

FELLOWSHIP FINAL REPORT

Religious *lieux de savoir* in premodern Tours and Orléans: A Social and Spatial Approach to Religious Reading in French (c. 1450-c. 1550)

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ABSTRACT

The research has shown to that up to ca. 1550 many of the inhabitants of “average” French towns as Tours and Orléans were literate and that they did have access to religious texts in French, contrarily to ideas regularly expressed in historical scholarship. Archival documents, as well as surviving handwritten texts and printed books have provided information about the wide range of social backgrounds of the readers, from stocking makers in Tours and Orléans, the grandson of Gaultiere who ran the public baths in Tours, to well-off merchants and lawyers. Next to books and their owners, the research has resulted in evidence about the presence and location of libraries, open access texts and books, booksellers and printers. Furthermore, an inventory of a book collection (probably a bookshop) with more than 276 books in French in Tours has given much data about textual cultures and reading interests. The historical data often allow plotting these “lieux de savoir” on historical maps of premodern Tours and Orléans. Further analysis of places of religious knowledge by making use of computerised Geographical Information Systems allow for more refined conclusions about concentrations (near religious institutions and schools) and accessibility (in the heart of urban life). The project has already resulted in one accepted peer-reviewed publication; two other articles and a collection of articles in open access, authored by specialists in the field, are in preparation.

1- Introduction

The most in-depth recent study into the history of late medieval Tours (Chevalier 1974) states that this was “a time when the extremely rare occasions to read rendered this skill of only minor interest” (216) and that “the clients of

booksellers in Tours were affluent people who were looking after the most traditional books of piety and who were willing to pay a high price for a hand-written and richly decorated collector’s item” (506). Ideas of books and reading being out of reach for middle class people because of their illiteracy and because of

high prices continue to inform recent historical publications.

The aim of this research project was to find new historical evidence for the access that lay people from the societal middle classes had to literacy and to their reading cultures of religious texts during the long fifteenth century, stretching until ca. 1550.

Furthermore, analysis of the urban spaces where books were located and where religious reading most likely took place, gives more insight into the circulation of religious knowledge in Tours and Orléans and its accessibility to the urban laity.

2- Experimental details

A major part of the ‘experimental’ phase of the research was retrieving new historical data and re-evaluating historical documentation that had already been published earlier.

- Late medieval manuscripts with religious texts in French and in Latin from the Bibliothèque municipale of Tours and in the Bibliothèque nationale de France in Paris were studied for their material aspects, their textual content, paratextual instructions for reading practices, for traces that linked them to Tours and to lay readers. Approximately fifteen manuscripts were identified as important sources for further analysis.

- A number of documents from the accounts of the elected municipal leaders (*les élus*) from Tours, séries BB and CC of the Archives municipales, were studied for mentions of acquisition of parchment and paper, payments to scribes, payments to preachers, to schoolmasters and discussions about a school financed by the town.

- Original legal documents and contracts from the *minutier des notaires* in the Archives départementales d’Indre et Loire in Tours, were studied, assisted by the online database

Rénumar of the CESR, for evidence for the presence of books, book sellers, artisans in the book industry and schools (for boys and girls).

- The Fellow has started to study original historical documents from Orléans (in the Bibliothèque municipale d’Orléans, the Archives départementales du Loiret, the Archives municipales et communales d’Orléans), but this was severely hampered, first by the strikes of public transport/SNCF in December 2019-February 2020, and then by the Covid-19 crisis and the lockdown starting on 13 March 2020, because of which the archives and libraries were closed until early June 2020.

It is disappointing that there is no funding available for a prolongation of the project to make up for the three lost months. Therefore, after discussion with the Host Scientist, the Fellow has opted for concentrating on Tours for the time being, and to use the historical data found for Orléans as background documentation sustaining the conclusions found for Tours.

- The Fellow has studied the state of the art in historical and cultural research on the subject based on the rich collection of specialist studies available in the library of the CESR.

- David Rivaud of the CESR has shared a map with a reconstruction of the street plan of Tours around 1500 that will be serve as the basis for a spatial analysis of libraries and book production in Tours, in collaboration with David Rivaud. Furthermore, online reproductions of historical maps have been used for understanding the spatial dynamics and conceptualisations.

- The research has much benefited from the courses in GIS (retraining) and ArcGIS offered by the Maison des Sciences de l’Homme in Tours.

- The research presentations of the Studium Thursdays, though strictly speaking not part of the research, were highly instructive and very inspiring. For many Fellows it is an opportunity to learn about other fields of research that they

never encounter in their home institutions, due to the compartmentalisation of universities.

3- Results and discussion

1. Several original manuscripts, early printed books and archival documents demonstrate that several **lay people in Tours owned books with religious texts**. A brief selection of examples (NB this is only a selection: several more examples could be quoted here and for the other points mentioned below):

Tours, AD, 3E1/34 contains an inventory made on 11 January 1516 of the movable goods belonging to Jehane Bernarde and her husband Jehan Julian, merchant and stocking maker, who lived in a house in the Rue Saint-Maurice (now the rue Lavoisier near the cathedral). The inventory shows that they owned at least ten books: several Books of Hours (one in French), the *Legenda aurea* in Latin, a book for the education of girls, and the lessons of Cato in French, a widely used school book.

Tours, BM, MS 231 is a spectacular example. It is a complete Book of Hours with additional religious texts in French copied by the lay man Nicolas Rolet in the first decades of the sixteenth century. The manuscript was most likely made in the Loire Valley, maybe in Tours, suggested for instance by a poem referring to the Sainte Larme in Vendôme (cf. the *Mystère de la sainte larme*, printed by Mathieu Chercelé in Tours, early sixteenth century).

2. More handwritten witnesses were **penned by lay people from Tours with their own hands**. These include so-called *livres de raison* (records of family events such as marriages and baptisms), as well as handwritten copies of religious texts; in some cases even texts or poems composed by lay people. Two examples:

Tours, BM, MS 226 is a fifteenth-century Book of Hours containing a *livre de raison* noted by members of the de Gallant family from Tours: “*Catharine Gallant [...] nasqui le lendemain de la Penthecoste jour de may lan mil v. c.*

cinquante et fu baptize en leglise St Hilaire a Tours”.

Tours, AD, 3 E 1/15: A piece of paper was pasted on the last leaf of this register of the notary Fousedouaire. It contains a religious poem in French, hand written and maybe even composed by his colleague Jaloignes: “*Pardonne moy deite excellent/ Et a toy humblement me presente/ Suplye vieut avoir misericorde/ Qui te requier, je scay que luy acorde...(etc)*”

3. **Schooling** was certainly accessible for the laity of Tours. For instance, there was a school (uniting probably both a *petite école* and a *grande école*) attached to the abbey of Saint-Julien, as testified by a document from December 1502 listing the payments still owed by several parents to the schoolmaster; these include the son of Jehan Galle, *brodeur du roi*, but also people of a more humble position such as two children of the widow of Naudin Mangier, a barber, and the grandson of Gaultiere, who ran the public baths (Tours, AD, 3E1/17). Moreover, the town council debated regularly issues regarding to a school and a head master they employed (Tours, AM, BB Registre 4, 23 December 1429). Chevalier (1974: 216) assumed that this was the only school in Tours and thus proof of the absence of education available for the inhabitants. However, it is more likely that this was the equivalent of a grammar school offering advanced education in Latin, as founded frequently by towns and private persons in the British Isles from the 1440s onwards (Orme 2006: 229-254). Furthermore, a contract dating from 1518 shows that there was a functioning school for girls in Tours that also offered boarding, ran by Jeanne, wife of Jean Maguyn, “*maitresse d’ecolle de filles*” (Tours, AD, 3E8/293).

4. In 1868 Achille Chéreau published a **late-medieval booklist counting more than 267 books in French**, and including a geographical indication “*A Tours devant l’ostel monseigneur de Dunois*” (In Tours in front of the hôtel [town house] of monseigneur de Dunois). This is the hôtel de Dunois, situated in the Grand Rue (at

present the rue Colbert), close to the collegiate church of Saint-Julien, on the corner of the Rue Neuve (at present the rue Jules Favre). Chéreau identified the booklist as the inventory of the shop of a bookseller in Tours. A renewed identification by the Fellow of all books mentioned in the list has allowed for a new dating of the booklist, shortly after 1494, and a new hypothesis concerning the nature of the book collection, most likely the inventory of the stock of a bookseller specialising in second hand books.

5. The Archives municipales and départementales in Tours preserve several documents mentioning copyists, book binders, booksellers, and printers. At this moment, 41 persons have been identified for the period 1458 to 1525, showing the importance of books and reading in the urban society of Tours. Since several documents also allow to localise a number of these artisans active in the book market, these will be used for a **cartography of the book market in Tours around 1500**, in collaboration with David Rivaud. A first mapping of the book market in Tours shows a specific pattern that has also been found for late-medieval Paris (Rouse and Rouse 2000, 11-49) and other European towns: concentrations near the cathedral in the rue de la Parcheminerie, in the rue de la Scellerie near the convent of the Franciscans, and near Saint-Julien in the Grand Rue. These were all important travel axes situated in the heart of urban life and commerce.

6. As shown above, religious *lieux de savoir* in Tours included private homes, schools, bookshops, but also **religious institutions shared their knowledge with the laity**, such as the cathedral, the chapters, and parish churches. A few examples:

Manuscript 312 of the BM in Tours was copied in 1417 for Mathurin Laurens, canon of the chapter of Saint-Martin in Tours. It contains sermons and several religious texts in French explicitly intended for the education of the laity, even for a very basic level, such as the *ABC des simples gens* written by Jean Gerson.

The cathedral Saint-Gatien had an important book collection and in the years (1459-1484) a library was constructed on the first floor of the western aisle of the Cloître de la Psalette, with direct access to the cathedral (now disappeared) (Rapin and Noblet 2002). There are several indications that that external readers, including some laypeople, had access to the library, just as was the case in other French and European towns.

4- Perspectives of future collaborations with the host laboratory

The fruitful collaboration between the Groningen research group “History of reading in the premodern period” directed by Professor Sabrina Corbellini and the CESR and Professor Chiara Lastraioli, started by the successful COST Action IS-1301 “New communities of interpretation” (2014-2017) will certainly be continued.

Since 1 July 2020 the Fellow is affiliated to the HERA project “Public RENaissance: Urban Cultures of Public Space between Early Modern Europe and the Present (PURE)”, PI: Professor Fabrizio Nevola, University of Exeter, UK; local PI Groningen: Professor Sabrina Corbellini. The PURE project is creating map-based smartphone applications for guided tours; see for instance the Hidden Florence app (<https://hiddenflorence.org>). The Fellow is now working on the finalisation of the Hidden Deventer app, and, if the funding allows it, a Hidden Tours app could be created based on the outcomes of the Studium Fellowship.

5- Articles published in the framework of the fellowship

Margriet Hoogvliet, “A List of 267 French Texts in Tours: A Hub for Reading in the Vernacular”, *Studi di Storia Medioevale e di Diplomatica*, status: accepted after peer review.

Margriet Hoogvliet, “Commentaire et analyse : Une collection de livres en français à lire, à copier, à emprunter et probablement à vendre”, French version of the above, downloadable from the Rénumar website.

Margriet Hoogvliet, “‘Je suis a Perrine’: Writing Lay People and Religious Texts in Tours around 1500”, in preparation.

Margriet Hoogvliet, ed., special issue of *Peregrinations, Journal of Medieval Art and Architecture* (open access <https://digital.kenyon.edu/perejournal/>) with contributions by the participants of the online le STUDIUM conference “Spatial Humanities and Urban Experiences During the Long Fifteenth Century”, including a scientific introduction and an article written by the Fellow about GIS and the spatial distribution of booksellers in Tours around 1500.

6- Acknowledgements

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7- References

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