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An Ideal Library for an Ideal King? Showcasing the Collection, Organization and Function of the Royal Louvre Library in Late Medieval Paris

Abstract: The *librairie du Louvre* existed for a short period of time, from 1368 to 1429. The Louvre library was the institutional frame in which all kinds of manuscripts were collected, inventoried by order and materiality due to a slowly professionalising procedure. Regularly, books were taken out for reading, as presents, or for loans. The inventories, and especially the lists of taken out and returned books, allow us to catch a glimpse of how translations, the circulation and reading of texts functioned at the late medieval French court. Apparently hardly followed up by the next kings and never as systematically institutionalised at the courts of the mighty contemporary dukes, this library underlines how rare and scarce this kind of institution was by then among the lay people in the medieval West. This article presents the historical sources as well as its discursive construction: The first part deals with the organisation and structure of the royal libraries, with a special focus on the Louvre library under the rule of Kings Charles V and Charles VI. The second part analyses the function of the book collection, their use and circulation, as well as reading habits. The third part argues for a discursive construction of an 'ideal' library in the service of royal power. The collection will be compared to the narrative choices made by medieval chroniclers in order to depict the literate king as the ideal king, and analyses how the Louvre collection helped in shaping and framing that trope.

1 Introduction

In his mirror for princes, *Le Songe du vieil Pelerin*, the royal counsellor Philippe de Mézières advised the young French King Charles VI to make time for reading: '[...] you have to please yourself by reading and hearing the ancient stories for your education. These books, you should read them patiently, for example after

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the holy Mass'.[1] This text features an extended reading list, suggesting explicitly that the King should be learned in specific disciplines: his education started with moral and theological texts, and proceeded to an intellectual grounding in historical and scholastic knowledge. The King should gain from books not only the basics of military strategy, but also a political education; the list includes the Aristotelian books, translated under Charles V. However, the counsellor warns the King against 'bad' literature, including all types of courtly novels, such as the Arthurian stories, which 'are full of errors that attract the reader to impossibilities, madness, *vanitas* and sins…'.[2] He also alerts him against judicial astrology, necromancy, geomancy or other kinds of astrology that were not authorized by the Church, and 'other writings that might harm the soul and the good government of [the] royal person'.[3]

As always with this kind of recommendations, it is very tempting to think that the young King did not follow his tutor's advice exactly, nor adhere completely to his extensive reading list. However, we have a good idea of where the books (both the 'good' as well as the 'bad' ones) the tutor mentions came from: the royal library, known as the *librairie du Louvre*. This was the royal book collection, assembled in small rooms one above the other in a three-storey tower of the Louvre. Here, at its high point in 1411 under Charles VI, almost 950 manuscripts were stored.[4] At the time, only the libraries of the Popes in Avignon and the library of the Sorbonne possessed more books,[5] and contemporary princely collections in France, Burgundy or England held nowhere near these numbers.[6] The *librairie*

1 '[…] Beau Filz, te demoustre que tu te doys delicter en lire et oyr les anciennes hystoires pour ton enseignement, esquelx livres spaciamment tu dois lire, voire apres le divin office, et l'escripture de tes deux tables et ceste present eschequier. Et aussi de quelx livres et ystoires eu te doys garder. […] c'est assavoir que tu doys ensuir les oeuvres des vaillans et des bons et fuir le contraire' (Coopland 1969, 220).

2 'Et […] tu (te) doyes garder de toy trop delicter es escriptures qui sont apocrifes, et par espicial des livres et des romans qui sont rempliz de bourdes et qui attrayent le lysant souvent a impossibilite, a folie, vanite et pechie, comme les livres des bourdes de Lancelot et semblables, comme les bourdes des Veuz du Payen […]. Et combien que les dictes ystoires et bourdes attraient les lisans a vaillance de chevalerie, toutesfois elles attrayent, qui pis est, a amer par amours, qui mal se puet faire sans grant pechie en attrayant au pechie de luxure' (Coopland 1969, 220).

3 'Si te doys bien garder, […] de lire ou faire lire les livres […] toute escripture qui pourroit nuire a l'ame et au bon gouvernement de ta royalle mageste' (Coopland 1969, 220).

4 This article draws on my monograph: Kopp 2016a, here p. 52.

5 Pommerol/Monfrin 1991; Anheim 2006, 1–27; Angotti/Fournier/Nebbiai-Dalla Guarda 2017; Berndt 2018; see also the articles in this volume by Donatella Nebbiai and Jacques Verger.

6 Wijsman 2010; Winter 1985; Beauvoir 2005, 65–118; Stratford 1994, 187–197; for the French nobility, see Fourcade 2021; for female book holders in a European context, see the database https://booksofduchesses.com/ (accessed on 20 December 2021).

du Louvre existed for a short period of time, from 1368 to 1429. In the latter year, John of Bedford, the English regent for France, bought and took the books with him when leaving Paris. However, the exact fate of the collection is unknown, it is likely that most books crossed the Channel and were dispersed in England, mostly after the regent's death.[7] Today, around 120 surviving manuscripts which can be identified as having belonged to the medieval collection at the Louvre, or to other royal residences outside of Paris.[8]

The present article does not attempt a reconstruction of the library and its manuscripts. That is a task at which librarians and archivists (especially in France) have excelled at over the last decades: finding extant manuscripts, and analysing the library's codicological, linguistic and artistic background.[9] Instead, the focus here is placed on the virtually existing medieval library as an organic entity in order to contextualise and historicise the place it held at the French court. Following a historical anthropological approach, this paper concentrates on the uses of the book collection and the functions of the library. In so doing, it demonstrates clearly that, indeed, the King's reading habits ranged more widely than the educational list recommended in the initial didactic example taken from a mirror for princes.

The first part of the article will deal with the organization and structure of the royal libraries, with a special focus on the Louvre library under the rule of Kings Charles V and Charles VI. The second part will analyse the function of the book collection, the use and circulation of books, as well as reading habits. The third part will argue for a discursive construction of an 'ideal' library in the service of royal power. The collection will be compared to the narrative choices made by medieval chroniclers in order to depict the literate king as the ideal king, and analyses how the Louvre collection helped in shaping and framing that trope.

2 Book collections and organizing knowledge

A few sources inform us that even before the late Middle Ages, the royal household was in possession of books owned by both male and female members of the royal family.[10] As the topic of this volume is libraries in the East and the West, it is

7 Stratford 1987, 329–350.

8 On the existing manuscripts, see the database europeanaregia.eu/en/historical-collections/library-charles-v-family (accessed on 30 October 2021).

9 For the general history of the Louvre library, see Kopp 2016a; Delisle 1907; Potin 1999, 25–36; Avril/Lafaurie 1968.

10 Kopp 2016a, 38–46; Avril/Lafaurie 1968.

relevant to highlight one earlier royal book collection in Paris, from the mid-thirteenth century, which was said to have been inspired by the East. The royal biographer Geoffrey of Beaulieu notes that during the crusades in the Near East, Louis IX heard about the Muslim sultan in Egypt possessing a huge library open to philosophers. In order to imitate and even surpass his political (as well as religious) rival, the French King ordered all religious texts to be copied at his expense and collected in an annex of the Sainte-Chapelle.[11] He had built the Sainte-Chapelle to host the relics brought back from Constantinople, and this same annex later also hosted the first royal archives.[12] Another biographer notes that the King spent a lot of time reading, mostly moral and biblical texts, and regularly showed guests the collection in the Sainte-Chapelle and even translated the Latin passages to them if they were not able to decipher the texts themselves.[13]

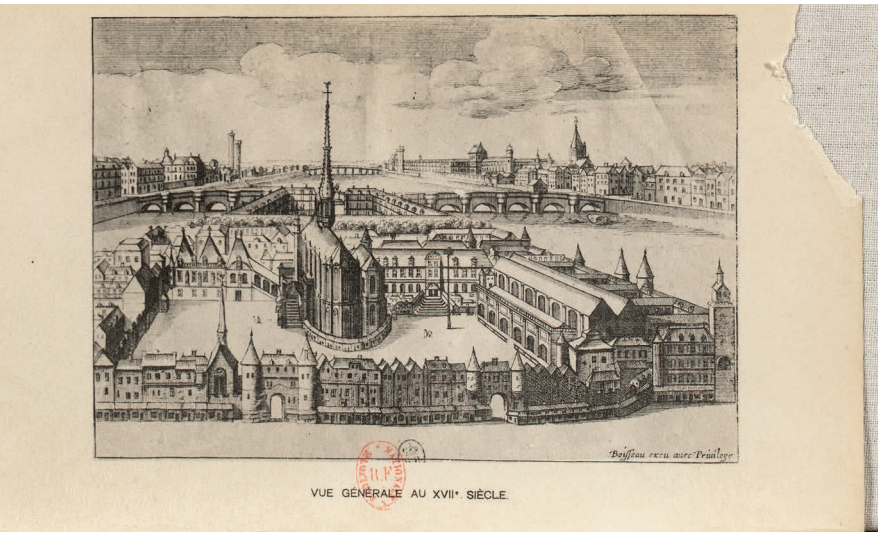

Fig. 1: The Palais and the Sainte-Chapelle in 1640, engraving by Jean Boisseau. The annex hosting the manuscripts and royal archives is the smaller building right next to the chapel's choir. Paris, BnF, est. VA-225-FOL. © Bibliothèque nationale de France.

11 Daunou/Naudet 1840, 15. On the analyses of this unique source see Potin 2003, 23–74.

12 The construction hosting the archives and the manuscript has been destroyed, see Potin 2000, 48–52; Durand/Laffitte 2001.

13 Daunou/Naudet 1840, 15; Delaborde 1899, 5–53.

The biographers also report that after the King's death, in accordance with the royal will, the books were disseminated among the religious institutions he had favoured in Paris, Compiègne, and Royaumont. Due to this decision, the task of modern researchers attempting to reconstruct this collection is a difficult one.[14]

Moving into the late Middle Ages, we have more information on book collections. Though Louis IX kept his books in a religious setting, assimilated with relics and the treasury, some source evidence suggests that after him, book collections were housed in the immediate vicinity of the royal person and his living spaces. A 'tour de la librairie' might even have existed in the royal palace on the Île de la Cité around 1300.[15] In 1368, the French King Charles V left this traditional royal residence on the Île de la Cité, the island in the middle of Paris, where the aforementioned Sainte-Chapelle stood next to Notre-Dame cathedral. The Île de la Cité became the centre of the royal administration, with the chancery (*chancellerie*), the law court (*parlement*), and the exchequer (*chambre des comptes*), whereas the Louvre was dedicated to the royal family, political representations and other royal daily duties.[16] Owing to this spatial and functional separation, the books of the royal household and their associated furniture, such as benches and reading wheels, were collected together in one place and the royal library was established on two, and later three, floors in one of the towers of the Louvre castle.[17] In the first inventory in 1373, 583 manuscripts were counted, and eventually during the reign of his son Charles VI, the library held over 950 books from a variety of disciplines, ranging from courtly poetry and novels, French historiography, and sciences to encyclopaedias. It also featured a lot of devotional literature; many fine books of piety were inherited from royal predecessors, especially from women. Newer titles entered the collection owing to the patronage of poets, copies presented to the King, confiscations of enemies' belongings, but only a few due to royal commissions.[18] Besides this, kings and queens owned their personal manuscripts. After the Louvre collection was taken to England in 1429, it was only in the sixteenth century, with the Renaissance King Francis I, that a new royal library emerged as an institution that can be continuously traced down to today's French National Library.[19]

14 About 15 manuscripts are identified, see Tesnière 2002, 36–40 and 37; Nebbiai-Dalla Guarda 1985.
15 Guérout 1996, 219–288; Potin 2007, 119–140.
16 On the Louvre, see Whiteley 1992, 60–71; Bresc-Bautier 1995.
17 On the architectural developments, see Kopp 2016, 46–50. The Louvre as used by the late Valois Kings can be seen in the October-miniature in the *Très riches heures du duc de Berry* by the Limburg brothers.
18 For a reconstruction of the procedures, see Kopp 2016a, 82–103; Boucher 2005; for existing manuscripts see Avril/Lafaurie 1968 (exhibition catalogue); Potin 1999, 25–36.
19 Balayé 1988; Bloch 1989, 311–332.

3 Book use: circulations, loans, readings

From 1368 on, the library can be studied through written evidence and serial sources, mostly from the inventories of the library. They started in 1373 and were updated intermittently in 1380, 1411, 1413–1416, and finally in 1424–1425. The entries in the inventory note the materiality of the manuscripts: their size and bindings, rich decorations, sometimes the previous owner (if identified), a keyword on their content, and sometimes also mention the style of handwriting and language of the text. Most manuscripts were in the Latin and French languages, whereas some were recorded as being in Occitan, Picard, Spanish or Lombard. The four manuscripts in codex form, among them one with figures in the Hebrew language, are a noted exception.[20] Inventorying after the death of Gilles Mallet, the first 'librarian', in 1411, the commission proceeded to identify the texts with more details,[21] and also created registers of missing books and lists of new books added to the aforementioned inventories, or even lists of separate collections entering the royal collection.[22] These separate registers draw a lively picture of the incoming and outgoing books: the so-called 'guards of the library' sometimes wrote down dates and contexts for the removal of books, repairs and new bindings, manuscripts on loan or given out as presents, and the eventual recovery of books.[23] The notes in the margins of the inventory and the separate list of 'checked out' manuscripts allow an insight into the circulation of books from the Louvre library: within the royal household, as diplomatic gifts, or as loans to courtiers or other individuals close to the royal person. Despite a dark legend constructed by nineteenth-century scholars and librarians about the careless 'dissipation' of the books, leading to a 'decadence' of the library,[24] it should be emphasized that among the more than 150 manuscripts taken out of the collection, the exact destination and use of only 18 are unknown.[25] For all the other items, the manuscripts either came back to the collection or had always been intended to be given away, thus forming part of the reciprocal system of services and gifts in the courtly environment. It is noteworthy that many of the most pre-

20 See Kopp 2016a, 112–113.

21 For the procedure and the techniques used in detail, see Potin 2007, 119–140.

22 For a first insight see Delisle 1907, vol. 2; for the missing books or those in surplus, see the registers in Paris, BnF MS fr. 2700 (see Fig. 2) and BnF MS fr. 9430; Paris, Mazarine MS 2030, for later copies, see the annex 2 in Kopp 2016a.

23 The fullest register of outgoing books is in Paris, BnF MS fr. 2700, fol. 41r–49v.

24 Delisle 1907, vol. 1 125–141.

25 For detailed analyses, see Kopp 2016a, 218–255.

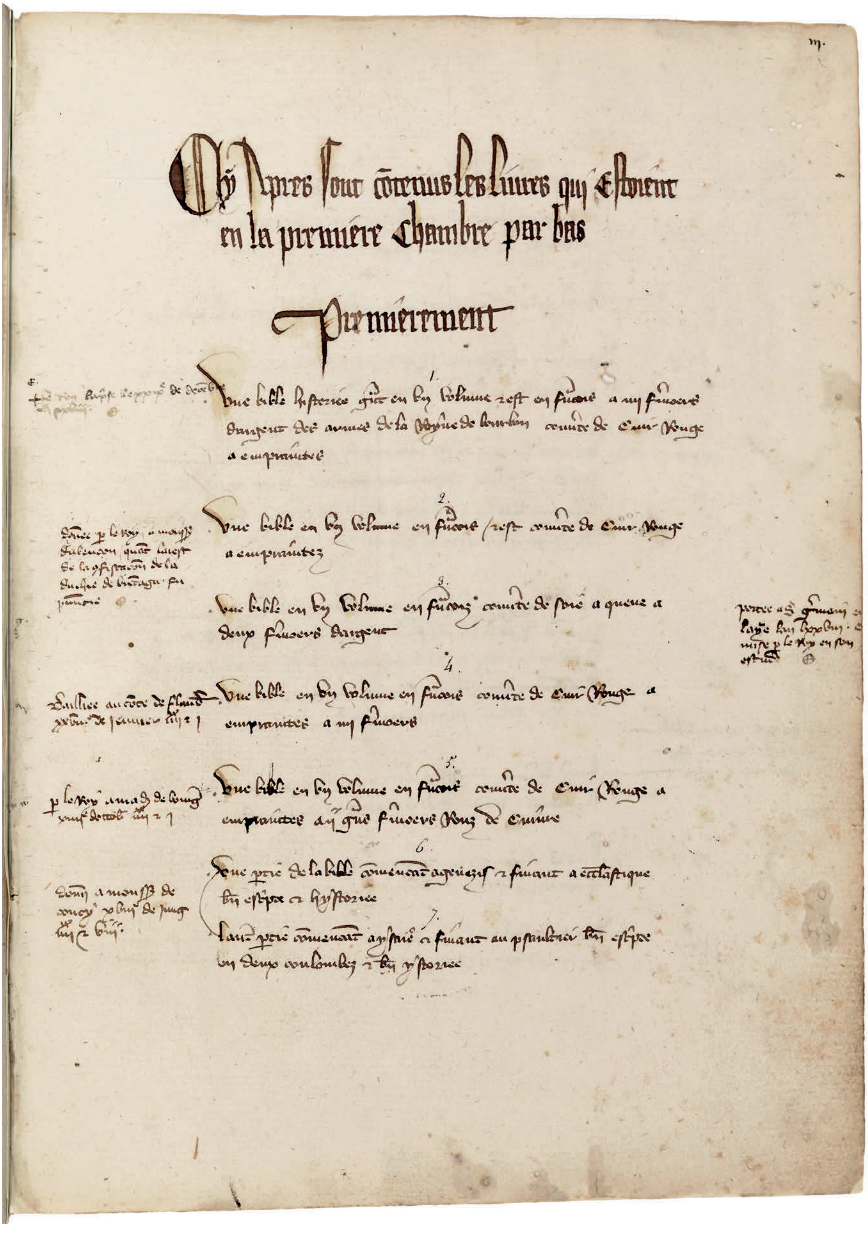

Fig. 2: Beginning of the Louvre-library's inventory. Paris, BnF MS fr. 2700, fol. 3r.
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cious manuscripts never left the collection;[26] some of them were even stored in the Vincennes castle, away from the daily life of the library, where they were unlikely to be used as loans or gifts.[27]

Some examples showcase the circulation and use of manuscripts: An illuminated version of the *Apocalypse* was signed out from the library and shown to Louis d'Anjou, the brother of Charles V, in the 1370s, to 'make his beautiful tapestry', as the annotation in the inventory says. It is likely that the Duke was offered several illuminated manuscripts and chose one to take with him to show to his main artist, Hennequin of Bruges, who used the illumination as an inspiration and model for the drawing of the tapestry's motifs. This is probably the still existing and well-known 'tapestry of Angers', displayed today in the castle of Angers. The manuscript was then sent back to the library in Paris.[28]

Not only highly luxurious manuscripts were signed out. A devotional book, characterized as 'little booklet'[29] and containing French prayers, Latin monthly vigils, and the *Hours of Our Lady* in French, was probably the book that circulated most widely. Thanks to inventories and the complementary lists of missing and returned books, this booklet's travels through the royal family can be tracked from before 1368 up to 1416: originally from the Anjou family, the devotional manuscript was given by Charles V to his infant daughter Mary, probably for educational purposes. On her death at the age of seven, the book was returned to the library. It was Charles VI who gave the booklet to his uncle the Duke of Berry, probably for his daughter, also called Mary.[30]

Other books were signed out to scholars for 'a lifetime' and eventually came back, as the inventory notes.[31] Evrard de Trémaugon, for example, received a version of the *Songe du Vergier*, which re-entered the library after the counsellor's death as noted in the later inventories. This example is interesting, because Evrard de Trémaugon is said to be the author of the *Somnium Viridarii* and its translation *Le Songe du Vergier*, a royalist, anti-papal political treaty, which also

26 There is one exception to the rule: while regent of France for the young Charles VI, Louis d'Anjou made frequent requests and received many expensive manuscripts, some of which he took away; some came back, Potin 2005, 181–212; Kopp 2016a, 66–68.

27 Avril 1996, 329–340; on the other residences see Kopp 2016a, 60–66.

28 Delisle 907, vol. 2, 19, Nr. 92: 'L'Apocalipse, en françois, toute figurée et historiée, et en prose'; in the inventory of 1380 in Paris, BnF, MS fr. 2700, fol. 6r, with the note 'Le roy l'a baillé à monseigneur d'Anjou, pour faire son beau tappis'; the return mention refers to this item at fol. 42r. On the tapestry, see Delwasse 2007; Yates 1975.

29 'petit livret'.

30 For all stations and quotes from the inventories see Kopp 2016, 233–234.

31 Kopp 2016a, 237, here a psalter for Philippe de Mézières.

deals with all the other political issues during the reign of Charles V.[32] We do not know if Charles V ordered the first Latin version in 1376, but it is certain that two years later he ordered Evrard to undertake the French translation and adaptation as a kind of 'political testament'.[33]

Books from the library were also used as thank-you presents for services to the crown, the texts being chosen from a genre befitting the recipient. The books given as gifts to the King's medical advisers are striking examples: Charles VI, struggling for most of his reign with mental health issues, gathered around him several physicians/astrologers, and presented several of them with medical, astrological and astronomical texts (even if their medical efforts were in vain).[34]

The Kings also took books with them on their travels: for example to the Mont Saint-Michel in 1393, Charles VI brought anthologies of antique stories or *chansons de geste*.[35] In the context of knightly renaissance at the time, this type of literature must have been appropriate reading matter for the young Charles VI and his followers—read out loud, for example, in the evening in the army's tents, the heroic stories of the king's predecessors would have helped to create a sense of aristocratic community, united by ideals of war and heroic deeds.[36] Charles V, on the other hand, seems to have preferred another genre: besides devotional literature, the high number of astrological books signed out of the library, as well as the collections assembled in the other residences of the King, testify to some personal interest. Many astrological texts, such as a horoscope of the *Dauphin*, astrological tables, or two judicial astrological manuals, bear his autograph signature,[37] which is a sign that a book had either been written for him or that he cherished it.[38]

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32 Schnerb-Lièvre 1982; 1993–1995. On the historical background see Cazelles 1982; for a comparative approach see Fletcher/Genet/Watts 2015.

33 Kopp 2016a, 236–237.

34 Among them, a book by Trota, a medical treaty by the eleventh-century Egyptian physician ʿAlī ibn Riḍwān, as well as several meteorological, astronomical and medicinal classics and their commentaries from the Greek tradition, see Kopp 2016a, 225; 248–249. On the place of astrology and medicine at the courts, see Boudet 2006; Boudet/Ostorero/Paravicini Bagliani 2017. On the reciprocity of gifts at court, see Hirschbiegel 2003; for the pre-modern society at large see Zemon-Davis 2000. On the mental health of Charles VI, see Guenée 2004.

35 "Des Faiz de Troye, des Romains, de Thebez, de Alexandre le Grant" are annotated with the comment that the King took them out for this purpose: 'Le roy le prinst quant il alla au Mont-Saint-Michel', Paris, BnF MS fr. 2700 fol. 7r; fol. 42v.

36 Coleman 1986.

37 See the appendix 3 for the number of manuscripts with royal autographs in Kopp 2016a.

38 See Kopp 2016a, 186–200.

Christine de Pizan offers a glimpse of how reading customarily took place. She records that the valet Gilles Malet, the so-called 'first guard of the Louvre library', was the usual reader to the King because 'he was good at reading and punctuation' (which means the modulation of the text when spoken aloud).[39] Malet was not only the reader, but also the person who had the keys to the library tower and made the first inventory of the library. From 1368 to his death in 1410, he was a crucial figure for the book collection: This close royal servitor was able to locate the books in the library and signed out what might interest the King, and also read the works aloud to him. So, what did the King choose besides astrology? Again, Christine de Pizan reports on the ideal daily routine of the King:[40] especially in the winter, before supper, she says, the King preferred to hear stories from the Bible, historical stories or even philosophical or other scientific topics.[41]

Although Charles V gathered some scholars around him, the Louvre library was not open to the public. Besides invaluable old books belonging to the King's family, many books were plain and simple manuscripts, some described in the inventories as 'old' or 'in very old script',[42] and these would never leave the rooms nor get any attention from the King. Most scientific and political works, such as Aristotle's *Ethics* and *Politics*, entered the library for the first time in their translated versions, as well as some encyclopaedias, 'mirrors for princes' and royal chronicles. These collections of knowledge came to the royal library not even as commissions, but owing to patronage or gifts, and in vernacular language.[43] The manuscripts the King commissioned were mostly compilations of treaties and juridical texts, such as a new *ordo* for the coronation ceremony,[44] as well as encyclopaedias and astrological books. The selection may look odd to a modern reader, and the anecdote at the beginning of this article highlights that not all contemporary scholars shared this view, but it takes on its true significance in

39 '[S]ouverainement bien lisoit et bel pontoit, et entendens homs estoit, comme il y ppert [...] cellui propre jour fu devant le roy, lisant longue piece par autel semblant et chiere, ne plus ne moins comme acoustumé avoit', Solente 1936, vol. 2, 63.

40 On the construction in her biography, see Brauer 2015, 46–63.

41 'En yver, par especial se occupoit souvent à ouir lire de diverses belles hystoires de la Sainte Escripture, ou des Fais des Romains, ou Moralités de philosophes et d'autres sciences jusques à heure de soupper' (Solente 1936, vol. 1, 47–48).

42 Kopp 2016a, 82.

43 See the analyses of the acquisition methods in Kopp 2016a, 280–303, and appendix 4; insisting on less royal commission and more voluntary gifts by courtiers see Boucher 2005; arguing for a coordinated translation project see Autrand 1995, 99–106; Sherman 1995.

44 On these, see Kopp 2010, 55–72. On the coronation *ordo* see O'Meara 2001, Jackson 1969, 305–324.

a political context, where all kinds of knowledge, even astrology, were deemed useful for counselling a king.

To understand the late medieval French context, it is important to differentiate two spheres of language: the administrative, in which Latin remained predominately the language of prestige and law; and the courtly, in which French had gradually overtaken Latin under the political and social pressure of the nobility. Latin remained the language of royal ordonnances and judicial exchange with parts of the kingdom that used medieval Roman law, as well as for decisions made for eternity such as ennoblements and legitimations.[45] But even on the political side, French was also used in communicating with the English, whose nobility was still French-speaking, and sometimes with the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire Charles IV, a Luxembourger raised in Paris.[46] Nicole Oresme himself, the well-known philosopher, argued in favour of translations: the classical text, he says in his introduction to the *Ethics* and *Politics*, has already been translated into many languages in the past. By translating it into French after it has been translated from Greek to Latin, the translator fulfilled another step of *translatio studii*. *Translatio studii* moved, so to speak, from the Greeks to the Romans and now to the French.[47] In his eyes, translations into French made Paris a new centre of knowledge, and, therefore, translations were not only a linguistic, but also a political concern.

Oresme met the expectations and general trends at court, where all writings undertaken to define the King's rights and legitimise the Valois dynasty were written in French: the *Chroniques de Saint-Denis*, the traditional royal chronicle originally composed by the monks of Saint-Denis in Latin, were now being continued in French, and written by the King's chancellor under the King's eye.[48] Political treaties or papal bulls were compiled by the King's archivist, and brought to the library; documents on peace treaties or marriage contracts were translated into French and compiled as manuals for use in the library. On the other side, papal letters were still written in Latin, but now included a French summary and brought into the Louvre.[49] These examples, very far from luxury manuscripts and expensive commissions, illustrate the contemporary bilingualism: the question was not which language to choose over all, but which language to use appropriate to a specific functional context.[50]

45 Lusignan 1999, 509–521; Lusignan 2004.

46 Monnet 2020; on his ties to France, see Šmahel 2006.

47 Paraphrased from Lusignan 1989, 311; for the full *Excusation*, see Menut 1940, 97–101.

48 On this, see Hedeman 1991; Spiegel 1978; Nora 1986, 189–214.

49 These texts have rarely been analysed, see Kopp 2016a, 292; 183-186. See also appendix 4. On the relationship between the archive and the library, see Kopp 2010, 55–72; Artonne 1955; Potin 2000.

50 See Kopp 2016a, 259–279; Lusignan 2004; Boucher 2005.

4 Constructing an ideal

This final section deals with the French King Charles V as the prototype of the wise king, how that figure was represented, and the importance of the Louvre collection for its discursive construction. It will focus on the way in which Charles V's long lasting image as *sage roy* ('wise king') was coined, and how the royal book collection helped to build this trope.

The representation of the ruler as a wise king is a trope throughout medieval history. New Solomon, *rex literatus, verus philosophus* are just some of the labels that were attached to kings such as the French Louis IX 'the saint',[51] and Charles V, le sage, the Castilian Alphonso X *el rey sabio*,[52] Robert of Anjou *il saggio*[53] or the Staufer Kings Frederic II, known as *stupor mundi*, and his son Manfred.[54] Books, reading and knowledge, and the figure of a reading king are all reflected in contemporary discourses. 'An illiterate king is like a crowned ass', claimed John of Salibury in his *Polycraticus*.[55] In the fourteenth century, the biographer of Charles V, Christine de Pizan, used the same image in order to emphasize the importance of knowledge for a good ruler.[56] In her biography of the King, she describes him as worshipping the university community and sciences. More importantly, she gives a vivid description of the Louvre library as being a treasure trove of many excellent translations made by the most renowned scholars of their time.[57]

The attributes and requirements for an ideal king were discussed in 'mirrors for princes' throughout the Middle Ages and rose to new popularity under the rule of the Valois kings.[58] Wisdom is one aspect needed by an ideal king for just government, and it included art, intelligence, science, but also prudence. It is according to these *topoi* that the author Christine de Pizan depicts Charles V in her panegyric biography: The wise King was *vray philosophe* ('a real philosopher'), *astrologien* ('astrologer'), and *droit artiste*, which means that he was familiar with

51 Le Goff 1996.
52 Burns 1990.
53 Kelly 2003.
54 Imbach/König-Pralong 2013; Boudet 2008, 545–566.
55 'Rex illiteratus est asinus coronatus', Webb 1909, 254.
56 'Puis conclut que roy non savant / Tout son fait n'estoit que droit vent / Et qu'autant valoit au regné / Com feist un asne couronné' (Püschel 1887, verses 5089–5092).
57 Solente 1936, vol. 2, 42–46, the chapter XII of book 3 starts with 'Item, comment le roy Charles amoit livres, et des belles translacions que il fist faire.'
58 Krynen 1993, 170–208; Kopp 2021; Delogu 2008, 153–183.

the university's seven arts.[59] For Christine, Charles really assumed his role as wise king by actively supporting the transfer of knowledge under his patronage.

His predecessors, such as the twelfth-century Louis IX, the collector and explicator of biblical texts and patron of Robert of Sorbon, or the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Robert of Anjou, Alfonso of Castile, or the Staufer Kings Frederic II and Manfred, are further examples of wise kings, singled out for their intellectual capacities. All these kings were said to be either the authors of prayers, poems, juridical compendiums, astrological treaties, and translations of Latin, Hebraic or Arabic texts, or to have corresponded with well-known scholars or found other forms for the patronage of science and knowledge. Therefore, by the time of Charles V, not only religious knowledge, but also intellectual abilities belonged to the topic representation of wise kings, showing the gradual shifts in the main virtues for an ideal ruler. This narrative was well understood and well used, for example by Christine de Pizan, who devotes one-third of her whole panegyric biography of Charles V to show the wisdom of the ideal king. When awarding Charles V the attribute *le sage* ('the wise'), she did not choose her models from the chronologically close medieval Spanish or Italian kings. Rather, she went back to antique models, such as the Egyptian Pharaoh Ptolemy II Philadelphus.[60] For her, the Pharaoh had also been an astrologer and she draws a parallel with Charles V's fondness for astrology as political advisory science, a fable Christine, herself the daughter of an astrologer, always emphasized. Another important parallel, for Christine, between the Pharaoh and King was the library and the commissioning of translations. Thus, the Pharaoh possessed over fifty thousand books in the great library of Alexandria, whereas Charles established the Louvre library. The Pharaoh ordered the translation of the *Septuagint*, the *Torah*, from Hebrew into Greek, while Charles commissioned the translation of all the main titles of philosophical and theological texts from Latin to French.[61]

59 Chapters III; IIII; XI.; XIII of her third book (Solente 1936, vol. 2, 12, 15, 33 and 46).

60 Nevertheless, we have to note that she mixes up the Pharaoh Ptolemy with the astrologer Claudius Ptolemy.

61 Solente 1936, vol. 2, 44–45: 'De la grant amour, qu'il avoit en avoir grant quantité livres, et comment il s'i [sic] delictoit, et de ses translacions, me souvient d'un roy d'Egipte appellé Ptolomée Philardelphe, lequel fu homme de grant estude, et plus ama livres que autre quelconques chose, ne estre n'en pouvoit rassadié; une fois, demanda à son libraire quans livres il avoit; cellui respondi que tantost en aroit accompli le nombre de .L. mille; et comme cellui Ptholomée oist dire que les Juifs avoient la loy de Dieu escripte de son doy, ot moult grant desir que ceste loy fust translatée de ebrieu en grec, [...]. Celle translacion fu moult agreable au roy. Moult fu sage cellui roy Ptholomée, et moult sceut de la science d'astronomie, et mesura la reondeur de la terre.'

Fig. 3: Charles V as wise king. Paris, BnF MS fr. 24287, fol. 2r. © Bibliothèque nationale de France.

One last visual source may show the importance of books and learning in the topic representation of a wise king. This is one of the most emblematic images of Charles V.[62] It is taken from the frontispiece of the translation by Dennis Foulechat of John of Salisbury's *Polycraticus*.[63] This text is not, like the earlier Aristotelian texts, from a university canon, but is a well-known 'mirror for princes' and belongs to counselling literature. Charles is depicted in a regal pose, wearing his crown and dressed in a cloak coat covered by the heraldic *fleur de lis*. He is sitting in a richly ornamented chair in front of a book-wheel. Books are piling up both on the wheel and in a chest on the ground, and on a little desk in the background two books are lying open. God, symbolized by a small hand, comes out of a little cloud above the King and blesses him. Charles points his finger at the big book, opened at a page showing the biblical saying *Beatus vir, qui in sapientia morabitur, et qui,* which continues [*in justitia mediabitur, et in sensu cogitabit circumspectionem Dei*].[64] This illumination synthesized perfectly the representation of a wise king, as personified by Charles: we see erudition in books, and a learned king, who takes the best from them in order to fulfil his duties as a just ruler. By doing this as best he can through wisdom, Charles V becomes the new prototype of a wise king.

These are just a few of many examples of how book prologues and biographers insist on the importance of books and book collections as the core of a royal education, intended to produce a wise, and therefore just and victorious king. From Charles V on, books and translations formed part of this enriched wisdom trope, thus bolstering the narrative of the French king's ascendancy as the *rex christianissimus*.[65] The intellectual requirements for a king as described in the following 'mirrors for princes' culminated in a reading canon,[66] which effectively would have required a king to read the entire Louvre library…

62 On the representations, see Hedeman 1991; Sherman 1969.

63 Paris, BnF MS fr. 24287, fol. 2r. See Fig. 3.

64 *Eccles*. 14: 22.

65 On this narrative in French state building and dynastic legitimation see Krynen 1989, 88–91; Gauvard 2010.

66 Jean Gerson for example recommended the Bible commentaries by the well-known theologian Nicolaus de Lyra as well as his own sermons, Krynen 1993, 191–195.

5 Conclusion

Books being a 'treasure' for a king is a thought widely spread out at the late medieval court in Paris. This citation comes from Evrard de Trémaugon, jurist and author of one of the royal political compositions. He has one of his protagonists say that 'It is clear that it is not a hateful, but a very profitable thing, even for a king, to have some books, old and new, it is a beautiful treasure for a king to have a multitude of books'. Later he adds that 'a king without wide reading (*lettrure*) is like a ship without helms/rudders, and like a bird without wings'.[67] Evrard, like Christine de Pizan, insists on King Charles V's *bibliophilia*, and on the commission of translations as one aspect of the King's *sagesse*, his wisdom.[68]

It might not be a coincidence that wisdom became such a prominent cardinal virtue of the king's government at the very time the French kings were collecting manuscripts in their residences and receiving many translations, done by experts. Mostly the Louvre library was the institutional frame in which all kinds of manuscripts were collected, inventoried by order and materiality due to a slowly professionalizing procedure. Books were eventually taken out for reading, as presents, or for loans. The inventories of the Louvre library, and especially the lists of taken out and returned books, as well as other narrative sources concerning the Louvre library, allow us to catch a glimpse of how translations, and the circulation and reading of texts, functioned at the late medieval French court. This unique evidence for a royal book collection between 1368 and 1429 (apparently hardly followed up by the next kings and never as systematically institutionalized at the courts of the mighty dukes), also underlines how rare and scarce this kind of institution was in the medieval West among the lay people. It might be the uniqueness of it, both for medieval contemporaries and for today's scholars, that explains the longevity of the library in the collective memory and the ongoing fascination around the surviving lavish manuscripts.

Evidently, the narrative of the medieval king's library went well beyond its short-lived existence: in the year 1995, the French president François Mitterrand laid the foundation stone of the new building of the Bibliothèque nationale de

67 'Il appiert donques clerement que ce n'est pas chose detestable, mez est profitable, mesmement a un Roy, avoir plusieurs livres, vieux et nouveaux, pour y avoir recours en temps et en lieu, selon lez divers cas qui luy avienent de jour en jour; et est biau tresor a un roy avoir grant multitude de livres' (Schnerb-Lièvre 1982, 227). 'Et pour ce est il ailleurs escript que un Roy sans lattreüre est conme une nef sanz avyrons et come oysel sanz elles' (Schnerb-Lièvre 1982, 223). My own translation above.

68 See book 3, chapter XII: 'Item, comment le roy Charles amoit livres, et des belles translacions que il fist faire', (Solente 1936, vol. 2, 42–46).

France, the national library, as a part of the monumental institutional and cultural programme, commissioned by the president himself. For this symbolic action, he used a stone taken from the recently rediscovered foundations of the medieval Louvre. This act shows the deliberate, even if historically inaccurate, narrative continuation of the Louvre library through the centuries from the Middle Ages into the digital era.[69] For some, from this perspective, Charles V as founder of the national library and supporter of the emergence of the French language through translations deserves more than ever his title of a truly wise king. The Louvre library was considered as the starting point of an institution and linguistic movement that is deeply rooted in the self-perception of the French nation.[70] Here we can grasp the remains of the historiographical construction of an ideal king from the Middle Ages, and how powerful it is still today.

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69 One example: 'Toutes ces préoccupations montrent bien que la Bibliothèque de Charles V a vraiment constitué la première ébauche, si timide fût-elle, de ce que fut, au cours des siècles, la Bibliothèque royale et de ce qu'est devenu aujourd'hui la Bibliothèque nationale' (Dennery 1968, IX, see also figure 6).

70 On the living myth of Charles V as founder of the 'national library' and its implication in nineteenth-century French historiography, see Kopp 2016b, 63–86.

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