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[Mystère (Passion Play)]. [*Passion de Jesus Christ*] [*Passion de Bâle*]  
In French and Latin, manuscript on paper  
Switzerland, Jura [Pays de l'Ajoie (Elsgau), Porrentruy?], c. 1608-1612

190 ff., complete (collation i<sup>4</sup>, ii<sup>4</sup>, iii<sup>4</sup>, iv<sup>4</sup>, v<sup>10</sup>, vi<sup>6</sup>, vii<sup>10</sup>, viii<sup>6</sup>, ix<sup>10</sup>, x<sup>10</sup>, xi<sup>4</sup>, xii<sup>12</sup>, xiii<sup>4</sup>, xiv<sup>12</sup>, xv<sup>4</sup>, xvi<sup>12</sup>, xvii<sup>4</sup>, xviii<sup>12</sup>, xix<sup>4</sup>, xx<sup>12</sup>, xxi<sup>4</sup>, xxii<sup>12</sup>, xxiii<sup>4</sup>, xxiv<sup>12+1</sup>), on paper (watermarks of the type Churchill, "Arms of Wurtemberg," no. 275 dated c. 1620, and also no. 276-277; see also Briquet no. 1179, Granges [near Montbéliard], dated 1598: "Les types 1177 et 1180 sont aux armes de Wurtemberg. . . Les types 1179 et 1180 proviennent de Montbéliard"; another watermark, "Foolscape," no. 342: William of Düring of Basle, 17<sup>th</sup> c.; also Briquet: "Les papetiers de Bâle ont donc employé, dès la fin du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle et au cours du XVII<sup>e</sup>, le filigrane de la tête de fou" [p. 788]), written in cursive script in brown ink on up to 40 lines, by at least two different hands, no ruling, catchwords, names of characters underlined in brown ink, some staves with noted music (f. 74v), stage directions (*didascalia*) in the margins (mostly in Latin, some in French, for example ff. 132, 160 et *passim*). Eighteenth-century marbled tan calf, back sewn on four raised thongs, back gilt in compartments, titre in second compartment: "Passion de Jesu Christi," edges in red (Covers a bit worn, paper cropped in a few instances but with very slight loss of text, else in very good condition and clearly legible). Dimensions 200 x 157 mm.

Most certainly the single preserved copy of an unpublished Passion Play, dedicated to the Prince-Bishop of Basel (likely Wilhelm Rink von Baldenstein) who resided in Porrentruy, and perhaps composed by the dramatist Jean Gardel, school rector in Porrentruy. The present manuscript is important for the study of early modern theatre, greatly indebted to medieval and Renaissance drama, but still severely understudied.

## PROVENANCE

1. Script and watermarks suggest either a late 16<sup>th</sup> century or early 17<sup>th</sup> century date for this manuscript, the paper coming from the nearby region of Montbéliard in the Franche-Comté (whose Dukes of Wurtemberg, at times, ruled the region of the Ajoie). The paper used for this manuscript bears a rare watermark representing the Arms of Wurtemberg associated with the initials GB. According to Briquet, this watermark was used in a paper mill established in the vicinity of Montbéliard by Jacques Foillet in 1597. This papermaker moved in 1612 and associated himself with a certain Gerson Binninger, which would account for our initials GB (see Briquet, I, p. 98, discussing watermark no. 1179, the same as the one in the present manuscript but with the initials IF, datable before Jacques Foillet's association with Gerson Binninger in 1612). Thus it is likely the present manuscript was copied circa 1612. The Prologue is dedicated to the "Reverendissime évesque de Basle," whose name is not provided, but a hint is given on ff. 4v-5: "[...] Sinon que de

representer / La Passion Jesus Christ / Laquelle avions encommencé / Lors que fustes esleuz de dieu / Il y a 4 ans passé / Pour joye a vostre bien venue." The play was thus composed in honor of a Prince-Bishop of Basel, newly elected some four years past. Two bishops are possible candidates, the first Jakob Christoph Blarer von Wartensee (1575-1608) and the second—the most probable—Wilhelm Rink von Baldenstein (1608-1628). Following the Reform, the Prince-Bishop of Basel did not reside in Basel proper. As of 1528, the Bishopric moved its official headquarters to Porrentruy (Pruntrut), in the Jura. Although the paper seems to come from the paper mills of nearby Montbéliard, it is clear the manuscript was copied in honor of the newly elected Bishop of Basel, who resided in Porrentruy, where the present Passion was likely performed. The manuscript then was passed on to two monasteries, both under the influence of the Bishopric of Basel and both located in Switzerland between Porrentruy and Basel (see Provenance 2. and 3.).

2. Later seventeenth- or early eighteenth-century ownership inscription in lower margin of f. 1: "J. Maillot. Canonicus monasterii Grandis-Vallis." This is most likely a member of the Abbey of Moutier-Grandval (*Monasterium Granvallis* was an abbey of Augustinian Canons that depended on the Bishopric of Basel; see A. Rais, *Un chapitre de chanoines dans l'ancienne principauté épiscopale de Bâle, Moutier-Grandval*, Bienne, 1940).

3. Eighteenth-century heraldic bookplate pasted on upper pastedown, which can be identified as that of Grégoire Girardin, Abbot of Lucelle or Lützel (Alsatian-Jura, former Cistercian monastery), whose arms [*de gueules à la bande d'azur chargée de 3 anneaux rangés d'or*] are placed next to those of the Abbey of Lucelle [*d'argent à un chocher entouré de quatre bâtiments disposés en croix, le tout au naturel, surmontés de 6 étoiles d'azur rangés en orle*] (reproduced in G. Amweg, *Les Ex-libris de l'ancien évêché de Bâle (Jura bernois)*, Neuchâtel, 1932, pp. 47-48). The majority of the important library of the Abbey of Lucelle was destroyed by fire in the nineteenth century.

## TEXT

ff. 1-3, General Prologue, *Prologue generaulx de toute la Passion*; incipit, "Si t'ost qu'Adam le premier homme / Eust mis la dent dedans la pomme...";

f. 3v, blank;

ff. 4-5v, Dedicatory Prologue, *Prologue a reverendissime evesque de Basle*; incipit, "Tres illustre prince clement / Tres gracieux et debonnaire / Miroir de vertu proprement / Et de pieté vray exemplaire...";

ff. 5v-6, *Prologue. Qui desduit ce que se representera le premier jour*; incipit, "Affin que tous soyent adverti / De ce que volons aujourd'huy / S'il plaict a Dieu representer / Et vous nous voulés escouter...";

f. 6, *Pour advertir de faire silence*; incipit, "Hola, hola je veulx aussi / Vous advertir touchant cecy...";

ff. 7-75, First day, heading, *L'Enfer. Lucifer, Beelzebuth, Sathan, Astaobt, Cerberus*; incipit, "Lucifer: O malheureux et miserables / Puans, meschins et detestables..."; ff. 10-15, *Les Limbes*; ff. 15v-27, *Le Paradis*; ff. 27bis-48, *L'Enfer*; ff. 49-75, *Herode, Tetrarque, Antipas, Jesus aves ses apostres etc.*

ff. 75-75v, *Épilogue* [First day], incipit, "Nous vous remercions, O prince souverain / Et toute l'assistance jeusne, vieux, groz, moÿen...";

ff. 76-76v, blank;

ff. 77-78, *Prologue pour la 2e journee*, incipit, "Pour et afin de pouvoir satisfaire / A ce que hier nous promisme de faire / Et de monsturer [sic] jourdhuy en public / Par devant vous prince tres magnifique...";

ff. 78-78v, *Épilogue pour la fin du 2e jour* [Second day], incipit, "Si avons abusé O prince d'excellence / Et toutte l'assemble de vostre patience...";

ff. 79-137v, Second day, incipit, "Les anciens peres tiennent encores entre eulx propos pour la venue du Messie et enfin ils concluent par propheties qu'il est ja venu des cieulx ...";

ff. 138-139, *Prologue sur la 3e journee*, incipit, "Puis qu'il a pleu a ce grand dieu des cieulx / Prince puissant tres hault et vertueux... Adam: Las quand je vien en moy comter / Les jours, les mois, aussi les ans...";

ff. 139v-188, Third day, incipit, "Bray: Or sus Dragon, voicy le point / Puis que l'aube du jour ja point..."; explicit, "[...] St. Pierre: Par canticque fault celebrer / De Jesus la resurection / Don't je vous prie d'encommencer / Car vous avés le meilleur son.";

ff. 188-188v, Final canticle, heading, *Fin. Canticque sur le son Christ ist erstanden* [Christ is resuscitated], incipit, "Jesus Christ est ressuscitez / Par la puissance et a domptéz / Par sa mort, la mort et l'enfer / Et rendu vaincu Luciffer...";

ff. 189-189v, *Épilogue pour finir le 3e jour* [Third day]; "Prince tres hault, tres reverendissime / Tres gracieulx, et tres illustrissime / Nous supplions votre benigne grace... Mais il n'y a ny celuy la ny celle / Qui ne saiche, ou puisse bien cognoistre / Que la plus part des acteurs sont tel maistre (?) / Qui ne peuvent bien prononcer ou dire / Pour n'avoir oncque feulletés dans les livres / D'autre costéz les aultre sont des gens / De grand labour et pauvre artisans / Qui nous apprins, que de fort travailler / Et s'il se sont bien volsu employer";

f. 190, Second copy of "Épilogue du premier jour" (this is the same text as the Epilogue copied on f. 75-75v; apparently a duplicate misbound or remounted in the 18<sup>th</sup> century).

The present manuscript contains an unrecorded and unpublished Passion Play (*mystère*), referred to as "Passion de Jesus Christ" in the Dedicatory Prologue (f. 4v): here the title of the play refers to the sole subject, just like the *Passion d'Autun*, the *Passion Nostre Seigneur* (Paris, Bibl. Ste.-Geneviève, MS 1131), *Passion de Troyes* etc., but many Passion Plays are preceded by the appellation "mystère" (see Runnalls, 1998, pp. 53-55, who records some 31 manuscripts that adopt the "genre-word" *mystère*, the most frequent to designate these religious dramas). This Passion Play could be named *Passion de Bâle* just like the *Passion d'Amboise* was named after the first owner who was mayor of Amboise in 1566 (see Runnalls, 1996, p. 511). Religious dramas such as Passion Plays were very

popular and attendance was high, their organization requiring a huge municipal mobilization and the involvement of a number of professionals, including the "fatiste" or playwright but also the actors, the "painctre" who designed the sets, the artisans, the director (or "meneur du jeu"), and others.

This play spans a period of three days. Each day is preceded by a prologue and followed by an epilogue. The first day is devoted to the Creation, Hell, the "Procès de Paradis," the Annunciation, the Beheading of John the Baptist, etc. The second day includes such episodes related to Christ's public life, the Betrayal of Judas, etc. Finally, the third day is devoted to the Passion proper, the Crucifixion, Christ's apparitions to the three Marys and the disciples, and finally his Resurrection. The religious scenes are interpolated with numerous "drolleries" or "diableries" that involve Old and New Testament characters, some very obscure, whose roles provide comic relief in popular jargon. The text, including the prologues, is entirely composed in octosyllabic verses (the epilogues are versified differently), with the first line of almost all speeches rhyming with the last line of the preceding speech (mnemonic technique).

Although the text for each new mystery play composed on the occasion of a specific performance was no doubt a "new" text, most Passion plays draw heavily on past Passion plays, especially the famous *Passion of Arnoul Greban* (8 extant manuscripts) and the *Passion de Jean Michel* (printed a number of times, see Runnalls, 1999). A comparative intertextual study of the known Passion Plays (Runnalls, 1996, p. 515 distinguishes 9 distinct "families") and the present *Passion de Jesus de Christ* [*Passion de Bâle*] should reveal the playwright's influences and sources, and the degree of "originality" of the present Passion play.

Manuscripts that contain the prologues, dialogues, epilogues, and some stage directions of plays are rare in that they were often autograph "working documents," directly related to the playwright (called "fatiste" in the Middle Ages and Early Modern France) or the different contributors and participants that these large-scale play performances required. A great majority of the plays that have survived are known in single copies: "The uniqueness of medieval drama is even reflected in the manuscripts which preserve the texts. Whereas texts of most other genres survive in several, or even large numbers of, virtually identical manuscripts, plays invariably survive in one single manuscript version. A play was a one-off occurrence, virtually never repeated..." (Runnalls, 1998, pp. 62).

Runnalls (1998) offers a typology of medieval French play manuscripts, in which he distinguishes seven different types of manuscripts and explores how these types of manuscripts relate to a specific performance. The present manuscript would seem to fit the category named "Fair copy (type B, *livre original*)," used as the basis for the performance, or perhaps even a type D, with additions and suppressions and a number of stage directions. The stage directions in the present manuscript are either in Latin and French, sometimes in both languages (a number of stage directions are added, see for example ff. 7, 106, 87, 139v, 144, 145 *et passim*).

The manuscript is dedicated to the Prince-Bishop of Basel. Two candidates are plausible: the first, Jakob Christoph Blarer von Wartensee [Jacques Christophe Blarer de Wartensee (1575-1608)], whose reign covered the entire second quarter of the 16th century; the second, Wilhelm Rink von

Baldenstein (1608-1628), an ardent promoter of his predecessor's active Counter-Reformation policy, and who contributed to restoring order throughout the Bishopric. In his Dedicatory Prologue, the playwright refers to the fact that the Prince-Bishop has occupied his function for 4 years: in the case of Rink von Baldenstein elected in 1608, this would take us to a date of composition of circa 1612, in keeping with the date of the watermarks in the paper. To be more precise, the Dedicatory Prologue mentions that the playwright had started to compose his Passion Play when the Prince-Bishop was elected, thus circa 1608, and likely copied and finished his work circa 1612.

The bishops of Basel resided in Porrentruy, where they conducted most of their temporal and spiritual administration. There is proof of theatrical activity in Porrentruy, such as a *Moralité* entitled *La Mère commune*, published in Leroux de Lincy, *Recueil de farces, moralités...*, 1837, vol. II, no. 29. The historical study by Kohler (1859) discusses the importance of theater in Porrentruy and provides the names of two important and very learned playwrights, both school-rectors, Pierre Mathieu and Jean Gardel. The latter succeeded Pierre Mathieu as rector and, between 1591 and 1613, he oversaw more than twenty performances. Most of these were "mystères." Kohler singles out "la comédie de la Passion de Nostre Seigneur," performed like his other plays on the public square, which could well refer to the present play. According to Kohler, Jean Gardel ranks at the top of early dramatists (see Kohler, 1859, esp. pp. 29-30). It appears that the present *Passion de Jesus Christ* could thus very well be attributed to Jean Gardel, working in the service of the Prince-Bishops of Basel in Porrentruy.

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Runnalls, G. A. "Les mystères de la Passion en langue française: tentative de classement," *Romania* 114 (1996), pp. 468-516.

#### ONLINE RESOURCES

E-texts of Medieval and Renaissance Theater (University of Rennes)

<http://www.uhb.fr/alc/medieval/THac.htm>

On the bishopric of Basel

<http://hls-dhs-dss.ch/textes/f/F8558.php>

<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02338a.htm>

On the Prince-Bishop Jacques-Christophe Blarer de Wartensee

<http://www.hls-dhs-dss.ch/textes/f/F17030.php>

[http://www.bautz.de/bbkl/j/Jakob\\_c\\_b.shtml](http://www.bautz.de/bbkl/j/Jakob_c_b.shtml)

On the Archives of the bishopric of Basel

[http://www.aeb.ch/index.pl/principaute\\_episcopale](http://www.aeb.ch/index.pl/principaute_episcopale)

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