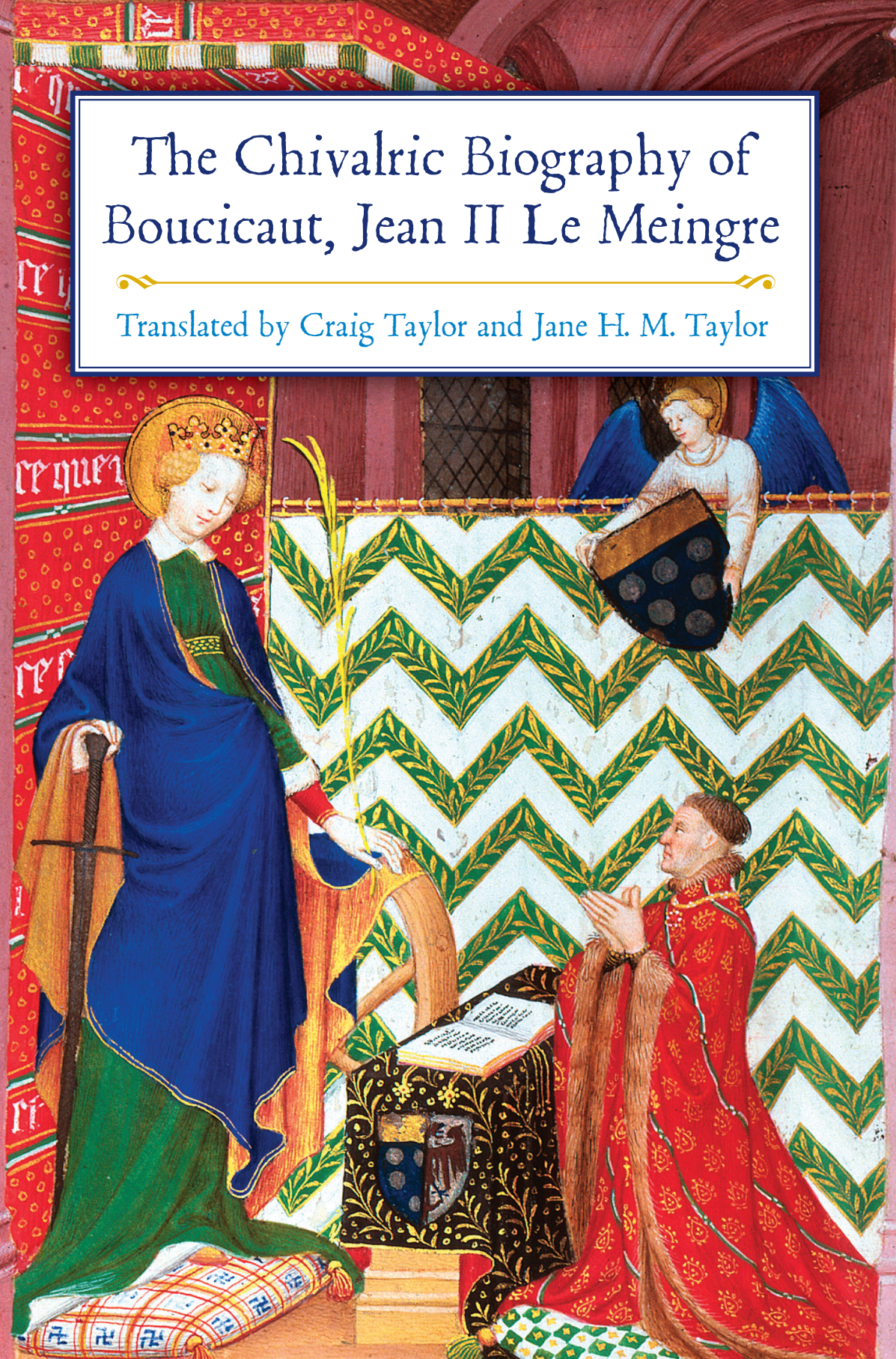
The Chivalric Biography of Boucicaut, Jean II Le Meingre

Translated by Craig Taylor and Jane H. M. Taylor



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For Richard W. Kaeuper
And In Memory of Elspeth Kennedy
Ardent Enthusiasts for Medieval Chivalry

Preface

This book is the fruit of a fortuitous, and fortunate, conversation between the two of us at the International Medieval Congress at Kalamazoo in May 2014. Jane Taylor and Robert L. Krueger had just published a translation of Antoine de La Sale's *Le Petit Jehan de Saintré* (Philadelphia, 2014), and that naturally led us to discuss other late medieval French texts that deserved to be opened up to a wider audience. Within just a few minutes, we had agreed to collaborate on a translation of the early fifteenth-century chivalric biography of Jean II Le Meingre, known as Boucicaut, marshal of France.

This anonymous biography remains little used by Anglophone scholars, despite its fundamental importance as a source for chivalric culture, the study of France and Italy during the age of the Great Schism, the history of late medieval crusading and what modern scholars often refer to as 'vernacular humanism' – that is to say the impact of classical learning on vernacular writing and lay society. The biography recounts the life of Boucicaut from his youthful chivalric exploits to his crusading adventures in eastern Europe and the Mediterranean. It also offers a great deal of unique evidence regarding the politics of Italy in the first decade of the fifteenth century when Boucicaut was governor of Genoa and deeply involved in the rivalries between the great city-states and the attempts to resolve the Papal Schism. The final book of the biography steps back from the narrative account to offer the lessons to be learnt from the example of Boucicaut, and hence a thorough dissection of political leadership and knighthood comparable with better known chivalric manuals and mirrors for princes.

The biography of Boucicaut was most recently edited in 1985 by Denis Lalande in *Le livre des fais du bon messire Jehan le Maingre, dit Bouciquaut, mareschal de France et gouverneur de Jennes* (Geneva, 1985), and Lalande also published a scholarly biography of Boucicaut three years later. We have translated that edition but revised the scholarly apparatus that Lalande offered, correcting, where necessary, and developing his identification of geographical locations, individuals and especially the sources used by the biographer.

Acknowledgements

Dr Alan Murray (University of Leeds) kindly provided guidance on matters relating to the Teutonic Knights, and in particular the identification of the 'Chastel de Chevaliers' – that is to say a castle on an island half a mile from Kaunas in Lithuania. Professor Richard Unger (University of British Columbia) and Dr Susan Rose were good enough to provide invaluable information on ships, shipping and naval warfare in the Eastern Mediterranean in the late Middle Ages. Dr Ralph Moffatt, Curator of European Arms and Armour, Glasgow Museums, was a fount of information on armour and chivalric practices in the late Middle Ages. Dr Alan Wedgwood was most helpful on naval idiom and naval manoeuvres.

But finally, it would be churlish of us not to express our profound gratitude to the late Denis Lalande, for the accuracy of his edition, for his copious annotations, for his excellent introduction and critical apparatus; his work has made ours a pleasure.

Abbreviations

Arch. Nat.	Archives Nationales
BM	Bibliothèque Municipale
BNF	Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France
c.	chapter
DMF	*Dictionnaire du moyen français*: online only, see http://www.atilf.fr/dmf/
fr.	français
Livre des fais	*Le livre des fais du bon messire Jehan le Maingre, dit Bouciquaut, mareschal de France et gouverneur de Jennes*, ed. D. Lalande (Geneva, 1985)
MS	manuscript
n.a.f.	nouvelles acquisitions françaises

Glossary

à outrance	A chivalric combat that was fought until one participant was killed or captured
barque	A smaller open boat which could use oars or sail for propulsion
bascinet	A lighter-weight helmet, with visor, covering the head
bastille	A wooden tower on wheels, built for siege warfare
battle	One of the divisions of the army when arrayed for combat
bombard	A large-calibre, muzzle-loading artillery piece used to throw stone balls during sieges or naval battles
brigantine	A small galley with both oars and sails, perhaps with some room for cargo
condottiere	An Italian term for a mercenary
coronel (lance with)	Crown-shaped safety-head for a lance, used in tournaments to prevent injury
destrier	A war-horse, or charger
écu d'or	The principal gold coin in France by the start of the fifteenth century; 9 écus were worth around £2
emprise	A chivalric undertaking that was declared formally, such as a series of jousts to be held at a particular place or over a particular period of time
galee soubtille	A narrow, streamlined war galley designed to be fast and highly manoeuvrable
galiot	A smaller, lighter-weight galley, with fewer benches than the galley and hence with a smaller crew
galley	The workhorse of the Mediterranean, for trade or warfare: a flat-built single-deck sea-going vessel propelled by sails and oars, with twenty-five to twenty-eight benches for the rowers
grande galee huissiere	A great galley fitted out with a hatch for horse transport
great galley	A galley propelled by sails and oars and which was larger in order to have room for cargo

gripperie	A lateen-rigged oared vessel, smaller than a galley, whose name would be a variant of the Italian *gripos* used by Pietro Bembo in 1530–40 for a vessel used to carry soldiers for an amphibious operation
league	A league was the distance that a person could walk in an hour, usually defined as three miles
letter of marque	Letter to authorise an act of reprisal by individuals, to seize by force goods, chattels or even people as compensation for injuries that they had received
lettre d'armes	A document setting out a detailed statement of conditions and stipulations relating to an order of knighthood, or a particular chivalric undertaking
marshal	The highest-ranking military officer in France, below the constable
nave	A sailing-ship – that is to say, a ship not equipped with oars. They were usually broader and deeper than a galley, and would be used largely for the transport of cargo
Outremer	A general name given to the Crusader states established after the First Crusade, but by the end of the fourteenth century a term used more generally to refer to French-speaking regions lying across the Mediterranean
Prisoners' Base	A game involving two teams who stage a mock battle, the aim being for each side to accumulate prisoners
Reise	A crusading campaign into Lithuanian territory organised by the Teutonic Order
routier	An unemployed soldier. Routiers often organised themselves into free companies (*routes*)
varlet	A servant, page or attendant to a knight or other person of military importance
vidimus	The attested copy of a document

Introduction

The Book of the Deeds of My Good Lord Jean Le Meingre, Known as Boucicaut is a chivalric biography celebrating the life of one of the most prominent knights of the Middle Ages. This anonymous work was completed on 9 April 1409, thirteen years before the death of its subject, Jean II Le Meingre, known by the sobriquet Boucicaut (1366–1421).[1] It survives in just one manuscript, BNF fr. 11432,[2] a fine, large folio volume of 125 parchment leaves. It is written throughout in two columns, by the same neat early fifteenth-century hand. It is a handsome, expensively produced volume: initial letters have been decorated in gold, red, and blue, and the copyist has left space for eight miniatures, although these, unfortunately, were never completed. Might this have been the author's own presentation manuscript? There are in any case no other surviving manuscripts.

The biography presented Boucicaut as a flower of chivalry and the embodiment of the highest qualities expected of a knight. It recounted his life and career up until 6 March 1409, when he was still serving as governor of Genoa on behalf of the French king Charles VI (1380–1422),[3] and when his reputation, in France, was still high.

The first part of *The Book of the Deeds* narrated the origins of Boucicaut's career and his swift rise to prominence. He had followed in the footsteps of his father Jean I Le Meingre, also known as Boucicaut (d.1367), who had enjoyed a successful career as a soldier and diplomat, culminating in his appointment as one of the two marshals of France in 1356. As a young man, Jean II Le Meingre served in the company of Louis de Bourbon and Louis de Sancerre, fighting against both the English and rebels like Charles de Navarre and Philip van Artevelde. The younger Boucicaut was knighted at the age of sixteen on the eve of the battle of Roosebeke (27 November

1 See p. 213 below. For the life of Boucicaut, see D. Lalande, *Jean II le Meingre, dit Boucicaut (1366–1421): étude d'une biographie héroïque* (Geneva, 1988), together with N. Housley, *The Crusaders* (Stroud, 2002), pp. 139–72, and id., 'One Man and His Wars: The Depiction of Warfare by Marshal Boucicaut's Biographer', *Journal of Medieval History*, 29 (2003), pp. 27–40.

2 Described briefly in the *Catalogue général des manuscrits français de la Bibliothèque Nationale. Ancien supplément français*, vol. II (Paris, 1896), p. 301, and in much greater detail by Lalande, *Le livre des fais*, pp. xiii-xxi.

3 See pp. 97–100 below.

1382), where Artevelde was killed and his Flemish army defeated (**I, chapter 10**). Boucicaut later took part in Louis de Bourbon's expedition to Castile in 1386 to fight against John of Gaunt and the English (**I, chapter 15**). In 1391, Charles VI appointed Boucicaut, aged just twenty-six, to replace Jean IV de Mauquenchy as marshal of France (**I, chapter 19**).[4] Boucicaut was then dispatched at the head of an expedition to punish Archambaud V count of Périgord for his rebellion against the French crown (**I, chapter 29**).

Above all, the biographer underlined Boucicaut's commitment to crusading.[5] Taking advantage of lulls in the Anglo-French wars, he had joined the *reise* fought in Prussia by the Teutonic Order against the pagan Lithuanians (**I, chapters 11 and 18**). From 1387 to 1389, Boucicaut travelled to Hungary, Constantinople, the Ottoman court of the sultan Murad I and the Holy Land, and quickly rushed to the aid of Philippe d'Artois, count of Eu, following his arrest by the Mamluk sultan of Egypt while on pilgrimage (**I, chapter 16**). Most famously, Boucicaut was one of the commanders of the ill-fated Nicopolis expedition in 1396 (**I, chapters 22–8**).[6] The French army at Nicopolis was nominally led by the twenty-eight-year-old Jean de Nevers, son of Philippe duke of Burgundy, supporting King Sigismund in the defence of Hungary against the Ottoman Turks.[7] On 12 September 1396, the Christians laid siege to the city of Nicopolis but just two weeks later suffered a devastating defeat at the hands of the Ottoman sultan Bayezid. Many prominent French noblemen died in the battle, including the admiral Jean de Vienne, Philippe de Bar and Renaud de Roye. Worse, the sultan took revenge for earlier atrocities committed by the crusaders against his own men by killing almost all of the three thousand Christian prisoners taken during the battle. Only those aged under twenty were spared, to be sold as slaves, as well as the wealthiest nobles who could afford great ransoms such as Jean de Nevers, Philippe d'Artois, Henri de Bar, Enguerrand de Coucy and Guy de La Trémoïlle. Boucicaut himself was almost executed but Jean de Nevers

4 The biography did not mention that Boucicaut was present alongside the king near to Le Mans on 5 August 1392, and may even have been wounded, when Charles VI suffered his first attack of mental illness. R.C. Famiglietti, *Royal Intrigue: Crisis at the Court of Charles VI, 1392–1420* (New York, 1982), pp. 2–3 and 207–8, note 15.

5 Housley, *The Crusaders*, pp. 139–72, and J. Paviot, 'Boucicaut et la croisade (fin XIVe-début XVe siècle)', *La noblesse et la croisade à la fin du Moyen Âge (France, Bourgogne, Bohême)*, ed. M. Nejedlý, J. Svátek, D. Baloup, B. Joudiou and J. Paviot (Toulouse, 2009), pp. 69–83.

6 Intriguingly, the biographer did not mention the fact that Boucicaut was one of the members of the Order of the Passion, set up by Philippe de Mézières to encourage zeal for crusading, and which by 1396 included sixty-one prominent nobles and clerics, mainly from France and England. P. Contamine, '"Les princes, barons et chevaliers qui a la chevalerie au service de Dieu se sont ja vouez". Recherches prosopographiques sur l'ordre de la Passion de Jésus-Christ (1385–1395)', *La noblesse et la croisade à la fin du Moyen Âge (France, Bourgogne, Bohême)*, ed. M. Nejedlý, J. Svátek, D. Baloup, B. Joudiou and J. Paviot (Toulouse, 2009), pp. 43–67.

7 For the Nicopolis Crusade of 1396, see the special issue of *Annales de Bourgogne*, 68 (1996).

successfully pleaded for his life. Three years after the disaster at Nicopolis, Boucicaut was commissioned by the French king in 1399 to break the Turkish blockade on Constantinople, and to aid the Emperor Manuel II Paleologos against his nephew John VII, who was supported by the Ottoman sultan Bayezid (**I, chapters 30–7**).

The first part of the biography also celebrated Boucicaut's success in chivalric combats, such as his defeat of the great Gascon champion Sicart de La Barde at Châlucet in 1385 (**I, chapter 13**), as well the famous jousts held outside the abbey of Saint-Inglevert in 1390 (**I, chapter 17**).[8] The author delighted in the bravery and success of Boucicaut and his companions at Saint-Inglevert, who were celebrated in a popular proverb: 'If the devil comes out of hell to fight a duel, he will accept the challenge of a Boucicaut, a Renaud de Roye and a Sempy.'[9] In addition to these chivalric exploits, the biographer was also keen to underline Boucicaut's credentials as a courteous lover and a protector of women. Early in the narrative, the biographer argued that Boucicaut had been motivated to accomplish great deeds at the start of his career by his passion for a secret lover, a commonplace theme of chivalric romance; he also reported that Jean had been one of the authors of the *Cent ballades*, a long poetic debate about love and loyalty that was probably presented before King Charles VI and his court in October 1389 (**I, chapters 8–9**).[10] No mention was made in the biography of Boucicaut's marriage to Antoinette de Turenne in 1392, but the biographer did report that in the aftermath of the disaster at Nicopolis, Boucicaut founded a knightly order dedicated to the protection of the women who had been widowed and orphaned (**I, chapters 38–9**). This Ordre de la Dame Blanche en l'Escu Vert (order of the Enterprise of the White Lady of the Green Shield) was established on 11 April 1400, and its thirteen members promised to fight in the lists in order to aid and to protect the honour and property of women widowed or orphaned by the plague or as a result of the disaster at Nicopolis. The great advocate of women, Christine de Pizan, praised this knightly order and its defence of women.[11]

8 The list of such events recorded in the biography was far from complete. For example, no mention was made of the fact that Boucicaut was one of the winners at the two days of jousts held to celebrate the marriage of Jean de Montaigu and Jacqueline, daughter of the late Étienne, lord of La Grange on 24 July 1390. R.C. Famiglietti, *Tales of the Marriage Bed from Medieval France (1300–1500)* (Providence, RI, 1992), pp. 38–9.

9 *Le livre des proverbes français*, ed. A.J.V. Le Roux de Lincy, 2 volumes (2nd edition, Paris, 1859), II, p. 390, and E. Gaucher, 'Les proverbes dans une biographie du XVe siècle: *Le livre des fais de Bouciquaut*', *Le Moyen Âge: Revue d'histoire et de philologie*, 99 (1993), p. 61.

10 *Les cent ballades, poème du XIVe siècle composé par Jean le Seneschal avec la collaboration de Philippe d'Artois, comte d'Eu, de Boucicaut le jeune et de Jean de Crésecque*, ed. G. Raynaud (Paris, 1905).

11 Christine de Pizan, *Autres ballades* II, III, IV and XII, in *Les oeuvres poétiques de Christine de Pisan*, ed. M. Roy, 3 volumes (Paris, 1886–96), I, pp. 208–12 and 220–1. For the remarkable career of Christine (1364-c.1430) see N. Margolis, *An Introduction to Christine de Pizan* (Gainesville, FL, 2011).

The second part of *The Book of the Deeds* continued the narrative of Boucicaut's career in Italy from 1401 to 1404. After a period of great internal turbulence, the doge of Genoa, Antoniotto Adorno, had signed a treaty with King Charles VI on 25 October 1396, placing the city under the protection and sovereignty of the French crown.[12] Boucicaut was appointed as governor of Genoa on 23 March 1401 (**II, chapter 5**).[13] The biographer recounted the marshal's initial actions upon arriving in the city (**II, chapters 6–10**). The narrative then shifted to Boucicaut's expedition that set sail in April 1403 to rescue the Genoese-controlled city of Famagusta on the island of Cyprus (**II, chapters 11–12**), as well as the raids that this force made along the Anatolian and Syrian coasts, culminating in the sack of Beirut in August 1403 (**II, chapter 21**).[14] The biographer strongly denied the Venetian claims that Boucicaut's troops had robbed their merchants in Beirut, denouncing this justification for their subsequent attack upon the marshal's fleet at Modone on 7 October 1403 (**II, chapters 25–31**).

The third part of *The Book of the Deeds* continued the story of Boucicaut's governorship of Genoa from his return from the expedition to Beirut up until 6 March 1409. This was a complex narrative of the marshal's involvement in the murky politics of Pisa, Milan, Florence and Rome, and above all the Great Schism that divided the Church and Western Europe. In 1378, Pope Urban VI (1378–89) had been elected pope at Rome, but a rival, anti-pope named Clement VII (1378–94) was also elected four months later, shortly before returning to Avignon. Their successors continued to maintain their rival claims to be the one true pope.[15] The biographer discussed Boucicaut's efforts to persuade the Genoese in October 1404 to support the Avignonese pope Benedict XIII against the claims of the rival Roman pope Boniface IX (**III, chapters 3 and 5**), Boucicaut's role in a plan in 1407 by which the two popes would resign in order to allow a general council to elect a new pope who could unify the Church (**III, chapter 19**), and Boucicaut's efforts to seize Rome back from King Ladislaus of Naples after he had seized the city in April 1408 (**III, chapter 20**).[16] Woven into this narrative of papal politics was Boucicaut's involvement in an

12 S.A. Epstein, *Genoa and the Genoese, 958–1528* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2001), pp. 228–70, and also see E. Jarry, *Les origines de la domination française à Gênes (1392–1402)* (Paris, 1896) and C. Masson, *Des guerres en Italie avant les guerres d'Italie. Les entreprises militaires françaises dans la péninsule à l'époque du Grand Schisme d'Occident* (Rome, 2014).

13 C. Masson, 'Gouverneur royal ou chevalier croisé? Boucicaut à Gênes, une administration intéressée', *Faire la guerre, faire la paix. Approches sémantiques et ambiguïtés terminologiques* (Paris, 2012), pp. 181–91.

14 A. Fuess, 'Prelude to a Stronger Involvement in the Middle East: French Attacks on Beirut in the Years 1403 and 1520', *Al-Masaq*, 17 (2005), pp. 173–80.

15 *A Companion to the Great Western Schism (1378–1417)*, ed. J. Rollo-Koster and T.M. Izbicki (Leiden, 2009), and also see N. Valois, *La France et le Grand Schisme d'Occident*, 4 volumes (Paris, 1896–1902).

16 Ladislaus, king of Naples (1386–1414), had intervened in the complex politics of Rome since 1404, and almost certainly laid siege to the Roman port of Ostia on 25 April 1408 in order

uprising in Pisa against Gabriele Maria Visconti in July 1405 (**III, chapters 6–12**), as well as Visconti's treacherous efforts to seize Genoa in 1408 (**III, chapter 22**). In addition, the biographer reported in some detail on Boucicaut's failed efforts in 1407 to secure the support of the king of Cyprus for an expedition to capture Alexandria (**III, chapters 15–18**), and a minor success in a naval battle against four Moorish galleys in September 1408 (**III, chapter 21**).

The fourth and final part of *The Book of the Deeds* abandoned the narrative of Boucicaut's life and instead offered a celebration of the virtues and good habits of the marshal. This attempt to draw together the lessons offered by the life of Boucicaut was extremely unusual in chivalric biographies, and more closely echoed the didactic manuals of writers like Christine de Pizan and Antoine de La Sale.[17] Drawing heavily upon the Roman history and moral advice presented in a recent French translation of Valerius Maximus's *Facta et dicta memorabilia*, the biographer meticulously compared the virtues and qualities of Boucicaut with those of the most famous men of Antiquity. The author highlighted the marshal's piety, charity and devotion to God (**IV, chapters 2–3**), his discipline, restraint and leadership in war (**IV, chapter 4**), his bravery (**IV, chapter 5**), his lack of avarice (**IV, chapter 6**), his chastity and self-discipline (**IV, chapter 7**), his love of justice and mercy (**IV, chapters 8–9**), his eloquence (**IV, chapter 10**) and his diligence (**IV, chapter 11**). The author concluded by emphasising that Boucicaut was worthy of the highest honour, but also acknowledged that Fortune could be fickle and often failed to reward the just, especially when others were jealous of them (**IV, chapters 12–13**).

* * *

The account of the life of Boucicaut in *The Book of the Deeds* stopped on 6 March 1409, but that was far from the end of his career. On 30 July 1409, Boucicaut left Genoa with an army to assist the duke of Milan against King Ladislaus, and so was absent from the city when an uprising against his rule began on 2 September. Within ten days, the French garrison in Genoa had surrendered to the marquis of Montferrat who stripped them of all weapons, armour and money and exiled them from the city.[18] Meanwhile Raoul de Gaucourt brought military reinforcements from France to assist the marshal, joining Boucicaut at Moncalieri in Piedmont in

to undermine the negotiations between the two rival popes, fearing that a resolution to the Schism might lead to the election of a new pope who would support Ladislaus' rival for the throne of Naples, Louis II, duke of Anjou (1377–1417).

17 Christine de Pizan, *Le livre du corps de policie*, ed. A.J. Kennedy (Paris, 1998), and id., *The Book of Peace*, ed. and trans. K. Green, C.J. Mews and J. Pinder (Philadelphia, PA, 2008), and Antoine de La Sale, *Oeuvres complètes d'Antoine de La Sale*, ed. F. Desonay, 2 volumes (Liège/Paris, 1935–41).

18 For the uprising in Genoa against Boucicaut and his return to France, see Lalande, *Jean II le Meingre*, pp. 153–5.

October 1409. But even with this help, the marshal lacked the financial resources to pay for an attack upon Genoa, and on 10 November 1410 he was ordered to return to Paris, where he arrived on 10 October 1411.

Despite this enormous setback, Boucicaut continued to enjoy a prestigious career in French royal service and particularly in the tangled rivalries and power-struggles of the factions led by the great princes of the blood.[19] For example, in April 1411, Boucicaut and Jean de Thoisy, bishop of Tournai, were sent as royal emissaries to meet with the duke of Burgundy at Arras.[20] In November of the same year, Boucicaut led an expedition to secure Bonneval and Étampes during a counter-attack led by the duke of Guyenne against the Armagnacs. In February 1413, Boucicaut was commissioned to secure royal power over Languedoc and Guyenne, following the failures of the duke of Berry who had lost his lieutenancies. On 28 May 1413, Boucicaut arranged a truce until the following Christmas with the counts of Foix and Armagnac. In April 1414, Boucicaut was appointed Captain-General for Languedoc by the duke of Berry, who had been reinstated by the king. In the summer of 1414, the marshal put down a tax revolt in Carcassonne.

Boucicaut's career finally came to an end upon the battlefield of Agincourt on 25 October 1415.[21] He had been one of the French captains shadowing the English army of King Henry V as it approached the Somme. In the week before the battle, Boucicaut, Alençon and Richemont had drawn up a plan for how to tackle the invading enemy force in the field, perhaps intending to fight at or near Blanchetaque. In practice, events took a very different course and battle was joined at Agincourt, perhaps against the advice of Boucicaut and the more experienced commanders. Following the French defeat, Boucicaut was taken to England as a prisoner in November 1415 alongside other leading commanders such as the constable Charles d'Artois and Arthur de Richemont.[22] Negotiations over Boucicaut's ransom proved intractable, despite the attempted intervention of papal ambassadors, not least because of the English desire to retain control of such an important and experienced French commander while the war still raged in Normandy. He remained in English hands when his wife Antoinette de Turenne died in July 1416. Indeed, Boucicaut remained in custody, moving from Fotheringhay to Methely in Yorkshire where he

19 The severe mental problems affecting King Charles VI from 1392 until his death in 1422 created a fierce struggle for power between the leading members of the royal family, and in particular Louis, duke of Orléans who was assassinated in 1407, and Philip the Good, duke of Burgundy who was murdered in 1419. Famiglietti, *Royal Intrigue*, and for Boucicaut's career between 1411 and 1415, see Lalande, *Jean II le Meingre,* pp. 165–9.

20 F. Lehoux, *Jean de France, duc de Berri: sa vie, son action politique (1340–1416)*, 4 volumes (Paris, 1966–8), III, pp. 216 and 255–6, and Famiglietti, *Royal Intrigue*, pp. 101–2.

21 Lalande, *Jean II le Meingre*, pp. 169–70, together with C.J. Phillpotts, 'The French Battle Plan During the Agincourt Campaign', *English Historical Review*, 99 (1984), pp. 59–66, and A. Curry, *Agincourt: A New History* (London, 2005).

22 Lalande, *Jean II le Meingre,* pp. 169–70, together with R. Ambühl, 'Le sort des prisonniers d'Azincourt (1415)', *Revue du Nord*, 89 (2007), pp. 755–88.

probably died on 25 June 1421 at the age of fifty-six. His body was returned to France and buried at Tours, alongside his father and his wife.[23]

The biography

Chivalric biographies were a flourishing genre in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, as witnessed by Guillaume de Machaut's life of King Peter I of Cyprus (1372/3), Jean Cuvelier's biography of Bertrand Du Guesclin (1381) and the Chandos Herald's life of the Black Prince (1385).[24] Such works typically recounted the lives of well-known contemporary military leaders and presented them as the embodiment of knightly values. Their celebration of the adventures, heroism and courtesy of their subjects often echoed chivalric romance.[25]

Up until the end of the fourteenth century, chivalric biographies were usually written in verse in order to magnify the achievements of their subjects by echoing the style of the *chansons de geste* and romances that celebrated the greatest heroes of chivalry. But the author of *The Book of the Deeds* chose to write in prose, perhaps in part because of changing fashion, seen for example in a prose adaptation of Cuvelier's biography of Du Guesclin commissioned by Jean d'Estouteville.[26] The choice of prose may also have reflected the most unusual feature of the biography of Boucicaut, that is to say the fact that the subject was still alive when the text was written. The author claimed that he completed *The Book of the Deeds* by 9 April 1409.[27] He said that he had been commissioned to write the biography by the marshal's comrades, carefully denying that Boucicaut had played any direct role in the composition of the work in order to defend the marshal against the potential charge of self-aggrandisement.[28] Indeed the writer implicitly compared himself with past authors who had written

23 P. Nobilleau, *Sépultures des Boucicault en la basilique de Saint-Martin (1363–1490)* (Tours, 1873).

24 D.B. Tyson, 'Authors, Patrons and Soldiers: Some Thoughts on Four Old French Soldiers' Lives', *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, 42 (1998), pp. 105–20, together with Guillaume de Machaut, *La Prise d'Alexandrie (The Taking of Alexandria)*, ed. and trans. R.B. Palmer (London, 2002); Jean Cuvelier, *La chanson de Bertrand du Guesclin de Cuvelier*, ed. J.-C. Faucon, 3 volumes (Toulouse, 1990–3), and Chandos Herald, *La vie du Prince Noir [The Life of the Black Prince], by Chandos Herald. Edited from the Manuscript in the University of London Library*, ed. D.B. Tyson (Tübingen, 1975).

25 S. Ferris, 'Chronicle, Chivalric Biography and Family Tradition in Fourteenth-Century England', *Chivalric Literature: Essays on Relations Between Literature and Life in the Later Middle Ages*, ed. L.D. Benson and J. Leyerle (Kalamazoo, MI, 1980), pp. 25–38; W.T. Cotton, 'Teaching the Motifs of Chivalric Biography', *The Study of Chivalry: Resources and Approaches*, ed. H. Chickering and T.H. Seiler (Kalamazoo, MI, 1988), pp. 583–609; E. Gaucher, *La biographie chevaleresque. Typologie d'un genre (XIIIe-XVe siècle)* (Paris, 1994).

26 *Chronique de Du Guesclin, collationnée sur l'édition originale du XVe siècle, et sur tous les manuscrits, avec une notice bibliographique et des notes*, ed. F. Michel (Paris, 1830).

27 See p. 213 below.

28 See pp. 24 and 188 below.

books celebrating great men without their knowledge: Pompey and Scipio Africanus had been surprised and delighted to hear that poets like Theophanes and Ennius had commemorated their deeds, and so offered these writers generous rewards.[29] Of course, the efforts made by the biographer to deny Boucicaut's involvement in the writing of the book may have simply been a lie.

Authors of medieval chivalric biographies consistently presented their books as memorials to the fame and glory of their subjects; their works, they said, would serve as inspiration for future knights. So it is no surprise that these themes were repeated at the start of *The Book of the Deeds*, when Boucicaut's biographer championed the importance of learning and literary skill as the means by which the great deeds of a knight like Boucicaut could be preserved forever and thereby serve as an inspiration to others.[30] Throughout the biography, Boucicaut was presented as a flower of chivalry and a model of the highest qualities expected of a knight, qualities that were underlined in the unusual fourth and final book that provided a chivalric manual reflecting Boucicaut's particular virtues. It is no surprise, then, that Johan Huizinga said of *The Book of the Deeds* that 'it is not like a piece of contemporary history, but rather like the depiction of an ideal knight'.[31]

Yet the fact that the biography of Boucicaut was written while the marshal was still alive would suggest that the text was intended to serve a more immediate purpose than merely to offer a grand chivalric statement about his achievements or an inspiration to future generations. Indeed in truth, most chivalric biographies were written with more practical goals in mind, and in particular to advance the agendas of their subject. For example, Guillaume de Machaut's celebration of the life of Peter I of Cyprus was written shortly after the king's assassination on 17 January 1369 and inevitably served not just as a memorial for a man who had endured such a tragic end, but also as a rallying call for its subject's crusading ventures, aimed in particular at the families of the small group of French nobles who had served alongside him and at the great princes like Charles V who would be crucial to the achievement of Peter's dream.[32]

The anonymous author of the biography of Boucicaut offered a strong clue to the purpose of his text when he admitted that the marshal had acquired many critics

29 See pp. 211–13.

30 Pp. 23–4 below, where the entourage is said to have commissioned the work so that it might inspire others, together with p. 188 where the writer insists that the aim of this book is not vainglory but to present Boucicaut as a role model.

31 J. Huizinga, *The Autumn of the Middle Ages*, trans. R.J. Payton and U. Mammitzsch (Chicago, 1996), p. 78. Barbara Tuchman famously described Boucicaut as 'the epitome of chivalry' and 'knighthood's zealot'. Barbara Tuchman, *A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous Fourteenth Century* (New York, 1978), p. 556.

32 R.B. Palmer, 'Guillaume de Machaut's *La Prise d'Alexandrie* and the Late Medieval Chivalric Ideal', *Chivalry, Knighthood, and War in the Middle Ages*, ed. S.J. Ridyard (Sewanee, TN, 1999), pp. 185–204, and Daisy Delogu, *Theorizing the Ideal Sovereign: The Rise of the French Vernacular Royal Biography* (Toronto, 2008), pp. 92–123.

and enemies after a long and controversial career. *The Book of the Deeds* denounced those envious men who liked to attack virtuous figures like Boucicaut, calling upon his readers to be suspicious of popular opinion and to pray that the marshal might be protected from the envy of others.[33] It is therefore highly likely that the biography was written as a very careful defence of the actions and policies of Boucicaut, and a response to his critics.

Both Jean II Le Meingre and his father had been attacked as avaricious and power-hungry courtiers who had taken advantage of their king. In *Le songe du vergier* (1378), Jean Le Fèvre defined a Boucicaut as a man without scruples who put the desire for profit ahead of honour. He claimed that Jean I Le Meingre targeted the royal court as an arena to win royal patronage, and had a saying that there was no fishing except in the sea, a pun based upon the notion that the surname Boucicaut meant a fishing basket.[34] The same idea was invoked in *Le songe du vieil pelerin* (1389), when Philippe de Mézières denounced knights who flattered their lords in order to win reward, citing a proverb that he claimed originated with Jean I Le Meingre: just as one could only fish in the sea, so one could only receive a reward from the king.[35] In 1406, the anonymous *Songe véritable* identified Jean II Le Meingre as one of the greedy members of a regime profiting from and exploiting the generosity of King Charles VI.[36] It is therefore hardly surprising that the biographer of Boucicaut went to such lengths to highlight the marshal's lack of interest in wealth and personal status.[37]

Boucicaut was also the subject of criticism for other reasons. In the *Chronique du Religieux de Saint-Denis*, Michel Pintouin characterised the marshal as irascible, impetuous and hot-headed, as seen in particular in his part in the great disaster at Nicopolis in 1396.[38] Boucicaut's biographer turned such criticisms on their head in his account of the Nicopolis expedition. Admitting, for example, that Boucicaut and his knights had ridden through the night ahead of the main Christian army and plunged straight into the fray at Oryahovo, the biographer praised this as audacity and courage rather than ill-discipline. He also emphasised the self-control and bravery of the French during the battle of Nicopolis, preferring instead to blame the disaster on the failings of their Hungarian allies. Above all, the biographer blamed fickle Fortune for turning against Boucicaut and his men, as had happened to many other

33 See pp. 164–7 and 206–9 below.

34 *Songe du vergier: édité d'après le manuscrit Royal 19 C IV de la British Library*, ed. M. Schnerb-Lièvre, 2 volumes (Paris, 1982), I, pp. 236–7, and also see D. Lalande, 'La naissance d'un sobriquet: Boucicaut', *Revue des langues romanes*, 85 (1981), pp. 115–23.

35 Philippe de Mézières, *Le songe du viel pèlerin*, ed. J. Blanchard, 2 volumes (Geneva, 2015), II, p. 976.

36 *Le songe véritable, pamphlet politique d'un Parisien du XVe siècle*, ed. H. Moranville (Paris, 1891), p. 325.

37 For example, see pp. 24–5 below.

38 E. Gaucher, 'Deux regards sur une défaite: Nicopolis (d'après la *Chronique de Saint-Denis* et le *Livre des faits de Boucicaut*)', *Cahiers de recherches médiévales,* 1 (1996), pp. 93–104.

brave and good men of Antiquity including Hercules, Hector, Achilles, Alexander, Hannibal and Pompey.[39]

Above all, the biography offered a defence of Boucicaut's tarnished reputation following his controversial involvement in the murky politics of Genoa, Venice, Florence and Pisa. The book was completed just months before an uprising in Genoa on 2 September 1409 that brought an end to Boucicaut's inglorious rule. Throughout his term as governor, Boucicaut had faced resistance within the city because of the rigour of his justice, the dislocation of trade caused by his expensive military expeditions, and his controversial diplomatic policy towards other Italian cities. *The Book of the Deeds* reported on successive threats to his rule of Genoa, including a Ghibelline plot in 1401, a plot by Pisans and expatriate Genoese in 1406, and a conspiracy by Gabriele Maria Visconti and the *condottiere* Facino Cane in December 1408.[40] The biographer admitted that many of Genoese citizens disliked Boucicaut's rule but defended the administration of the marshal, denouncing the lack of gratitude on the part of the *popolari*, condemning their envy and jealousy. He pleaded with them to recognise what Boucicaut had really done for them.[41]

The Book of the Deeds also presented a very careful defence of Boucicaut's policies towards other powers in Italy and the Mediterranean. For example, the biography defended his actions on the controversial expedition against Muslim ports in 1403 that had undermined relations with the city of Venice. According to the Venetian version of events, Boucicaut's troops had seized property belonging to their merchants during the sack of Beirut on 10 August 1403. Using this pretext, Carlo Zeno and the Venetians had attacked Boucicaut's fleet at Modone on 17 October 1403, destroying all but five ships, killing six hundred men and capturing a number of prisoners including Châteaumorand.[42] In the aftermath, Boucicaut had wanted to declare war on Venice but had been constrained by the French court which prioritised negotiations for the release of the prisoners taken at Modone who were not freed until May 1404. The biographer reported that Boucicaut was frustrated at this interference and sent a personal letter of defiance to Michele Steno, doge of Venice, and the admiral Carlo Zeno on 6 June 1404. When Zeno refused to respond to this challenge, the biography itself remained as Boucicaut's last effort to defend his honour.

The Book of the Deeds also sought to explain Boucicaut's involvement in the politics of Pisa that had allowed Florence to seize control of that city.[43] On 20 July 1404, the Pisans had risen up against their ruler, Gabriele Maria Visconti, who had agreed to pay homage to the king of France just a few months earlier, in return for French protection for Pisa. So Boucicaut had been obliged to send troops to Pisa to aid Visconti, and after having failed to secure the city, the marshal ceded it to Florence

39 See pp. 63–4 below.
40 See pp. 102–3, 158 and 184–6 below.
41 See pp. 165–6, 200 and 206 below.
42 See pp. 137–8 below.
43 Lalande, *Jean II le Meingre*, pp. 127–40.

on 27 August 1405 in return for other concessions.[44] Strongly opposing this decision, the Pisans dispatched an embassy on 11 February 1406 to the dukes of Orléans and Burgundy at the French royal court, offering them joint lordship over their city. In July Burgundy sent troops to Pisa under the Picard captain Enguerrand de Bournonville, and also dispatched his counsellor Girard de Bourbon to meet with Boucicaut, calling upon the marshal to resist Florentine efforts to seize Pisa.[45] So again, *The Book of the Deeds* set out Boucicaut's version of this extremely controversial sequence of events. The biographer reported that Boucicaut had written to Paris, defending the deal that he had made with the Florentines and denouncing the treachery of the Pisan efforts to go behind Boucicaut's back in order to secure the support of the French royal court. The writer also denounced those at court who had been motivated by jealousy to deceive the royal dukes and turned them against Boucicaut.[46]

Finally *The Book of the Deeds* presented a defence of Boucicaut's actions in the context of the Great Schism. In 1378, a split amongst the cardinals led to the election of two rival popes, Urban VI (1378–89) at Rome and Clement VII (1374–98) at Avignon. The French crown had supported Clement and his successors as popes at Avignon until the start of the fifteenth century, when momentum grew for a resolution to the crisis. Yet Boucicaut had continued to support the Avignon pope Benedict XIII, against the French court's policy of withdrawal of obedience from Benedict and his Roman rival, Gregory XII (1406–17), in order to allow the election of a new pope to reunite the Church.[47] His biographer therefore took great pains to deny any responsibility on the part of Boucicaut for the unravelling of the plan for Benedict XIII and Gregory XII (1406–17) to meet at Savona in April 1407 in order to move towards a solution to Schism.[48] He also defended Boucicaut's failure to restore Pope Gregory XII to Rome after the city was seized by King Ladislaus of Naples in April 1408.[49]

In short, the biography of Boucicaut served as a highly detailed defence of the marshal's career, and in particular the decisions that he had made during his service as governor of Genoa. The obvious audience for this was the French royal court. Indeed, the author acknowledged as much when he denounced the envy motivating those at the court who were undermining Boucicaut and misleading the

44 See pp. 152–60 below.

45 B. Schnerb, *Enguerrand de Bournonville et les siens. Un lignage noble du Boulonnais aux XIVe et XVe siècles* (Paris, 1997), p. 85, and also C. de La Roncière, 'La domination française à Pise', *École française de Rome: Mélanges d'archéologie et d'histoire*, 15 (1895), pp. 240–4.

46 See pp. 161–4 below.

47 See pp. 146–50 above. The marshal's brother, Geoffrey Le Meingre, had laid siege to the papal palace at Avignon in 1398, for which he was pardoned two years later and performed a year-long penance. This may partially explain Boucicaut's support for Benedict XIII. Lehoux, *Jean de France, duc de Berri,* III, pp. 396–9.

48 See pp. 176–8 below.

49 See pp. 178–80 below.

royal dukes.[50] Such opposition posed a very grave risk to Boucicaut who had long depended upon the goodwill of the royal princes who effectively ruled France during the mental incapacity of King Charles VI.[51] Above all, the deteriorating situation in Genoa meant that Boucicaut was desperate for reinforcements and money to pay his soldiers. In the spring of 1409, Raoul de Gaucourt led a French expedition to reinforce Boucicaut that finally arrived in October.[52] Yet even with that help, Boucicaut lacked the financial resources to mount an effective recovery of Genoa. Therefore in March 1410 he sent three envoys to Paris to ask for more assistance. They brought with them copies of Boucicaut's accounts for the occupation of Genoa, highlighting the precarious financial situation.[53] Shortly before their arrival, the archbishop of Genoa, Pileo de Marini, had written to King Charles VI setting out a long justification for the opposition of the citizens of Genoa to their governor who had forced many, including the archbishop himself, to flee the city.[54] Therefore *The Book of the Deeds of My Good Lord Jean le Meingre, Known as Boucicaut* would have made a very useful counter to Marini's complaints, setting out a very careful defence of the marshal's involvement in the murky politics of Italy, the Mediterranean and the Church. The manuscript might have been intended for one of the great princes, most probably Jean duke of Berry who had commissioned the translation of Valerius Maximus that was a major source for the biography. Or alternatively, the biography would have armed Boucicaut's envoys with the detailed justification of all of his recent actions, especially those criticised by Marini.

If the biography was indeed written for this very specific context of negotiations at the French royal court in 1410, then that may explain one further unique feature of this particular chivalric biography. Unlike comparable works, the biography of Boucicaut survives in just one manuscript that was never finished.[55] Space was left on folio 3r, for example, for the armorial of the lord to whom it was to be presented, but this was never completed. Add this to the fact that the narrative within the biography stopped on 6 March 1409 at the end of book III, the only book which did not have an *explicit*, and there is a strong suggestion that the biography was completed in a rush.[56]

50 See p. 164 below.

51 Famiglietti, *Royal Intrigue.*

52 Lalande, *Jean II le Meingre,* pp. 153–6 and Schnerb, *Enguerrand de Bournonville,* pp. 89–90.

53 Arch. Nat. Kk40, *Comptes de guerre 1409–10*. These original accounts were entitled 'Dommages gros et menus et messageries faites pour ledit fait de Jennes'.

54 The letter was probably written in October or November 1409. D. Puncuh, 'Il governo genovese del Boucicaut nella lettera di Pileo de Marini a Carlo VI di Francia 1409', *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome. Moyen Âge, Temps modernes*, 90:2 (1978), pp. 657–87.

55 BNF MS fr. 11432. In contrast, there are five surviving manuscripts of Machaut's biography of Peter I of Cyprus, eight manuscripts of the life of Bertrand Du Guesclin, and two copies of the Chandos Herald's life of the Black Prince. See note 24 above.

56 The anonymous author also called for a future writer to complete the biography after the death of the marshal. See p. 210 below.