

**PLATO, *Phaedo*, French prose translation by Jean de Luxembourg (d. 1548)**  
**In French, illuminated manuscript on parchment**  
**France, Paris, between 1536 (1538?) and 1545**

90 ff., preceded and followed by a paper flyleaf, complete (collation: i-ii4, iii-xi8, xiii2), written in brown ink, the dedication and argument in a slanted italic hand, the core of the text in a rounded Roman script, no catchwords, ruled in pink (justification 178 x 110 mm), four illuminated initials in blue highlighted in white on liquid gold grounds with flowers and foliate motifs, with two initials introducing the dedication and argument, two larger initials at the opening and the beginning of the final section of the text, respectively ff. 3, 7, 9, 77v. Bound in a later (17<sup>th</sup> c.?) rigid speckled vellum binding over pasteboard, back sewn on 5 raised bands, spine gilt with title-piece "MS," paper label with shelfmark pasted on upper compartment of spine "23" (Upper hinge splitting, a few stains to parchment, but overall in very good condition). Dimensions 245 x 174 mm.

This is a royal presentation copy made for Charles of Valois, third son of King Francis I and brother of the future Henri II. Charles's interests as a bibliophile have not been studied, nor is there an inventory of manuscripts made for him. It contains the first French translation of any work of Plato, Jean of Luxembourg's translation of Plato's *Phaedo*. One of only three known copies of an unpublished text, this manuscript is testimony to the interest in Christian Platonism in courtly circles. It pre-dates the first printed French *Phaedo* by Louis Le Roy (1553) by at least a decade.

**PROVENANCE**

1. Copied and illuminated in France, likely Paris, based on stylistic and paleographical evidence. The style of the decorated initials suggests a dating in the second quarter of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Dedication copy made for Charles of Valois (1522-1545), third son of King Francis I and Claude of France, who received the title duc d'Angoulême at birth and who became duc d'Orléans in 1536 upon the death of the second son of Francis I, Francis. He was, by far, his father's favorite son. He was immensely popular with everyone at his father's court, and it was widely believed that the French nobility of the time would have much preferred him as the Dauphin to his downcast brother, Henri, who never seemed to recover from his years of captivity in Spain. At the age of twenty-three Charles died of the plague.
2. A number of 17<sup>th</sup> century pen trials, with "Louis par la grace..." on f. 1; an erased inscription reads using ultraviolet light: "usages 38350(?)" (bottom of f. 3). There is the addition of amateurish headings to the dedicatory prologue, the argument and text by another later perhaps 17<sup>th</sup> century hand. Finally an educated 17<sup>th</sup> century hand, perhaps contemporary with

the binding, gives some biographical details of the dedicatee and the translator (see below Text, f. 2v), quoting the Bibliothèque de la Croix du Maine, first published in 1584.

### 3. European Private Collection.

## TEXT

ff. 1-2, blank, ruled parchment;

f. 2v, Added later note in black ink, in a 17<sup>th</sup> century hand, providing biographical details: "Charles de France, duc d'Orleans, estoit troisieme fils du Roy Francois I, lequel mourut aagé de 23 ans en l'année 1545. Il fut duc d'Orleans apres la mort de Francois dauphin son frere aîné en 1536. Henry estant devenu alors dauphin, lequel depuis fut Henry II. / Jean de Luxembourg auteur de cette traduction estoit abbé d'Yvri et de la Rivou, issu des Princes de Luxembourg. Il a composé plusieurs ouvrages. Voy. la Bibliot[heque] de la Croix du Maine. / Il dit dans son epistre qu'il a traduit le dialogue de l'immortalite de l'ame par ordre du duc d'Orleans qui aimoit les belles lettres. / Le duc portoit auparavant le titre de duc d'angoulesme. / Et il mourut le 6 septembre a Forest Moustiel en la susditte année 1545";

ff. 3-6v, Dedication to Charles de Valois, Dauphin de France, heading added in a later slanted italic hand: *A monseigneur Monseigneur [sic] le duc d'Orleans Iehan de Luxembourg son treshumble et tresobeissant serviteur salut*; 16<sup>th</sup> century hand, incipit, "Monsieigneur combien que ie congnoysse assez quel grant scavoir et experience il convient estre en celuy qui veult louer ou descrire les vertuz d'ung si grant prince tant magnanime et digne de telle recommandacion comme vous estes..." ; "[...] Et pource que je scay que vous desirez conioindre avecques tant de voz aultres perfections ancores les enseignemens et preceptes de philosophie J'ay traduit en ensuivant vostre commandement le dialogue de l'immortalité de l'ame du diven philosophe Platon lequel je vous supplie recevoir de telle affection que vous congnoissiez que vostre treshumble serviteur le vous presente vous assurant qu'il pensera avoir beacoup [sic] prouffité s'il entend qu'il ait fait chose qui vous soit agreable";

ff. 7-8, Argument of Dialogue, in three parts, heading added in a later hand: *Argument de ce dialogue*; 16<sup>th</sup> century hand incipit, "En ce present dialogue de Platon nommé Phaeton de l'immortalité de l'ame est recité la mort du grand philophe [sic] Socrates avec les belles et diverses opinions et disputes qui furent traictees par luy et ses anciens amys..." ;

ff. 9-90v, Plato, *Phaedo*, French translation by Jean de Luxembourg, heading in a later hand: *Le Dialogue de Platon nommé Phaeton, de l'ame et de l'immortalité d'icelle. Les personnes introduittes sont Echecrates, Phaeton, Apollodorus, Socrates, Cebes, Simmias, Crito et l'executeur de iustice des onze gouverneurs de la ville*; incipit, 16<sup>th</sup>-century hand: "Dy moy Phedon sy tu estoys present le iour que Socrates beut le venin en la prison ou sy tu en as ouy parler a quelque aultre qui en sceust la verité aucunement..." ; explicit, "[...] Et a ce ne fist aucune response mais ung peu de temps apres rendist le dernier soupir de la mort et le bourreau le descouvrit et luy ferma les yeulx la quelle chose voyant Crito le feist luyesmes et luy acoustra les yeulx et la bouche. Telle fut la fin de nostre amy Socrates qui estoit selon nostre iugement le plus parfaict et homme de bien le plus iuste et le plus saige que nous ayons iamais congru."

Plato's *Phaedo* is one of the great dialogues of his middle period, along with the *Republic* and the *Symposium*. The *Phaedo* recounts the death of Socrates and is Plato's seventh and last dialogue to detail the philosopher's final days: Socrates discusses the nature of the afterlife before being executed drinking Hemlock poison. He subsequently explores various arguments for the soul's immortality in order to prove the existence of an afterlife. The *Phaedo* was first translated from the Greek by Henricus Aristippus c. 1154-1156.

This manuscript contains the French prose translation of Plato's *Phaedo* by Jean de Luxembourg, and it is one of only three known manuscripts containing this first translation in French. The manuscript has hitherto remained unknown to scholarship. Never published, this translation is known in two other codices. The first codex is Chantilly, Musée Condé, MS 1478 (originally in the Montmorency Library, then subsequently acquired by Thomas Phillipps MS 209, his sale London, Sotheby's, 1 May 1903, lot 923, bought back by Chantilly, Musée Condé), a vellum illuminated manuscript with the arms of the Connétable de Montmorency (1492-1567) and a letter of dedication to him, with a different incipit, beginning: "Monseigneur, en lisant les livres des saiges anciens..." (Aumale, 1911, III, p. 513; Kristeller, 1983, III, p. 207; dedication published in Delisle, 1904, pp. XVIII-XX and discussed in Saulnier, 1976, p. 392). The second manuscript of the text is Paris, BnF, MS fr. 1081, a plain paper codex without ornamentation and containing a dedication to Charles of Valois, duc d'Orleans, as in the present copy (*Catalogue des manuscrits français. Ancien fonds*, I, p. 183; recorded in Chavy, 1988, vol. I, p. 1129, no. 181). Until now the Paris, BnF, MS fr. 1081 manuscript has been treated as the dedication copy by Delisle and Saulnier, but the plain appearance of the Paris manuscript suggests instead that the present vellum copy was presented, or was intended to be presented, to Charles de Valois, the third son of Francis I, who died on 9 September 1545.

The translator Jean de Luxembourg (1515?-died c.1547/48) was the youngest son of Charles de Luxembourg, comte de Brienne. He was destined for a Church career and was provided with the commendatory abbacies of Ivry in the dioceses of Evreux as early as 1525 and of Larrivour (or La Rivou) in the diocese of Troyes in or before 1532 (Delisle, 1904; Saulnier, 1976, pp. 386-400; Chavy, 1988, II, p. 919; *Dict. des lettres françaises. XVIe s.*, pp. 761-762). In 1540 or soon afterwards he became Bishop of Pamiers, and died near Avignon in 1547 or 1548. Although he passed away at a relatively young age, Jean de Luxembourg was the author of a variety of works, some poetical and historical (*Triomphe et les gestes de illustre seigneur Mgr. Anne de Montmorency* [1538]), others political or polemical (such as a work very critical of King Henry VIII upon his repudiation of Anne of Cleves: *Oraison et remontrance par la seur du duc de Julliers au roy d'Angleterre...* [1541]). This last work caused something of a diplomatic stir, but nonetheless Jean de Luxembourg had it printed at his Cistercian monastery of Larrivour [a copy is in London, BL, C.55.c.8]. Saulnier showed that it was through Marguerite of Navarre's support that Jean de Luxembourg became something of an official poet to the Constable of Montmorency (Saulnier, 1976).

Since the Chantilly manuscript is dedicated to Montmorency as Constable of France, a position he assumed on 10 February 1538, the translation—or at least the dedication—must be dated between 1538 and 1545. If one considers that the translation was originally dedicated to Charles of Valois (with two codices containing the dedication to the son of Francis I), the text and its dedication could have been written from anytime between 1536 to 1545 given that the dedication is made out

to Charles as "duc d'Orléans," a title he received from his brother Henri who was made Dauphin upon the death of the eldest son Francois in 1536. The probability is that the present manuscript was made circa 1536-1538, close to when Charles received his title of "duc d'Orléans," but also close to the time Anne de Montmorency was made Constable of France, for whom another dedication was planned and copied. It may be that the present dedication manuscript to Charles of Valois never received its personalizing elements such as coats of arms or even illumination, perhaps because his death forestalled their addition. There is a presentation copy of Jean de Luxembourg's *Remonstrances* made for Charles with very similar decorated initials as those found in the present *Phaedo* (London, British Library, Add. MS 36676).

Unfortunately the eight-page letter of dedication gives no clue as to the circumstances of the translation, being largely devoted to courtly praise of the Duke with classical *exempla*, except that according to Jean de Luxembourg, "Lay traduit en ensuivant vostre commandement" ("I translated it following your command," this manuscript, f. 6v). If that were really so, it seems that this must have been the original dedication. This dating at least makes it certain that this is the first such translation of *Phaedo* in French, preceding that of the political thinker and scholar Louis Le Roy (c. 1510-1570), which appeared in print in Paris, in 1553 and was dedicated to Henri II, King of France.

Although Louis Le Roy contrives to give the impression that his *Phédon* is a "new" translation directly from the Greek (dedication Au Roy, sig. A5: "Certainement le labour a esté grand a traiter premierement en la langue françoise ces matieres hautes..."; again, Privilege at the end: "Loys le Roy, dit Regius...n'agueres il a traduit de Grec en François le Timée et le Phédon de Platon...l'un d'iceux, qui est le Phédon, n'a iamais este veu..."), it appears that the Le Roy printed translation of *Phédon* is substantially based on the pre-existing version of Jean de Luxembourg, helped along by reference to Ficino's standard Latin version, first published in 1484-1485, which was doubtless Luxembourg's own source. Where Luxembourg is diffuse, Le Roy often dispenses with his padding and fillers, generally returning to Ficino's spare prose. But where Luxembourg gives a straightforward rendering of Ficino, Le Roy is content to adopt his wording with small changes. It seems fairly clear that Louis Le Roy—although a learned and confirmed Hellenist (he succeeded Lambinus as Professor of Greek at the Royal College in 1572)—used his French predecessor Jean de Luxembourg as an unacknowledged basis for his own translation. This was common practice amongst translators of philosophical texts, with many humanist versions of Plato and Aristotle being recast medieval or early Italian humanist translations. It is interesting that Le Roy chose to dedicate "his" translation to Henri II, Charles's brother: it may be that Le Roy had some sort of connection with Charles who might have given him access to his library, in which the present manuscript presumably was once found. Le Roy's second printed work was none other than a Latin funeral oration for Charles de Valois: *Ludovici Regii...Oratio in funere Caroli Valesii Aureliorum ducis*, Paris, 1545 [Paris, BnF, 4-Ln27-15425].

The reading, translation, and interpretation of Platonic works in Europe is an important part of Renaissance intellectual history, particularly in Italy with the translations and commentaries of Ficino and Bruni (see especially the remarkable study by J. Hankins, *Plato in the Italian Renaissance*, 1990; for England, see S. Jayne, *Plato in Renaissance England*, 1995). Ficino (1433-1499) became an ardent admirer of Plato and a propagator of Platonism, or rather neo-Platonism, to an unwarranted

degree, going so far as to maintain that Plato should be read in the churches, and claiming Socrates and Plato as fore-runners of Christ. He taught Plato in the Academy of Florence, and it is said he kept a light burning before a bust of Plato in his room. He was the first translator of Plato's complete extant works into Latin (on Ficino, see Allen et al. [ed.], 2001). In sixteenth-century France, translations in the vernacular came relatively late, mostly influenced by Ficino's (*Platonis Opera omnia*, printed in Florence, 1484) but also Bruni's (earlier translation in 1404) Latin translations from the original Greek, thus placing the translations in a triangular relation of interdependence between the Greek, the Latin, and the French versions. In France, the Church long discouraged the translation of Plato and, when Abelard showed an interest in Plato, he was ruthlessly silenced. In fact, as late as 1350, the only dialogues of Plato that had been translated into any western language were the *Timaeus*, translated in Spain by Calcidius circa 385 and the *Phaedo* and *Meno*, translated in Sicily by Henricus Aristippus between 1154 and 1156. Thus when Petrarch, impressed by the praise of Plato that he found in Augustine (who affirmed that Platonists were the philosophers closest to Christianity), tried to acquire copies of Platonic works, he had few places to turn to. The interest in Plato developed at the dawn of the fifteenth century in Italy and progressively across Europe as Christian Platonism gained recognition as a coherent philosophical school.

In the sixteenth century, and especially at the court of Francis I, there was a renewed interest in the study of Greek and in Greek translation. The first teacher of Greek, Gregory Tifernas, reached Paris in 1458. An impetus to the study of Greek was then given by the Italian, Hieronymus Aleander, who lectured in Paris in 1509 on Plato and who issued a Latin-Greek lexicon. In 1512, his pupil, Francois Vatable, published a Greek grammar, and then in 1530, Guillaume Bude, perhaps the foremost Greek scholar of his day, urged Francis I to found the College de France, with instruction in Latin, Hebrew, and Greek. Many translations of Greek works were ordered or dedicated to Francis I, patron of Hellenistic studies, such as Jacques Amyot's translation of Plutarch's "Lives." At the death of Francis I in 1547, an inventory of his library included 3000 volumes, of which 500 were in Greek.

The present manuscript, containing the first known translation in French of a Platonic dialogue (and still unpublished), dedicated to a young member of the Royal family who would die shortly after, is testimony to the period's renewed interest in Plato, whose writings were believed to be amongst the most elegant of the antiquity.

## LITERATURE

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## ONLINE RESOURCES

The Internet Classics Archive: Plato's *Phaedo*

<http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/phaedo.html>

Benjamin Jowett's translation of *Phaedo* on Project Gutenberg

<http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/1658>

Plato, Platonism, and Neo-Platonism

<http://www.earlychurch.org.uk/plato.php>