

Ermengau, Matfré, fl. 1300.

Breviario de amor.

Begins: "En nombre de Nro Señor Jhu Xpo [Nuestro Señor Jesús Cristo] sea e de la gloriosa Virgen Señora Santa Maria. Comiençan las rubricas deste libro llamado Breviario de amor."

A translation and paraphrase into Castilian prose of some 26,000 lines of the 34,600 lines of the Provençal didactic poem Breviari d'amor.

BX890.^fB84. MS ^f63.

Spain.

Ca. 1400?

Matfré Ermengau - known variously as Ermengaut or Ermengaud, or even (erroneously) as Maître Ermengaud (Matfré is equivalent to the English "Manfred," and does not mean master) - can be identified only through information which he himself supplied in his long poem Breviari d'amor. He was a Franciscan friar, living at Béziers in Provence, and he began the Breviari in 1288. It can be assumed that he was born sometime before 1268, and he was known to have been still alive in 1322. The Breviari is an extraordinary summary of many branches of medieval knowledge - including astronomy, botany, zoology, scriptural history, systematic theology, the lives of the saints, and the nature and mission of the Church - written in simple and attractive rhymed couplets and intended for the instruction of illiterate laymen, who would hear the work recited by strolling minstrels and would be, at one and the same time, edified, indoctrinated, and entertained. The complete Provençal text of the 35,000-line work, with a long explanatory introduction and notes, can be found in Le Breviari d'amor de Matfre Ermengaud, ed. Gabriel Azaïs for the Société Archéologique, Scientifique et Littéraire de Béziers (2 vols; Béziers & Paris, 1862).

There are at least 12 extant MS copies of the Provençal text in existence, although these copies differ somewhat from one another (see Breviari, I, x-xix). Also, in the Escorial library in Spain there is a MS version of the Breviari in Catalan verse, containing 27,000 lines, and therefore about 8,000 lines shorter

than the original, yet almost exactly the same length as the Chicago text. The Catalans called Ermengau "Armengol de Bezieres" (Catalan Armengol is equivalent to the Castilian Hermenegildo). The two languages, Provençal and Catalan, were related, and the city of Béziers is only about 100 miles from the present Franco-Spanish border - so it is probable that, during the 14th and 15th centuries, a number of Catalan versions of the Breviari circulated throughout Catalonia. The Castilian prose version in the Chicago MS was probably made from a Catalan verse translation, a Catalan version that was incomplete, just as the Escorial MS is incomplete.

It should be understood that the Chicago MS ends at a logical place, with a sermon on the descent of the Holy Spirit which concludes the work. The missing 8,500 lines (corresponding to lines 26071-34597 in the Azaïs text) comprise a kind of appendix to the main work and contain short biographies of St. John the Evangelist and St. Thomas the Apostle, a prolonged series of dialogues on human love (in characteristic troubadour style), a section on matrimony, and short essays on the vices and virtues.

When the text of the Chicago MS is compared with the Azaïs text it will be seen that the Castilian translator, in addition to changing the format of the work from verse to prose, also added explanatory materials of his own - although some of these new materials may have already been present in the text he used for the translation, assuming that he worked from an incomplete and corrupted Catalan text. The differences between the Provençal original and the Castilian version can be seen in the following example, taken from the opening lines of the section describing the characteristics of devils:

The Provençal original (lines
3284-3297 in Breviari, I,
120-1):

DE LA NATURA DES DIABLES

Li diable naturalmen
So non corporal issamen
E mot sotil e mot genhos;
Mot sabo per doas rasos:
Car an mot vist et mot auzit;
E soven li bon esperit
Lur fan manhtas cauzas saber,
Aici cum Dieus o vol per ver,
E so per cert mot orgolhos,
Enoios e malicios;
E lor orguelh solo mostrar,
Car si fazian adorar
En las ydolas a la gen
Cum c'els fosson Dieus
veramen.

The Castilian prose version in
the Chicago MS (f. 35v.):

DE LA NATURA DE LOS DIABLOS

Os diablos naturalmente no
tienen cuerpo ni son corporales,
e sabed q̄ son muy sabios e muy
ingeniosos y esto por tres ra-
zones: la p'mera por subtileza e
por ingenio de entendimiento na-
tural q̄ Dios los dio en su cria-
ciō: La segūda por luenga espe-
riencia de tiempo: e a muchas
cosas han puado [passado?] tanto
ha q̄ son criados; y a tercera
por revelacion de āgeles buenos
q̄ por voluntad de Dios los reve-
lan algunos secretos algunas
vezes: Y los diablos son por
cierto muy sobezuiosos e muy
invidiosos y muestra su gran
soberuia como se fazen adorar
en los ydolos como si fuesen
dioses.

English translation of the
Castilian prose version:

ON THE NATURE OF DEVILS

Devils by nature have no body
and are not corporeal; and
be aware that they are very
knowing and very cunning and
this is for three reasons:
first, because of the subtlety
and cunning of their natural
understanding which God gave
them in creating them; secondly,
because of their long experience
of time and of the many things
that have happened since their
creation; and thirdly, by reve-
lation of the good angels who,
by the will of God, sometimes
tell them some secrets. And
the devils are certainly very
proud and very vain, and their
great vanity is shown when they
have themselves adored in idols
as if they were gods.

It will be seen in this passage that where the original Provençal merely states "so non corporal," the Castilian version lengthens the statement into "no tienen cuerpo ni son corporales;" where the Provençal gives only two reasons ("doas rasos") for the sagacity of devils, the Castilian makes it three reasons ("tres razones"), and goes on to add the passage about the good angels telling secrets to the devils, which does not appear in the original. Yet the translation of the final six lines has been slightly contracted. Hence the Chicago MS is not only a translation of the Breviari, it is also a paraphrase.

The unknown Castilian translator also left certain blanks within the text he translated. These omissions are indicated by blank pages in the text (such as ff. 34v. and 35r.), although sometimes they are only a few lines in length (see, for instance, the short space left empty on f. 30r.). There are also spaces left for drawings and for ornamental capitals which remained unused (see ff. 113-7).

Although the Edgar J. Goodspeed Descriptive Catalogue of MSS (MS 63, p. 75) gives a physical description of the Chicago MS, it does not identify it correctly. The suggestion noted there and derived from the Berlin list that the MS is the "original of the Floro del gay saber" is misleading. The Breviari was composed at least half a century before Las flors del gay saber - for which see Las flors del gay saber estier dichas las leys d'amors (4 vols.; Toulouse: Paya, 1841-3), and the article in Studj di filologia romanza (9 vols.; Rome: E. Loescher & Co., 1895-1903), VI, 247-53. Identification of the MS is made difficult because at the points where, in the original, Ermengau introduced his own name, the Castilian translator has merely written the word author, and made no mention of the author's name.

Folio, 33 x 24 cm.
227 numbered leaves, 233 leaves in all.
Vellum binding, damaged by insects.

A fair copy written in double columns, rubricated, in one hand. Fol. 1 contains a pen-and-ink drawing of the author requesting Divine guidance. Foliated & with a table of contents. In the top margin, at the beginning of the text, a later hand has written: "Breviario de amor, o sia trattato di diverso cose spirituali teologiche." The date of translation, and the names of the translator and copyist, are all uncertain.

Part of the Berlin collection.

15 July 1967
T. B. Duncan

Addendum: This MS once belonged to the Marquis of Taccone, treasurer to the king of Naples late in the 18th cent. Our codices Nos. 6, 12, 14, 17, 18, 39, 47, 54, 65, and 101 all formerly belonged to the Taccone collection, and were all acquired in the Berlin purchase of 1891. All these codices have, or once had, an oval label on the spine with a number written in ink, which was the number they bore in the Taccone collection.

9 April 1971
TBD