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ANONYMOUS, [Livre historial des faiz de feu messire Bertrand du Guesclin]
In French, manuscript on paper and parchment
France [North], c. 1450-75

304 ff., mostly in gatherings of 12 (collation *i-xix*¹², *xx*¹¹; *xxi-xxv*¹²; *xxvi*⁶ [lacking a leaf in the 8th gathering, another in the 26th and the last blank, gathering 20 is complete with only 11 folios, one cancelled, else complete]), modern foliation, on paper with parchment on the outer bifolio of the first gathering ("pot à une anse," close to Briquet no. 12476: Neubourg, 1471, and "fleur de lis" close to Briquet no. 1680: Paris and other centers in northern France, from 1451 on), written in a neat and elegant *bastarda* script on 26-27 long lines (justification c. 170 x 115 mm.), illuminated initial on f. 1, with space left for a miniature that is left incomplete. Bound in the late eighteenth or nineteenth century in half vellum with five raised thongs, on the upper pastedown in a seventeenth-century hand "Ouvrage de Deydié de Fages sur la vie de duguesclin" repeated on the first flyleaf, citing Didier de Fages as the author of the work (Generally in very good condition, only the last 80 folios have a stain on the lower fore-edge margins, not affecting the text except on the last folio where there is a loss of a few letters, some scribbles on the last leaf). Dimensions 270 x 195 mm.

Manuscript in prose derived from Jean Couvelier's celebrated epic poem on the life of the Breton warrior Bertrand du Guesclin, the French national hero who enjoyed the protection of King Charles V. The present manuscript—one of perhaps only four that exist of this prose version, which has not been edited since the seventeenth century—would provide an important base for further study of the complex and still poorly understood manuscript tradition. No copies are recorded in North American libraries, nor have any copies, apart from the present one, apparently changed hands in the last hundred years.

PROVENANCE

1. Written in northern France in the third quarter of the fifteenth century judging from the watermarks, the script, and the decoration, once in the possession of a family "De Foyssy." The following members are listed: "Francoise de Foyssy / Jan de Foyssy / Nicolas de Foyssy (see f. 304v). A note placed in the lower margin at the end of the manuscript that has been torn out--beginning "Ce li[vre]..."--could have provided information on its original owner. There is a De Foissy family recorded in Lachesnaye-Desbois, *Dictionnaire de la noblesse* (Paris, 1866), vol. 8, col. 144-145, with a Nicolas de Foissy, Chevalier de Malte, died in 1625. The family is tied to the Mâconnais region (Burgundy).
2. Late eighteenth- or early nineteenth-century added note in French, pasted on front flyleaf reads: "Mémoire. Deidier de Fages vivant en 1470 a fait l'histoire de Du Guesclin, sur les

mémoires et notes qu'avoit laissé Guillaume de Fages son bisaieul, lequel avoit servi sous ce connectable pendant toutes ses guerres, ledit Guillaume fut fait ensuite capitaine de cent hommes d'armes et contribua par sa valeur à la reprise du Pont de Commines [...] ce qui fut cause du gain de la bataille de Rosembeq donné le 17 novembre 1382. Charles VI en considération du service qu'il lui avoit rendu voulut qu'il ajouta 3 fleurs de lis d'or sur un champ d'azur sur chef de ses armes. Ce manuscrit était relié en bois suivant la mode du temps. Une personne à qui on le prêta creut rendre un service en le faisant relire tel qu'il est aujourd'hui [sic]." Likely erroneous, the note refers to Didier de Fages as the author of the present prose version: his father Guillaume de Fages was employed in Du Guesclin's army. For services rendered to the King of France, he was awarded three gold fleur de lis to be added to his coat of arms (see *Dictionnaire des familles françaises...* [Évreux, 1921], vol. 17, pp. 41-43: "Guillaume de Fages aurait été un des plus vaillants auxiliaries du connétable du Guesclin [...]. Didier de Fages, bailli de Senilhes, en Vivarais, qui fit son testament en 1520. Les généalogistes modernes ont avancé que Didier de Fages était fils de Pons de Fages, petit-fils de Guillaume II de Fages et arrière petit-fils de Guillaume I^{er} de Fages, mentionné plus haut"; see also Lachesnaye-Desbois, *Dictionnaire de la noblesse* [Paris, 1865], vol. 7, col. 671-673: "Didier ou Deydier de Fages, branche des seigneurs de Chazeaux, établie en Vivarais"). It seems unlikely that Didier de Fages (died c. 1520) was actually the author of the prose chronicle, granted another manuscript containing this prose version states that the prose was commissioned in 1387 by Jean d'Estouteville. The attribution to Didier de Fages is thus probably fallacious, but nonetheless reflects an authorial tradition.

2. Laurence Witten, USA, Catalogue 8, 1978, no. 57, \$6,500, and again in Catalogue 10, 1979, no. 43, for the same price.
3. Private Collection, Italy.

TEXT

ff. 1-2, heading, *Cy commence listoire du noble Bertrand du Guesclin qui fut jadis connestable de France*; incipit, "A tous ceulx qui les coeurs ont gentils et ayme et desirent honneur noblesse et gentillesse naturellement se delictant moult a lire ou faire lire et recorder pour amener a memoire les nobles fais des vaillans chevaliers et preudommes hardy qui on esté au temps passé pour scavoir les prouesses... [...] C'est assavoir feu monseigneur de Guesclin jadis connestable de France qui de vaillance et de largesse puet et doit estre acomparaiger aux .ix. preux pour les beaulx fais qu'il fist et acheva en son vivant lequel romant sans adicion ou diminucion aucune sera cy apres traicté et proposé [sic for "en prose"] pour cause de briefté et extrait d'un autre romant compilé en parolles rimees excepté mutacion de parolles pour abreger le langaige et evader prolixité je supplie tres humblement a tous ceulx qui a la vie et histoire dudit monseigneur Bertrand scevent pour lequel a l'aide de Dieu ce present livre sera fait et ordonné que ce aucune faute y treuve en la substance de la matiere qu'il leur plaist a corriger aussy l'ay je fait soubz leur correction et moy avoir pour excusé. Car je ne puis ediffier d'autres etoffes que celles que j'ay" [Prologue, Menard, 1618, pp. 1-3];

ff. 2-304, heading, *De la naissance Monseigneur Bertrand et de ses menus de son maintien et gouvernemens (?) jusques a l'aage de .xviii. ans ou environ*; incipit, "Monseigneur Bertrand du Guesclin dessus nommé, dont ce

prologue cy a fait et fera mencion...“ [Menard, 1618, Chapitre I, begins p. 3]; explicit, “ [...] et a tous ceulx qui ce livre liront et orront et especialment a celui qui l’a fait ordonner dont [sic] dieux doint bonne vye et paradis en la fin. Amen. Explicit livre de Bertrand du Guesclin.” [Menard, 1618, pp. 3-543].

Sometime between c. 1380 and 1385, Jehan Cuvelier completed a poem of 24,346 alexandrine verses, a chronicle on the life of Bertrand du Guesclin (1320-1380), the French national hero who became a living legend. From minor Breton nobility, rough in manner and in looks, Du Guesclin first distinguished himself as a guerilla warrior in the Breton War of Succession, and then went on to fight for France against the English in many battles of the Hundred Years’ War, before he finally also led expeditions to the Iberian Peninsula. He was taken prisoner-of-war three or perhaps four times, released only upon payment of extravagant ransoms by King Charles V, and he enjoyed the protection of the crown at least from 1356-57, when he was awarded a life annuity. In 1370 the king named him Constable of France, an office he held until his death. As testimony to his esteem, parts of his body were handed out upon his death, almost like relics, and he was even buried in the royal necropolis at the Abbey of St.-Denis. A black-and-white film directed in 1949 by Bernard de Latour perpetuated both fact and fiction of Du Guesclin’s colorful life. The soldier’s mythic life and Cuvelier’s poem about it have been perceptively analyzed by Levine (1985), and only recently Jones (2004) has published previously unknown documents from more than 50 archival sources, the facts of which finally shed welcome light on the actual career of the heroic Constable.

Using the out-moded form of the *chanson de geste*, Cuvelier managed to poke fun at the form of the epic at the same time that he captured the earthiness of his hero and the nitty-gritty of the day-to-day life on the battlefield. In 1387, an unknown author composed a prose version of Cuvelier’s poem commissioned by a Norman nobleman Jean d’Estouteville, captain of Vernon (as stated in verses found in Paris, BnF, MS fr. 4995, which presents the same prologue and incipit as our manuscript, but ends incomplete (“En un temps qui a yver nom / Du chastel roial de Vernon / Qui yst aux champs et a la ville / Fist Jehanet d’Estouteville / Dudit chastel lors cappitaine / Aussi de Vernoinnel sur sayne / Et du roy escuier de corps / Mectre en prose bien m’en recors / Ce livre cy extrait de ryme / Complet en mars dix neufyme / Qui de l’an la dacte ne scet / Mil .CCC. III^{xx} et sept“: these verses are reproduced in *Catalogue des manuscrits français*, IV, p. 465). It is this later prose version that assured the success of the history, as it served as the source for a number of biographies of the Constable until the eighteenth century.

The 1387 prose chronicle was rediscovered, edited and published in 1618 by Claude Menard, a notary from Angers, who based his edition on a single manuscript now reputedly lost (see Petitot, 1824, pp. 14-15: “Le manuscrit faisoit le rebut d’un colporteur, il l’acheta; MM. de Sainte-Marthe lui en offrirent un plus ample; il en trouva un troisième à l’hôtel de Mercoeur [...] Après avoir confronté ces divers manuscrits, il parvint à établir un texte aussi complet que possible“; Tixier, 1981, p. 15; *Dictionnaire des lettres françaises, Moyen Age*, 1994, p. 363). Other successive versions, or rather adaptations, of a prose version were published by Le Febvre (1692) and by Petitot (1824), the latter being nothing more than a reprint of the earlier Le Febvre adaptation. According to Petitot (1824), Le Febvre probably based his prose adaptation in modern French on some of the fifteenth-century prose manuscripts used by Menard, but added and modified the text by compiling other sources, the final result presenting an entirely different result, which is not in

keeping with the manuscript tradition. Thus the only edition philologically faithful to the manuscript tradition remains that of Menard. The title retained by Menard for his edition is: "Histoire de messire Bertrand du Guesclin, connétable de France." Another possible appellation, in keeping with the fifteenth-century tradition, is: "Livre hystorial des faiz de feu monseigneur Bertran Du Guesclin..." (Paris, BnF MS fr. 4995).

The manuscript tradition of the prose chronicle is complex and requires further study to disentangle the different versions. For now, it seems acceptable to state that there are at least two separate prose traditions, both likely stemming from the verse version by Cuvelier. The first version, named by us prose "version A," is that of the present manuscript, with at least 3 other known copies, perhaps more, and the following incipit: "A tous ceulx qui les coeurs ont gentils et ayme et desirent honneur noblesse et gentillesse naturellement se delictant moult a lire ou faire lire et recorder pour amener a memoire les nobles fais des vaillans chevaliers..." (last edited in 1618 by Menard). A second version, named here prose "version B," is more common and less complete, and it has the following incipit: "En ma pensee souvent me delictoye en ouyr livres et compter les faiz des anciens." It is found in Paris, BnF, MS fr. 4993 and Rouen, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 1144, and it is subsequently reproduced in the incunable and sixteenth-century editions. It was prose "version B" that Michel preferred for his 1830 edition, which is none other than a transcription of the Lyons incunable (*Livre des faiz de messire Bertrand du Guesclin*, [Lyon], [s.n.], [c. 1480?] [Paris, BnF, Res-Y2-91]; see also Goff, G-541, who attributes the imprint to Guillaume Leroy).

Although a modern edition with a census of the manuscripts now exists for the verse version (see Faucon, 1990-91), there is no modern edition or accurate census of the manuscripts for the prose versions. In his introduction to the edition reproducing the Lyons edition, Michel lists the manuscripts that contain a prose version of the Chronicle (1830, pp. 10-18, followed by a chapter devoted to the early printed tradition, pp. 19-26). Although Michel records some 11 manuscripts in the BnF, with all but one from the fifteenth century, four of which are substantially incomplete, all copies do not contain the same prose versions, some containing prose "version A," others prose "version B" (see paragraph above). Mathieu (1964) indicates that the original manuscript for the present version (prose "version A") is lost, but he cites the following three manuscripts as most faithful to the original: Paris, BnF, MS fr. 4995; Paris, Bibliothèque Ste.-Geneviève, MS fr. 814; and Rouen, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 1143. All three date from the fifteenth century and are written in double columns on parchment of around 150 folios; the Rouen copy is adorned with a prefatory miniature. DeRicci and Bond record no manuscripts in North American collections, and, apart from the present manuscript, no codices appear in the Schoenberg Database in the last century.

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