queen and regent she would later become.

PROVENANCE

1. The work was composed after 1533, as is indicated by the text that refers to the official action taken by François I (reign 1515-1547) at Fontainebleau shortly after Easter 1533, when he ordered the Parliament and the Faculty of Theology of Paris to take measures against the spread of Lutheranism: "Et icy ne veulx taire le tresillustre et catholicque faict digne de grande et perpetuelle memoire du Roy treschrestien Francois premier Roy de ce nom lequel estant a Fontaynebleau peu de temps apres Pasques l'an cinq cens trente trois le dixneufiesme de son regne ayant entendu que en sadicte ville de Paris principale et capitale ville de son Royaulme aulcunement pulluloit cest mechante heresie et venimeuse secte de Martin Luther filz de Sathan apres avoir evocque par devers sa majeste, sa court de parlement et faculte de theologie dudict Paris..." (f. 10r-v). Furthermore, the prayer, "Oraison a dieu pour luy demander lignee," which

completes the work (commissioned from the outset), sets the context for the making the manuscript: to reaffirm the succession of the royal house of Valois by legitimate male heirs (f. 44r-v).

The manuscript was most probably made after 1536, following the death of the dauphin François (1518-1536), whose sudden death was politically disastrous (see below). With François dead, the new heir was his brother Henri (the future Henri II), who had married Catherine de Medici in 1533. The union was politically strategic but, crucially, remained childless for ten years, causing great anxiety at court. The manuscript was most likely made in this period, 1536-1544, for Catherine de Medici (see below). The styles of the script and secondary decoration suggest that the manuscript was made in Paris around 1539-1540 (see below). It is probably a unique copy of the work; we have not found any other copies and the wording of the text suggests that it was commissioned personally for Catherine de Medici (see below).

2. Inscription on the paper cover made in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century provides evidence that the text on the first pages was already effaced by this date: "Manuscrit Précieux, apres les premieres Pages effacés..."

TEXT

ff. 1-44v, Anonymous treatise on the marriage and education of children (unique, unpublished work), rubric, "Traicte du sacrement de mariaige faict a l'honneur de dieu et pour l'instruction de la conscience de ceulx et celles que dieu a appellez audict estat et vocation," incipit, "Mariaige au dire des saintz docteurs est ung lien indissoluble entre l'homme et la femme procedant du mutuel accord et consentement ... et clemence infinie nous donner apres cest exil laborieux et vie mortelle avecques ses benoistz anges le saint et bien heureux repos en sa gloire eternelle. Amen." (explicit on ff. 43-44), completing with a prayer on f. 44r-v (integral to the work, copied and decorated by the same scribe and illuminator), rubric, "Oraison a dieu pour luy demander lignee," incipit, "Mon dieu pere eternel qui avez ordonne et institue le sacrement de mariaige pour multiplier le genre humain ... si c'est vostre plaisir en ce avoir pitie de moy et me exaulcer en ma priere comme avez ouy et exaulce ma dame sainte Anne, mere de la tressainte vierge et pucelle Marie, aussi la bonne dame Anne, mere du prophete Samuel, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Zacharie, pere de monsieur saint Jehan Baptiste et plusieurs aultres que vous plaise me donner la grace de bien instruyre et conduire en vostre sainte foy et loy les enfans que vous me donnerez affin que en ce monde je vous en puisse faire service et sacrifice qui vous soit agreable et que a jamais en paradis soit par iceulx en la compagnie des benoistz saintz et saintes vostre hault nom et immortel love et honore. Amen," ff. 45-47v, ruled, otherwise blank.

The anonymous work found in this manuscript begins by discussing the topic of marriage, for which the author found inspiration in the *Traictié du saint sacrement, estat et fruit de mariage* by Raoul de Montfiquet, a Parisian theologian and doctor at the Sorbonne (rector of the University in 1475, died in 1501; for more on him, see Hasenohr 1992). Montfiquet composed didactic treatises in French to explain doctrine accessibly for noble lay readers, and this exposition on marriage is part of a larger manual explaining all seven sacraments, printed in Paris in 1495. The first chapter in Montfiquet's work begins: "Mariage est ung lien ou obligation indissoluble entre personnes de homme et de femme légitimes, cause de leur consentement par lequel ilz donnent

et transportent leurs corps l'un a l'autre pour engendrer, nourrir et instruire a la loy de dieu lignee, et pour rendre l'un a l'autre le deu de mariage..." (see Online Resources for a digitized copy). This is similar to the beginning of our text, but not the same; the author of the work in our manuscript used Montfiquet's treatise as a source. After dealing in general terms with the nature, duties, and purposes of Christian marriage, the treatise in our manuscript quickly differs from the work of Montfiquet, turning to the education of children. It recalls, for instance, how neglecting to correct children led to divine punishment (the story of Heli and his sons), stresses Christ's teaching that God must come before family, and recounts the famous words of Blanche of Castile to her son Saint Louis: she would prefer him to die than to see him fall into sin (ff. 7v-8). The biblical and classical examples that follow include moral warnings of fratricide and family rivalry: Absalom and Ammon, Joram killing his brothers, Eteocles and Polynices, the gruesome myth of Atreus and Thyestes, and so forth (ff. 18v-19). The rest of the work, from f. 21v onwards, presents classical, biblical and historical (mainly French royal) examples of couples without legitimate male heirs and the importance for praying for heirs ("lignee"), before concluding the treatise with a prayer for heirs.

The manuscript was made in the context of dynastic instability. When the dauphin François suddenly died in Tournon in 1536, apparently of illness (fever) at the age of eighteen, rumors of poisoning spread immediately. His death was politically disastrous: François I had lost his heir at a critical moment when succession questions were acute with the Valois dynasty facing threats from both the Habsburgs (Charles V) and internal instability. Henri became dauphin, but without further children, the Valois succession looked fragile. In the period of 1536-1544, the French court repeatedly feared a dynastic crisis. If Henri died childless, the crown might pass to his younger brother Charles d'Orléans, but beyond him the line was uncertain. This anxiety increased the practice of reciting special prayers and devotions for fertility and offspring for Henri and his wife, Catherine de Medici. Finally in 1544 Catherine conceived a son, François II, the future king. This was viewed as a miraculous answer to years of prayers.

In this political context, confirmed by its date (see below), the manuscript was most likely made for Catherine de Medici. After reminding the reader that the primary "fruit" of marriage was to continue humankind and dynasties (drawing on Montfiquet's treatise), the work deals with the education of children and the importance of male heirs. The concluding prayer (ff. 43-44) invokes two holy women whose stories are centered on childlessness and divine intervention: St. Anne, mother of the Virgin Mary ("ma dame sainte Anne"), and Hannah (Anne), mother of the prophet Samuel, another biblical model of a once-barren woman granted a child through prayer. The concluding chapter of the treatise reads: "Parquoy voulant conclurre et faire fin a ceste presente instruction je vouldrois conseiller a ceulx et celles qui ont este long temps en mariaige sans avoir lignee et qui ne peuvent avoir si dieu de sa grace especialle ne la leur donne et envoie pour le souverain remede et certain moyen d'en avoir fils ... Et non seulement je vouldroie conseiller aux dessusdictz de prier dieu ... la priere et oraison continuelle d'ung ou plusieurs gens de bien il ouvrira le ventre et donnera lignee a la femme pour laquelle sera tant requis et supplie ..." (ff. 39v-42v) (Therefore, wishing to conclude and bring this present instruction to an end, I would advise those men and women who have long been married without having offspring, and who cannot have any unless God in His special grace grants and sends it, that the sovereign remedy and surest means of obtaining a son... And not only would I advise the aforesaid to pray to God, but (also) that through the continual prayer and

supplication of one or several good people, He will open the womb and give offspring to the woman on whose behalf He is so earnestly requested and entreated).

The decorative illumination of this manuscript displays a style characteristic of the sixteenth century that was favored by northern European courts, which suggests that our manuscript was made in Paris c. 1540 in courtly circles. For French comparanda, see the Hours of François I (New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, MS 2011.353, see Online Resources), copied by Jean Mallard and with primary illumination by the Master of François de Rohan in Paris in 1539-1540; the decorative illumination is especially similar to the present manuscript (cf. Croizat-Glazer 2013). Further comparisons can be made with initials in Plutarch's *Vie de Pyrrhus*, translated into French by Arnould Chandon for François I around 1542-1547 (Chantilly, Musée Condé, MS 855; see Online resources for digitized images). Mallard left France for the English court c. 1539, and a hand more similar to the present manuscript's than Mallard's can be found in a panegyric written for François I by Renatus de Bombellis in 1531 (Chantilly, Musée Condé, MS 892; see Online resources for digitized images; Carley, 2009).

LITERATURE

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Hours of Catherine de Medici, Paris, BNF, MS nouv. acq. fr. 82 (1530-1531):
<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b550140134>

Hours of Henri II, Paris, BNF, MS lat. 1429 (1542-1547):
<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8447767x>

Chantilly, Musée Condé, MS 855:
<https://arca.irht.cnrs.fr/ark:/63955/rgzqrfy9chmv>

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New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Hours of Francis I,
<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/238581>

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