THE IMPORTANCE OF REPUTATION IN THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF BURGUNDIAN CHIVALRY


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This essay is about the place of moral values in certain Burgundian works of the fifteenth century, as well as in the chapter meetings of the Order of the Golden Fleece. The society of the late medieval Burgundian nobility is usually seen as having a strong ideological background – not only in the sense of a self-conscious and synchronised political community, as it is presented in other articles of the present volume, but also in the sense of a moral community claiming an elevated individual morality for its representatives. In this context, reputation is not so much a value in itself, but rather the connection between people or their actions on the one hand, and social values on the other: in other words, the medium by which someone’s morality is created in public.

This can be exemplified in a short treatise by Jean de Lannoy, an important political figure of the second half of Philip the Good’s reign. He was

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lord of the village of Lannoy (which through his initiative\textsuperscript{3} was to become a
town), chamberlain of both the duke of Burgundy and the king of France,
governor of Holland, Zeeland and Friesland from 1448 to 1462, governor of
Walloon Flanders from 1462, and knight of the Order of the Golden Fleece.
For the French king he became, in 1463, captain of Amiens, Arras, Dou-
lens and Mortagne, and bailiff of Amiens.\textsuperscript{4} Between 21 October 1464 and 3
May 1465 (n.st.), he wrote a treatise in the form of a letter to his newborn
son Louis, in order to instruct him about the duties of a nobleman.\textsuperscript{5} It is the
emphasis given to reputation which makes this work stand out from other,
similar treatises, often written by more learned men.\textsuperscript{6}

Already the structure of the chapters point in this direction. Before pro-
ceeding to the topics of the seven deadly sins, the service at court and the
motif of \textit{disce mori}, Lannoy presents a chapter on \textit{bien parler}, and another one on \textit{bien aller}. \textit{Bien parler} does not only mean – as it seems to in that
passage of the letter most quoted by today’s historians – to excel in learned
rhetorical skills in order not to stand back in the contest with non-noble
courtiers.\textsuperscript{7} Across several passages, Jean de Lannoy evokes noble life and
the court as a place where the spoken word has to be measured with care.
The word is the arrow which cannot be taken back.\textsuperscript{8}

\footnotesize{3} See J.-M. Cauchies, ‘Deux grands commis bâtisseurs de villes dans les Pays-Bas
bourguignons: Jean de Lannoy et Pierre Bladelin (vers 1450/60)\textsuperscript{3}, in: \textit{De Jaques
Cœur à Renaut. Gestionnaires et organisations. Troisièmes rencontres}, Collection
\footnotesize{4} B. de Lannoy and G. Dansaert, \textit{Jean de Lannoy, le bâtisseur}, 1410-1492 (Paris/
Bruxelles, 1937).
\footnotesize{5} \textit{Lettres envoyées par Jehan seigneur de Lannoy a Loïs son filz}, published in De
Lannoy and Dansaert, \textit{Jean de Lannoy} (see n. 4), pp. 119-210.
\footnotesize{6} This is not to say that works like the \textit{Preceptes d’Aristote à Alexandre}, Bernard de
Clairvaux’s \textit{Epistre à Raymond chevalier de Saint-Ambroise}, Ramon Llull’s \textit{Livre de
l’ordre de chevalerie}, Brumetto Latini’s \textit{Livre dou tresor}, Renaut de Louhans’s
\textit{Livre de Mellibee et Prudence}, Guillaume de Tignonville’s \textit{Dits moraux des philoso-
phes}, Christine de Pizan’s \textit{Epistre Othea}, Jacques Legrand’s \textit{Livre des bonnes
mœurs}, Giovanni Aurispa’s \textit{Débat de honneur}, Buonaccorso da Montemagno’s
\textit{Controverisie de noblesse}, Diego de Valera’s \textit{Petit traiçty de noblesse}, Hugues de
Lannoy’s \textit{Enseignements paternels}, \textit{Instruction d’un jeune prince et Enseignement
de vraie noblesse}, Martin Le Franc’s \textit{Estrif de fortune et vertu}, Guillaume Fillastre’s
\textit{Traitié de conseil}, Pierre Michault’s \textit{Doctriale du temps present} or Charles Soillot’s
\textit{Débat de félicité} do not have much more to say about reputation as is often
recognised. See Sterchi, \textit{Über den Umgang mit Lob und Tadel} (see n. 1).
\footnotesize{7} Hexter, ‘The Education of the Aristocracy’ (see n. 2), p. 14; Vale, \textit{War and Chivalry}
(see n. 2), p. 23f. The passage is in De Lannoy and Dansaert, \textit{Jean de
Lannoy} (see n. 4), p. 120f.
\footnotesize{8} De Lannoy and Dansaert, \textit{Jean de Lannoy} (see n. 4), p. 128: \textit{Et certez les paroles
sont comme les flesches, que l’en peut légèrement traire, mais non les retraire.}