

[ANONYMOUS], *Vie de Saint Pierre Célestin* [Life of Saint Peter Celestine (Pietro del Moronne)]

In French, decorated manuscript on paper

Northern France, Picardy? Champagne? c. 1460-1485

*10 ff., a single quire of 10 leaves, probably lacking a second quire to be complete (there is "explicit primus" in the lower margin of the verso of the last leaf, suggesting there probably was a second, or more, quire), on paper (watermark of the type Briquet, "Sirène à une queue," "d'origine française, peut-être champenoise," close to no. 13858, Troyes, 1458-1461; Sens, 1461; Ourscamp, 1466-1467; Paris, 1467), written in a tight Gothic cursive bookhand, on up to 27 lines (justification 155 x 95 mm), single rubric in red (a bit faded, the name "Pierre Celestin" retraced in brown ink), paragraph mark in red, opening initial "V" in red, a few corrections, annotations or crossed out sentences. Single quire, unbound but covered in light manilla cardboard. Dimensions 203 x 143 mm.*

Unique and unpublished French prose Life of Saint Peter Celestine, different from the only other recorded French Life of the Saint (Paris, BnF, MS fr. 24433). It is loosely adapted from the famous Autobiography and the Latin Vita of the Saint by Pierre d'Ailly, who was close to the French Celestines. Peter Celestine is a interesting persona, being the only pope who abdicated and returned to being a hermit. Although fragmentary, the present manuscript warrants an edition.

## PROVENANCE

1. Copied in France, as suggested by watermarks and linguistic features. Indeed, there are a number of linguistic forms that suggest this opuscula was copied in a Northern French environment. For example: "lesquieux" ["lequels"] (f. 1); "comencha" (f. 1v); "rechevoir" (f. 8v); "commencherent" (f. 9); "yra de cha et de la" [de ça et de la] (f. 10v); "blecher" [blesser] (f. 10v).

The fact that the rubric reads "Sensuit la vie saint pierre celestin nostre père et patron" suggests the present Life of Peter Celestine was copied in a Celestine environment or monastery whose "pere and patron" would have naturally been Saint Peter Celestine.

2. Inscriptions (or devotional pen trials) in brown ink in the lower margin of f. 1: "Ihesus Marya"; "Myserere mymis mei o beastis celsestinis."
3. Owned and studied by a Dutch or Belgian collector, as suggested by the notes in blue ink copied on the makeshift cardboard cover that protects the quire of ten leaves. Most of the notes are in French, but clearly the collector is of Flemish or Dutch stock.

## TEXT

ff. 1-10v, Anonymous, *Vie de saint Pierre Celestin* [Life of Saint Peter Celestine], rubric, *Sensuit la vie saint pierre celestin nostre père et patron. Translatée de latin en francoys*; incipit,

"Vous qui volés oyr aucunes choses de nostre bon père monseigneur saint piere celestin aoustés biens et retenés et mettés en vostre oier les grandes merveilles et grace que dieu luy a fait..."; explicit, "[...] car il veoit les dyable terribles adoncques pria monseigneur s. piere pour eux et tout [...] au matin. Explicit primus." The text ends abruptly and does not cover for instance certain key moments of the second half of Peter's existence, most notably his election to the papal throne and his abdication; there is no mention either of his death (1296), his canonization (1313) or the translation of his relics to L'Aquila (1327). Hence we conclude that the present manuscript is an isolated quire or an opuscula that must have consisted of at least two quires.

This manuscript appears to contain a hitherto unrecorded prose Life of Saint Peter Celestine, in French. It seems to be a free adaptation of another Latin prose Life, attributed to Cardinal Pierre d'Ailly or Petrus de Alliaco (c. 1408). Pierre d'Ailly (1350-1420) was a French theologian and philosopher, bishop of Cambrai and chancellor of the University of Paris. He was close and loyal to the Order of the Celestines, as was his friend Jean Gerson who retired in the Celestine Convent of Lyon. The *Vita* by Pierre d'Ailly is recorded in at least six codices (see list in Seppelt, 1921, p. XLVI) and comprises two books: Book I relative to the life of Peter before his papacy; Book 2 covering the life of Peter during and after his papacy (Pierre d'Ailly's Life of Peter Celestine is published in *Acta Sanctorum*, Mai, IV, pp. 485-489: "Vita auctore Petro de Aliaco Episcopo Cameracensi..."; also commented and published in F. X. Seppelt, *Monumenta Coelestiana*, 1921, pp. 149-182). There are passages in the present vernacular adaptation (and not a verbatim translation of d'Ailly's *Vita*) that are clearly modeled after d'Ailly's *Vita* (more specifically, Book I, chapters 1-15 as published by Seppelt (Seppelt, 1921, p. 150-161). For instance, when discussing the youth of Pietro del Morrone (Peter Celestine), the Latin d'Ailly states that the mother of Peter sensed that she bore a child already clad in a religious outfit: "Nam in nativitate sua matri eius, dum puer egrederetur ex utero, quasi quadam religiosa veste indutus apparuit" (Seppelt, 1921, p. 150); the French adaptation states: "[...] car comme elle disoit, des qu'il estoit ecoyre (sic) en son ventre il luy sanbloit estre vestu d'ung abit religieux..." (f. 2). Again, upon reaching twenty years of age, the Latin d'Ailly version states: "Quid facimus? Exeamus de patria nostra, et relictis parentibus rebusque..." (Seppelt, 1921, p. 153); in the anonymous French adaptation we have: "Que faisons nous icy? Alons nous en hors de nostre pay..." (f. 3v). We could multiply the examples of such parallels, but it should suffice to say that the anonymous author clearly had access to Pierre d'Ailly's Latin *Vita* and chose to give a free adapted vernacular version of the life and miracles of the saintly man.

The Latin prose tradition of the Life of Saint Peter Celestine is complex. In sum, there is a first manuscript Rome, Archivio Vaticano, Armadio XII, Cassetta I, no. 1, datable to the first part of the fourteenth century that contains three *opusculae* that were the sources for the tradition of successive Lives of Saint Peter Celestine: 1) *Vita sanctissimi patris fratris de Murrone...tractatus de vita sua, quam ipse propria manu* (published in *Acta Sanctorum*, Mai, IV, pp. 422-426); 2) *De continua conversatione eius...* (ed. *Analecta Bollandiana*, XVI *Analecta Bollandiana*, IX (1890), pp. 147-200; and *Analecta Bollandiana*, 16, 1897, pp. 393-399); 3) *Tractatus de vita et operibus...quam quidam de suis discipulis seriatim scripsit* (ed. *Analecta Bollandiana*, 10, 1891, pp. 385-392 and *Analecta Bollandiana*, 16, 1897, pp. 399-450; likely composed by two of Peter Celestine's disciples, B. de Trasacco and T. de Sulmona)

The first of these *opusculae* (*Vita sanctissimi...*) is often referred to as *Tractatus de vita sua ab ipso, ut fertur, conscriptus* (see *Bibliotheca hagiographica latina*, Société des Bollandistes, 1992, p. 979, "Petrus de Murrone"), and more generally known as the so-called *Autobiographia*, with the Latin incipit, "Venite et audite me et narrabo vobis..." [Gather around and listen, and I shall tell you...]. The incipit of the Autobiography bears some resemblance to the incipit of the present vernacular adaptation "...aoustés biens et retenés et mettés en vostre oier..." After the *Acta Sanctorum* (see above), it was commented by the *Analecta Bollandiana*, XVI (1897), pp.

365-; and more recently by A. Frugoni, *Celestiniana*, Rome, 1954; see also C. Isolan, *Auto e biografia di Papa Celestino* (1990), pp. 28-50). Most agree now that the work, although once thought to be an Autobiography, is in fact an apocryphal opuscula, full of fantastic accounts of Saint Peter Celestine that the sainted man would certainly not have included.

The so-called Autobiography and the appended Vitae composed by his disciples influenced a number of authors who composed parallel versions. This is the case of the Pierre d'Ailly version, which in turn was freely adapted in the present *Vie de saint Pierre Celestin*, a text that appears to be unique and unpublished.

G. Philippart (*Hagiographies*, II, 1996, p. 348, no. 145) records only one French vernacular prose Life, redacted towards the end of the fourteenth century, or perhaps the beginning of the fifteenth century and found in a single manuscript, Paris, BnF, MS fr. 24443, ff. 103-129, which includes the story of the translation of the relics of Saint Peter to L'Aquila, so necessarily composed after 1327. However this anonymous Prose Life of Saint Peter Celestine offers a very different incipit: "O doulx jhesu crist roy de gloire filz de dieu..." from the present adaptation.

A Benedictine congregation, the Order of the Celestines owes its name and foundation to a very interesting persona, Saint Peter Celestine or Pietro del Morrone (1215 – May 19, 1296), later Pope Celestine V (1294, his papacy lasted five months and eight days), who is remembered as the only pope who abdicated. Dante in his *Inferno* levels harsh words at Celestine V because of his abdication: "I saw and recognized the shade of him / Who by his cowardice made the great refusal..." (*Inferno*, III, 59-60). He was canonized in 1318 (Feast 19 May), and his relics were transferred to the Basilica Santa Maria di Collemaggio in Aquila in 1327. Before becoming Pope, Pietro del Murrone retreated to live as a hermit in a cave on the Monte Murrone, and in 1263 his foundation adopted the Rule of Saint Benedict by Pope Urban IV: the new Benedictine congregation was definitely organized in 1275. The movement rapidly expanded in Central and Southern Italy. Philip the Fair, King of France introduced the Order in France around 1300. The mother house of the French branch of the Order was founded by King Charles V in Paris, Notre-Dame de l'Annonciation. By 1400, the order had as many as 96 houses in Italy and 21 in France.

It is tempting to see this little unpublished opuscula as a work composed by a Celestine monk, who used the Latin hagiographical literature and other versions available to him for inspiration – in particular that of Pierre d'Ailly – in the absence of a text he could easily read and meditate on in the vernacular. It is certainly worth editing.

## LITERATURE

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## ONLINE RESOURCES

On Pope Celestine V

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pope\\_Celestine\\_V](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pope_Celestine_V)

IRHT, "Jonas" database, reference to Paris, BnF, MS fr. 24433

*Vie et miracles de saint Pierre Célestin*

[http://jonas.irht.cnrs.fr/oeuvre/oeuvre.php?bl\\_temoins=showbloc#temoins](http://jonas.irht.cnrs.fr/oeuvre/oeuvre.php?bl_temoins=showbloc#temoins)

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