

NOTE

De David le prophete (and the Old French *Eructavit* poem)
as a Synecdoche of the Psalter
in the manuscript British Library, Additional 15606

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ABSTRACT: *The scribe of manuscript London, British Library, Additional 15606 (dating back to the early 14th century) made an interesting error, leading to the substitution of a bifolio in a quire of the codex and suggesting that the French poem Eructavit, inspired by the commentary of a psalm, could stand in for a symbolic representation of the psalter.*

KEYWORDS: *Medieval French literature – Codicology – Palaeography – Psalms*

There is an interesting case of title misattribution in a text from Lorraine connected with the biblical prophet David, which suggests that vernacular Old French poems based on the psalms could be symbolically interpreted as a prefiguration of the entire psalter. Currently, the title in question is still believed to be that of an allegorical poem dealing with the siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, based on biblical sources scattered throughout several books of the Old Testament.¹ Yet the assumption is wrong. In fact, the poem appears in a Burgundian manuscript dating back to *c.* 1300, where it was attracted by the centripetal tradition of a much more famous poem, known from several other manuscripts, the *Eructavit* written for Marie de Champagne (*c.* 1180). This other poem represents a commentary of Ps 44 (*Eructavit cor meum*) presented as an interpretation of the psalm in the form of a vision of David, with Latin headings for each commented biblical verse. At the end of the poem, the

¹ Fuhrken 1895 edited the text and believed that the vernacular poem had no connection to biblical sources. The primary sources for the siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar are the verses 2 Ki 25:1-4, 8-19; 2 Ch 36:18-19; Jr 34:8-22; Jr 37:5-16; Jr 39:2; Jr 52:7, 12-25; Ez 24:1-2; Ez 30:20-21; Ez 33:21; Ez 40:1.

vernacular author also included *Gloria Patri*. It was copied in many manuscripts; the base manuscript probably being Paris, BnF, fr. 2094 (late 13th century).²

The Lorraine manuscript that I am interested in is currently located in London, British Library, Additional 15606.³ It contains a version of *Eructavit*, preceded by the other vernacular poem, titled *De David li prophecie* ever since its first publication. My presentation will deal with palaeographic and codicological facts, since they will allow me to draw conclusions on the evolution of a series of texts in peripheral contexts reminding of the much larger centripetal tradition of Old French psalters. This poem dealing with the siege of Jerusalem begins on f. 5r of the manuscript with a title in red ink. A comparison with the tituli transcribed for the following poem (the *Eructavit*, herein without a title proper) testifies to the fact that these red titles and the initials were transcribed at the end of the transcription process. The choice of the title *De dauid li prophecie* should therefore be attributed to the copyist who also acted as a rubricator. This copyist left *inserendae* in the text, in order to have enough space to transcribe the red headings at the end, but he quickly grew tired, giving up on transcribing them in the second part of the *Eructavit* poem.⁴

² For an edition, see *Eructavit* (ed. Atkinson Jenkins). For the base manuscript, see also the online bibliography of the DEAF *Dictionnaire Étymologique de l'Ancien Français* (<http://www.deaf-page.de/>; last access: 19.11.2021). Cf. *L'Eructavit antico-francese* (ed. Meliga). Cf. Ruini 2008, p. 213, (note 11), who mentions the issue of the incorrect title, but considers that the text preceding the *Eructavit* has no connection with the poem proper.

³ The manuscript's leaves (parchment) measure 255x195mm. The text is transcribed on two columns and dates back to the early 14th century. Cf. Sinclair 1979, n. 2499.

⁴ The colophon after the explicit of the text appears in the last line of the second column of f. 17vb: *Sancti spiritus adsit nobis gloria*. The *Eructavit* poem has many red rubrics with Latin texts; some of them in marginal *inserendae* achieved during the transcription of the main text. These *inserendae* are found only in the beginning: f. 19v: *Eruptauit cor meum verbum bonum + Linga mea chalamus scribe velociter scribentis*; f. 20v: *Speciosus forma pre filiis hominum*; f. 21r: *Diffusa est gratia in labiis tuis*; f. 21v: *Accingere gladio tuo super femur*. Subsequently, the copyist no longer indicates the rubrics to be copied. These red rubrics without prior indications are on f. 22v: *Intende prospere procede et regna + Propter veritatem et mansuetudinem*; f. 23r: *Sagite tue populi sub te cadent*; f. 24v: *Sedes tua deus in seculum seculi*; f. 27r: *Dilexisti iusticiam et odisti iniquitatem*; f. 27v: *Mirra et guta et cassia a uestimentis*; f. 28r: *Astitit regina a destris tuis*; f. 28v: *Audi filia et vide inclina aurem*; f. 29v: *Omnis gloria eius filie regis*; f. 30v: *Et filiae tiri in numeribus vultum tuum*; f. 31r: *Et concupiscet rex decorem tuum*; f. 31r: *Adducen-tur regi virgines*; f. 31v: *Afferantur in leticia et exsultatione*; f. 32v: *Pro patribus tuis nati sunt tibi filii*; f. 34r: *Propterea populi confitebuntur tibi*; f. 34v: *Gloria patri*; f. 34v: *Et filio et spiritui sancto*; f. 34v: *Sicut erat in principio*.

I am much more interested by the fact that the copyist did not transcribe any inserenda for the heading of the title in question on the first leaf of our text. In other words, this title (*De dauid li prophecie*) was chosen and transcribed only at the end of the copying process. This happened independently of the texts themselves, when the copyist only followed the inserendae. The title then represents just a larger designation that merges several texts in the manuscript: the untitled poem, the *Eructavit*, and an *Entrée de la messe*.⁵ The latter is in prose and starts on f. 35r.⁶ Its text was written by the same hand, but the copyist had changed the ink. He had left some space for the initial drop cap, but he forgot to paint it. This text was therefore written after the transcription of the initial letters and headings of the two previous texts. It is particularly significant that a colophon in red was copied after the already marked explicit. Its transcription was done also at a later date, probably during the revision of the rubrics, and the colophon reads, surprisingly, *Explicit lib[er d]e dauid la prophecie*, with the verso of the last folio left blank, unwritten. It is highly plausible that the copyist wanted to improve the codex, but that he did not take into account the fact that the texts he had transcribed were very different in nature and contents. This “prophecy of David” had several endings.

The explanation can be found at the end of the manuscript. P. Meyer briefly described the last quire (f. 160r-162v), but did not thoroughly investigate the issue.⁷ Logic would suggest that this quire should be inserted after f. 29v. P. Meyer also noticed that the text starting on f. 30r is again copied on f. 160r. Yet, the ink and quill of f. 29v match those of f. 160r, thus suggesting that f. 160r had to be transcribed well before the transcription of f. 30r. Since the text of f. 160r-v and 30r-v is identical, except for a minor change which I will deal with later, and since f. 160r-v and 30r-v share the same ruling, rubrics, number of verses, and contents, it is clear

⁵ It is perhaps useful to note that in this handwritten copy, the Old French *Eructavit* poem does not have any title, perhaps because it follows this first text. The *Eructavit* begins on a separate folio (f. 18r) only by accident, a sort of coincidence, since the earlier poem ends with the last line of f. 17v and the red colophon already mentioned is written on the last line of that folio.

⁶ Incipit of the text: [C]’est ci l’antrée de la mosse commant l’an doit oir la mosse ne les ordenances qu’il afierent a faire premerement [...]. Explicit on f. 36rb: [...] Si les deuons prier qu’il faceint nos besoignes a nostre soignour asteemant. Et qui ansic lou fait ie croi que il hot bien la mosse. *Explicit*.

⁷ Meyer 1877, p. 28.

that f. 30r-v represents a substitution of f. 160r-v. When one looks at the last quire, real change occurs only on the next folio (f. 161r) which contains the same text as f. 35r. The missing text is that of the folios that make up the inner leaves of the fifth quire of the manuscript (f. 31r-34v). It is rather obvious that the scribe had made an error: he transcribed his text from a manuscript source, whose quires had been dismembered in order to facilitate the copying process. This explains why the fifth quire of his manuscript-copy, the one that gave him a hard time (f. 30r-35v) contains six folios, not four like the first quire (that of the calendar, the first text of the manuscript) or eight, like the quires 2, 3, and 4 (the first ones in the manuscript, those which transcribe the untitled poem and part of the *Eructavit*).

The copyist had to make amends by rejecting the outer bifolio of his fifth quire, which was appended at the end of the manuscript. In its stead, he recopied correctly the text on a quire consisting of three bifolios.⁸ However, the folio that he rejected and placed at the end of the manuscript also helps us reconstruct the aspect of the source text. On f. 161r, the copyist simply transcribed the colophon in red directly from the source: *Laux tibi sit xpiste quoniam liber explicit iste*. This text is absent from f. 35r. It is therefore safe to conclude that its very absence allowed for the incorporation of the bizarre colophon at the end of the text concerning Mass, the one that says *Explicit lib[er d]e dauid la | prophecie*. The reconstruction of the entire process suggests that the copyist was in so much of a hurry, preoccupied with fixing his mistake, moving and changing the order of bifolios, that he copied another segment of text, a part of the *Eructavit* poem, from a quire that he had left aside for a while, before copying the text concerning Mass. By the time he got back to it, it didn't have a title yet. As a result, the copyist was baffled by the text where he had made a mistake (the *Eructavit*) and ignored that there were other texts in this section of the manuscript. He chose a title that had a relation

⁸ The ink and quill of f. 30r correspond to those from the second half of Wace's *Conception* poem, another text which follows in the manuscript. It is therefore certain that this folio was redone at a later stage, when the copyist had already finished the transcription of the *Conception*. The other bifolios of the quire, that is, the middle and inner ones (ff. 31r-34v), present the same ink and pen as the previous quire. There is evidence to suggest that the scribe placed the badly written folio aside when he realised the mistake he had made, and decided to correct that mistake later, at a different time.

to the psalm, the main text at the beginning of his manuscript, unwittingly signalling that this text was the key one in the grouping of texts from those quires (before and after it).

However, this also suggests that the untitled poem, wrongly titled *De David li prophecie* in current bibliography, formed a group the *Eructavit* poem and together they played the part of a real psalter. The concept should be taken, of course, in a figurative sense. Not only does the *Eructavit* attract this other text, which fulfils the role of a prologue in the new textual unit of the manuscript, much in the same manner in which psalms attract, for example, the canticles, prayers, and even litanies from the end of the psalter; but the *Eructavit* and the untitled poem are preceded in the Additional 15606 manuscript by a calendar, transcribed on the folios of the first quire, identical to the calendars which open the psalters proper. One can have the impression that, symbolically, the Lorraine manuscript was a real Psalter. In addition to this comparison, the calendar in question is bilingual, Latin-French.⁹ This would explain why the *Conception Nostre Dame* by Wace was copied after the *Eructavit* section (f. 36r-81r). The case is similar to that of the Royal 2 A IX manuscript of the British Library, which dates back to the first quarter of the 13th century or c. 1250. The transcription of a series of Marian poems by Wace and two anonymous *Oratio[nes] de sancta maria* at the end of this other manuscript is an extension of several experiments and variations with the psalter.¹⁰ Thus, the copy of the vernacular *Eructavit* poem became a synecdoche for the entire psalter in the Lorraine manuscript Additional 15606.

As for the link between the *Eructavit* and the poem dealing with the siege of Jerusalem, it could be a banal consequence of the mention of David in both texts. When Nebuchadnezzar fought Zedekiah, the last

⁹ The names of the days and the final calculation of the hours are in Latin. The rest – the number of days of each month, the feasts, and the names of the saints – are in French. The calendar occupies the first three folios, a column for each month. The month of December occupies the second column of f. 3v. However, the red-ink explicit has been copied on two lines from the beginning of f. 4r: *Après la sainte agathe lene prime querons | Lou samadi apres li voile des brandons*. The rest of the folio was left blank.

¹⁰ The Royal 2 A IX manuscript contains the Psalter of the Holy Spirit (ff. 1r-19r), Psalter of the Virgin (ff. 20r-35v), another version of the Psalter of the Holy Spirit (ff. 47r-62v), Hymnary of the Virgin (ff. 64r-77r), selections from the psalms (ff. 78r-83v), several Latin hymns, and a large number of poems attributed to Gautier Map. Note also that the first folio of the *Conception* in Additional 15606 presents a similar ink to that of the *Eructavit*, meaning that the folios that contain the Explanation of Mass were left blank, so that this other text be later integrated.

king of Judah, the Bible tells us the words of a divine prophecy: «For thus saith the Lord, David shall never want a man to sit upon the throne of the house of Israel» (Jr 33:17). Perhaps this is why the entire group of texts is titled *De David li prophete* and several verses from the end of the untitled poem speak about David and his psalter:

Qui les aime contre raison
done est lor huz fors de saison;
de ce saint David li prophete
en son sautier nos amoneste.¹¹

The connection with the Exposition of Mass can be explained by the last verses of the *Eructavit* poem, which contain a commentary on the *Gloria Patri*, the short doxology that is often said at mass.¹² The scribal accident from manuscript London, British Library, Additional 15606, is therefore extremely significant, as it clarifies the symbolical status of a group of texts developed around a famous late 12th-century Old French poem. French literature often imitated Latin exegesis. Here, in the Lorraine manuscript dating back to c. 1300, French poems inspired by sacred texts could stand in for a symbolic representation of the psalter.

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¹¹ Fuhrken 1895, p. 223 (vv. 1217-1220).

¹² For a discussion about *Gloria Patri* transcribed at the end of the *Eructavit*, see also Ruini 2008, p. 216.

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