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JACOBUS DE CESSOLIS, *De ludo scaccorum*, translated by JEAN DE VIGNAY, *Jeu des échecs moralisé*
In French, manuscript on paper
[France, likely Paris (or Champagne?), c. 1490-1500]

69 ff. (66 + 3 ff. added in the (in all 69 ff.) (collation: i¹⁰, ii-iv¹², v¹⁰, vi⁹, the last gathering originally containing 12 folios including one blank, f. 66 with upper half torn out and 2 preceding folios missing), on paper (watermarks close to Briquet, "Armoiries de France avec initiale T," no. 1744, Paris, 1485; Troyes, 1485-1495; and variant no. 1745, Paris, 1490; Troyes, 1497), written in a neat Gothic bookhand in brown ink on 32 long lines (justification 190 x 130 mm.), initials in red, paragraph marks, titles and rubrics in red, 3 additional folios that supply the missing text are probably copied from an early printed edition. Fine French contemporary binding of blind-stamped brown calf over pasteboard, covers decorated with a double frame formed by two roll-produced thick filets, enclosing a central rectangle on which six rolls of floral and leafy motifs are impressed in vertical strips, the intermediary frame impressed with a similar floral roll, the outer frame impressed with repeated three-tiered rosettes, binding neatly repaired in the corners and skillfully rebacked. Dimensions 260 x 205 mm.

Rare copy of Jean de Vignay's still-unedited popular French translation of the Latin *De ludo scaccorum*, perhaps the last remaining in private hands and from the library of the greatest collector of chess books. This copy has a medieval inscription and a fine contemporary binding. Jean de Vignay's version served as the basis for Caxton's *Game and Playe of Chesse*, the third book printed in English.

PROVENANCE:

1. Written probably in France, most likely Paris or perhaps Champagne, based on script and watermarks (paper from Paris or Troyes). The style and design of the contemporary binding is typical of Parisian "trade" bindings of the first years of the 16th century.
2. Sixteenth-century (or late fifteenth-century) name written in lower margin of f. 57v, reads: "A. Berangier." Repeated on f. 66v: "Se livre a moy André Berangier, sieur Duga." Again, but slightly smudged: "Se livre et a moy André Berangier sieur Dugaz." Another inscription on lower pastedown reads: "Se livre et a moy le seigneur de Gaz, qui le trouvera..." This is perhaps a member of the family Dugas de Bois-Saint Just (Lyonnais) or Dugas, anciennement Ducoignet (Forez) (see *Dictionnaire des familles françaises*, 1915, vol. 14, pp. 367-368).

3. Later sixteenth-century ownership inscription of Jean Blosset on the upper pastedown and again on ff. 10 and 12. Upper pastedown inscription reads as follows: "Se present livre et [*sic*] a moy. Qui me apelle le seymeur en [...]. Qui le treuvera le moy rendera et je payré le vin en bonne companye et qui ne le moy randera, pandu sera pour le coup an plus vil (?) gibet qu'il se trouvera et moy desoubz [signed] Jehan Blosset." On f. 10, one reads: "Je confesse avoyr heu et receu de noble Jehan Roux la somme de troys sept[iers] [de] froment [...] pour chause de rante due a monsieur de Gaz de la feste de tous les seyns procheyne passé de quoy [...] ay signé devers luy et moy desoubz signé le xiii^e jour du moys de may. Jehan Blosset. 1545." On f. 12: "Se present livre et a moy Jehan Blosset, qui le trouvera les moy randra et je poyerey..." This is likely Jean IV de Blosset (died in 1587), seigneur and baron of Torcy-le-Grand and du Plessis-Pasté, governor of Paris and the Isle de France in 1578, and Knight of the Order of the Saint-Esprit. He rebuilt the castle of Beaumont-les-Autels in the Perche (circa 1550, completed circa 1580; see H. de Souancé, *Le château de Beaumont-les-Autels*, Paris, 1989; on Jean de Blosset, see P. Anselme, *Histoire généalogique et chronologique de la maison royale de France*, 1733, IX, 59; and Lachesnaye-Desbois, *Dictionnaire de la noblesse*, vol. 3, col. 357-358). His father, also named Jean Blosset, was chamberlain of King Louis XI and "grand seneschal" of Normandy.

4. Dr. Meinder Niemeijer (1902-1987), one of the greatest collectors of chess books in the world, a managing director of an insurance company and composer of chess problems. He began to collect chess books at the age of 22 and in 1948 donated his rich collection of chess- and draughts books, in total 7,000 titles, to the Netherlands to be housed in the Koninklijke Bibliotheek in The Hague. There it joined the collection of Van der Linde to become the second largest public chess collection in the world. (see below *Bibliotheca*, 1955; Kruijswijk, 1974; and Reerink, 1998).

5. Dr. Rob. Blass, Zurich, Switzerland, undoubtedly a collector of chess because his book plate, which overlaps the bookplate of Niemeijer, displays a knight.

6. Sam Fogg, *Catalogue* 15, no. 24; again *Catalogue* 16, no. 115.

TEXT

The *Jeu des échecs moralisé* is divided into four sections of 27 chapters: the first, History of the Game of Chess (chs. 1-3); the second, Description of the noble pieces (chs. 4-8); the third, Description of the pawns (chs. 9-16); and the fourth, Generalities on chess and the rules of the game (chs. 17-27).

ff. 1-1v, rubric in red, *Cy commence la moralité des nobles hommes et des gens de peuple selon le jeu des escheies translaté de latin en francois par religieuse personne et bonneste frere Jehan d'Avignay de l'ordre de l'ospital saint Jehan. Incipit prologus*; prologue, "Tresnoble et puissant prince jehan de france, duc de normendye et aisé filz de phelippe par la grace de dieu roy de france frere jehan d'avignay vostre petit religieux entre les autres de vostre seigneurye..."

ff. 1v-2, [Table of Contents], rubric, *Cy commence la table d'icelluy livre par les chapitres contenus en icelluy livre*;

ff. 2-3v, rubric, *Sy commence soubz quel Roy le gieu des eschequecs fut trouvé etc.*; incipit, "Entre tous les mauvais signes qui puissant ester en home c'est un tresmauvais signe quant ung home ne doubte a courroucier par pechié...";

f. 3v-4, rubric, *Qui trouva le gieu des eschiciz en cedit livre*;

ff. 4-6, rubric, *Des trois causes pourquoy ledit gieu fut trouvé etc*;

ff. 6-9v, rubric, *Le second traictié de ce livre de la forme des eschés nobles et premierement de la fourme du roy et des choses qui luy appartient*; incipit, "Nous commencerons au Roy...";

ff. 9v-16v, rubric, *De la fourme de la royne et des meurs d'icelle*;

ff. 16v-19v, rubric, *De l'estat et des meurs etc. Des offices des alpbins*;

ff. 19v-25, rubric, *De l'office et des meurs des chevaliers et de l'ordre de chevalerie*;

ff. 25-32, rubric, *Sy parle de l'office et des meurs des rocs*;

ff. 32v-35, rubric, *Du premier paonnet qui est assis devant le roc. De l'office et des meurs de ceulx qui labourent la terre pour tous*;

ff. 35v-37v, rubric, *De l'office qui appartient aux feures etc.*;

ff. 37v-43, rubric, *De l'office et des meurs de ceulx qui eurent de fil de laine etc.*;

ff. 43-47, rubric, *De l'office et des meurs des marchans et des cousturiers*;

f. 47v-51v, rubric, *Des oeuvres et des meurs des mires et des espiciers qui signifient le paonnet*;

ff. 51v-54, rubric, *De l'office et des meurs des hostellers et ceulx qui logent*;

ff. 54-56v, rubric, *Cy parle du viie paonnet et comment de quoy il doit servir*;

ff. 56v-58v, rubric, *Sy parle des ribaux et truans joueurs de dez et des messagiers qui vont parmi le royaume porter lectres*;

f. 58v-60, rubric, *Comment ledict philozophe parle cy en general et la comparage a la cour de babilonne*;

ff. 60-62v, rubric, *Comment le philozophe monster au roy en quel point il doit ester assis en l'eschequier et comment il fait son mouvement*;

ff. 62v-63, rubric, *Sy devise le philozophe en quel point la royne doit ester assise en l'eschequier*;

ff. 63v-64, rubric, *Comment les alpbins doivent ester assis en l'eschequier et de leur mouvement*;

ff. 64-65, rubric, *Cy parle du mouvement du chevalz et en quell point de l'eschequier il doit ester assis,*

ff. 65-65v, rubric, *Si devise en quel point les rocs doivent ester assis et de leur mouvement,*

ff. 65v-66, rubric, *Comment les paonnes doivent traire et de leur mouvement,*

f. 66, explicit, "[...] vivre avecques lui pardurablement. Qui vivit et regnat deus per omnia secula seculorum. Amen. Explicit. Cy fine le geu des eschas. Que dieu nous garde de debas."

ff. 67-69, Added nineteenth-century pages, completing the *lacunae*, starting "[...] car se aucun deux puet venire a celle ligne se il est blanc comme le laboureur, le medecin et les gardes de la cite..."; heading, *Cest derrenier chappitre recorde briefvement toute la maniere et l'estat du livre. xxiii.*; explicit, "[...] et de toute la glorieuse compaignie des cieulx et a l'onneur du corps et au prouffit des ames. Amen. Cy fenist le gieu des esches moralisié translaté de latin en francois par frere Jehan de Vignay."

A vicar attached to the Convent of St.-Dominic in Genoa between 1317 and 1322, Jacobus de Cessolis wrote the Latin treatise, *Liber de moralibus hominum et officiis nobelium sive super ludum scacchorum*, probably around 1300. The Dominican Order was a major producer of popular literature, having produced the *Legenda Aurea* by Jacobus de Voragine (died 1298) several decades earlier between 1260 and 1267. The invention of the game of chess is attributed to the philosopher, Xerxes, who hoped to use the game to change the ways of the king of Babylonia. Utilizing several treatises of exempla, including Vincent of Beauvais's *Speculum historiale*, Jacobus de Cessolis's work fits in the genre of exempla literature including the Mirror of Princes tradition. In his work, the game of chess provides a metaphor for working out the correct relationship between a king and his subjects. In elaborating on the metaphor, the author provides a detailed introduction to the rules of chess as it was played in the thirteenth century. For modern readers, this has been one of the main attractions of the text.

The earliest dated manuscript of the Latin version is 1419, but Kaeppli (*Scriptores ordinis praedicatorum mediaevi*, II, pp. 312-318) concluded that Jacobus actually wrote it around 1300; others have dated it as early as 1275. Kaeppli identified 250 manuscripts of the text, including those in Latin and in the vernacular. Although two Latin manuscripts have been published, with readings from two more manuscripts and from early printed editions, there has been no critical edition of the Latin text. During the fourteenth century the Latin work was translated into Catalan, Dutch, English, French, German and Italian. There are four translations into French: the so-called anonymous version of Berne, a scarce version by Guillaume de Saint-André (see Cauneau and Philippe) and two popular versions by Jean Ferron and Jean de Vignay. Jean Ferron's concise rendition, also written in a Dominican milieu in 1347, is considered closest to the original Latin. Of it, there are only four "pure" manuscripts and 28 where the text is interpolated with that of Jean de Vignay.

Highly allegorical, full amusing moral asides, Jean de Vignay's version known as the *Jeu des échecs moralisé* was by far the most popular of the vernacular renditions. A Norman educated near Bayeux, Jean de Vignay (c. 1285-1340) studied law in Paris before entering the order of the hospitalers in Saint-Jacques du Haut-Pas. He is widely known as a translator, credited with eleven translations in

all, including chronicles, travel accounts, saints' lives (e.g., Jacobus de Voragine's *Legenda Aurea*), and theological encyclopedia (e.g., Vincent of Beauvais's *Miroir historiale*). He was evidently much in favor at the Valois court, to whom he dedicated many translations, and he was attached to the court of Philippe VI of Valois and Jeanne of Burgundy in the 1330s. Sometime between 1332 and 1340 (thus before Jean Ferron's translation), he dedicated the *Jeu des échecs moralisé* to the Valois John II the Good, king of France (reigned 1350-1364), while he was still duke of Normandy before becoming king.

Judging from the lists of manuscripts of Jean de Vignay's *Jeu des échecs moralisé* (the most recent, Arlima), there are 52 extant copies of the text (41 were known to Knowles in 1954). Only five copies are recorded in North American libraries (Morgan Library, New York Public Library, Cleveland Public Library, University of Chicago Library, and Huntington Library). None are signaled in private hands. There is no modern critical edition (excepting Fuller's unpublished dissertation). Jean de Vignay's version is the one William Caxton used as the basis of his English translation, *The Game and Playe of Chesse* (1474/5 and 1483), the third book printed in the English language.

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ONLINE RESOURCES

Jean de Vignay in Archives de littérature du Moyen Age (Arlima)

http://www.arlima.net/il/jean_de_vignay.html

Illuminated manuscripts of Jean de Vignay's *Jeu des échecs moralisé*

<http://www.enluminures.culture.fr>