

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

THE AUTHOR

PHILIPPE DE MEZIERES SPEAKS

WE may begin this introduction to the study of the Dream of the Old Pilgrim by allowing the author himself to give some account of his life, aims and times, and of the world as he saw it.

In the closing scene of the *Songe*, Philippe, overcome by despair at the failure of his hopes for the reform of the West as antecedent to a new crusade, lies prostrate before the altar in a chapel of the Celestines in Paris, and there expresses his private and public griefs. To him appears Divine Providence. She asks Philippe, 'Why this posture of despair in the presence of the comforter of the unhappy? Don't you know that despair is the worst of sins? Perhaps you have lost your wits.' The Dreamer's way of proving that he is still in his right senses runs thus, 'I am in such misery that I know not whether I am asleep or awake, but I do know what is happening round me and am well aware that this is not the Golden Age. I know that at this moment I am in the chapel of the Virgin, where I hope to spend my last days. I know, too, that in this kingdom of Gaul there is reigning Charles VI, for whom I have long laboured; that we are in the ninth year of his reign and in the year of grace 1389. Again, I am aware that in this very year a truce for three years has been signed, with the hope of a permanent peace, between our young king, Charles, and his adversary of England, and that they are both well disposed to such a peace, unless turned aside by greedy counsellors. I know that at the moment there is no Roman emperor, though Wenceslaus, son of Charles IV, is reputed to be king of the Romans, and that his brother has obtained by marriage the kingdom of Hungary. And in Spain, John is king of Castille. I know quite well that a great Turkish prince, Marbesund Alesmure, has brought ruin to most of the 1,500 islands of the Archipelago,

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and that a greater prince still, Amurath, has conquered the empires of Trebesond, of Constantinople, of Bulgaria and the kingdom of Serbia, though in this present year he has been defeated in Albania and he and his son slain in battle.¹

‘I am sadly aware that the Catholic Church is torn in twain. In Rome Urban is proclaimed by his followers as Vicar of Christ and in Avignon there reigns Clement VII, acknowledged by me and his adherents as true head of the Church. This schism has now lasted more than ten years and unless God changes the hearts of those in high places and moderates the urge of ambition and greed, a solution is hardly in sight. All this I have said to prove to you, Providence Divine, that I am not out of my mind, and my general and public grief is, in a word, that Christendom has refused to accept the divine virtues of truth, peace, mercy and justice.’

In another of his works, under the heading *La Substance de la Chevalerie de la Passion de Jhesu Crist en francois*,² Philippe says this, ‘The substance of this order of chivalry was revealed in spirit to the aforesaid Philippe when in his youth he was overseas. This happened in the year of grace 1347. From that time forward, as God knows who knows all things, the strong desire for the foundation of that Order

¹ See Jorga, p. 55, n. 1, for the Turkish attacks on the Greek islands. In the *Epistre Lamentable et Consolatoire*, addressed to Philip of Burgundy after Nicopolis, Mézières draws on his fifty years’ experience of the Middle East to sketch the course of Turkish conquest in Asia Minor and to define the various areas overcome in that conquest. In the last fifty years, he says, there have been three very powerful ‘natural’ lords in Turkey. The first of these was Marbesund Alesmure. The name ‘Alesmure’ implies a connection with Ismir (or Smyrna). He it was who conquered the Archipelago and fought the Christians who had captured Smyrna. The threat to Armenia came from Le Caraman, and the Moslem forces in this region did not attack Christians outside Asia Minor. The third great prince was Le Grand Caraman, who attacked to the north and conquered Trebizond. His lands bordered on Tartary.

This passage presents difficulties and cannot be reconciled with the facts. Amurath I, or Murad, gained the victory of Kossova on 15 June 1389, and was assassinated by a Serbian soldier at the end of the battle. He was succeeded by his son Bajazet, who had contributed to the Turkish success. This concluding part of the *Songe* was written at some time in the first half of 1389, presumably before the details of Kossova had reached the West. It may be noted that the *Penguin atlas of medieval history* (Colin McEvedy, 1961), ascribes the victory to Bajazet ‘on the first day of his reign’.

In general, we must suppose that Philippe, during his semi-retirement, was no longer well informed on Eastern affairs.

² See n. 1, p. 15, below.

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has never left his heart and mind; and so that the said Order should come into being, the said chancellor has laboured without ceasing and suffered perils innumerable. For fifteen years he came and went, acting as royal messenger to three Roman popes, to Charles the Roman emperor, to all the kings and great princes and communes of Catholic Christendom, with few exceptions. Everywhere and on every occasion he asked help for his lord, the king of Cyprus; on all sides he preached the holy voyage, the holy war, and the need for the founding of this Order. But time and time again the unhappy chancellor found his labour and his hopes disappointed. Sometimes he had occasion to rejoice, but more often to despair, and his deepest despair came from that great betrayal of the Catholic faith when that counsel of Achitofel was given to the victorious king, namely that he should withdraw from Alexandria, queen city of Egypt.'

Finally, in his *Epistre Lamentable et Consolatoire*, written after the débâcle of Nicopolis (1396), he speaks of himself as an old solitary who for long had never ceased *de crier et de braire que l'estable feust close avant que le cheval eschappast*.¹ He had, he says, lived for about thirty years in contact with Turks and Saracens. His plans had not been lightly hatched in some tavern of London or Paris. They dated back some forty years in which he had been able to consult Syrians, merchants, veteran knights and converted Saracens.

These statements by the author of the *Songe* on current affairs and on what may be styled his life theory may serve to illustrate the outline of his career here presented. From it may emerge further evidence as to his qualifications as adviser and provider of remedies for the ills of Christendom and for the dangers which threatened from the East.

THE LIFE OF PHILIPPE DE MEZIERES

Philippe de Mézières was born at the Picard village of Mézières in 1327, six years after the death of Dante, the year before the birth of Chaucer, and shortly before the momentous election of Philip VI

¹ In the *Letter to Richard II* he uses a different figure and says he has sounded *le grant cornet* (fo. 32v).

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to the throne of France. He was the youngest of twelve children, but some of these were, apparently, half-brothers and half-sisters. So far as we can see, the family belonged to the very numerous class of the minor nobility, and members of it achieved distinction¹ in later years.

Philippe was educated at the Canons' School at Amiens, but first enters history in the year 1345, when we find him as a soldier in the service of Lucchino Visconti, lord of Milan (1339–49). He had apparently gone off to seek his fortune in the fashion of young Picards of his time; as he says himself, speaking of Picards, 'one may be found in France and another in Normandy, and yet another in Provence or in Lombardy'.² Later in the same year—why, does not appear—we find him in south Italy at the court of Andrew,³ the young Angevin king of Naples, and he was there at the time of the king's assassination. His declared affection for the young king must have been of very rapid growth, but Andrew was a member of the house of Anjou, roughly the same age as Philippe, and may have shared his ideas.

Now follows a vague period of some months before Philippe reappears as taking part in the expedition of 1346 to Smyrna, under

¹ A brother was a soldier and was at the capture of Alexandria. A half-brother was bishop of Arras, of Terouanne, and of Cambrai, in that order. Another was archdeacon of Ostrevant and was a prisoner in England. Philippe refers to his Picard relations when he discusses private war (*Songe*, 330v2).

² *Songe*, 330v1. The possibilities of war and battle, east and west, are summed in the Prologue to the *Canterbury tales*. The Knight had fought as well in Christian as in heathen places. He saw the town of Alexandria fall. He had seen service in Prussia, Lithuania and Russia, and he was in Granada when Algeciras was captured. He had fought, too, in North Africa, in Benmarine and in Armenia, where he had seen the fall of Attalia and Ayas.

'For all along the Mediterranean coast
He had embarked with many a noble host.
...
This same distinguished knight had led the van
Once with the Bey of Balat, doing work
For him against another heathen Turk;'

(Chaucer, *The Canterbury tales*, tr. Nevill Coghill, Penguin Classics, 1951, pp. 26–7.) Chaucer seems to credit the Knight with some excess of experience.

³ See *De la Chevalerie de la Passion de Jesu Crist*, Arsenal MS 2251, 12v: 'Combien qu'il eust este un bon temps soudoyer en Lombardie pour aprendre le fait d'armes et au service du noble roy de Sicile Andrieu, frere du vaillant Loys, roy de Hongrie.'

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the leadership of Humbert II of Dauphiné.¹ In that same year he journeyed to Jerusalem, probably reaching it through the desert from the south. This may be taken as a turning-point in his career, for it was then that he became filled with that passion for the crusade which was to govern his life for the next fifty years.

It may have been at this time (the evidence is obscure) that his relations with Cyprus began and his contacts with Hugh IV and his second son, Peter, two years younger than himself. These contacts were to be, perhaps, the most important in his life. We shall find his eulogy of Cyprus as she was under the rule of King Peter and his lament for her decadence after the Genoese conquest very eloquently expressed in his account of the consistory attended by the heavenly visitors at Genoa.

In the year 1346 we have to place, also, a return to France, via Naples and Lombardy. Thus, at the age of twenty, Philippe had already a ripe experience of travel in east and west, of men and cities.

At this point our evidence fails us badly and we have a period of, roughly, eight years in which we are left to guess at our author's activities. The gap between 1346 and 1354 is filled at one point only. In 1349 Philippe was at Avignon when James of Majorca set out to recover his kingdom, and he tells us himself that he had almost decided to accompany the king on that journey, which was to end in the loss of his kingdom and his head.² For 1354 we have again an abruptly presented scrap of evidence. Some time in that year Philippe was serving at Pontorson under Arnoul d'Audrehem, Marshal of France, and was given charge of the conduct of a trial by combat. Again comes an empty period as far as evidence is concerned, but in 1359 he travelled to Cyprus, met that extraordinary

¹ Humbert the last ruler of Dauphiné, to which he succeeded in 1333. He ceded his domain to the French crown in 1348. It may be presumed that Philippe de Mézières had some contact with him in the expedition to Smyrna. Humbert's career, his dealings with Western rulers, with the papacy and the great trading cities—all these furnish an admirable epitome of the cross-currents which justified the *Songe* and, at the same time, showed the real hopelessness of a successful crusade.

² James of Majorca's stormy career ended on 25 October 1349, when in the attempt to regain his kingdom he was defeated by an Aragonese army. Nicole Oresme refers to this in his *Livre de Divinacions*. See G. W. Coopland, *Nicole Oresme and the astrologers* (1952), pp. 72–3.

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figure, the Carmelite Pierre Thomas,¹ and became chancellor of the kingdom.²

At the age of thirty-three, then, Philippe is in daily contact with two men passionately interested in projects for a crusade, in an island where he could meet refugees from the Holy Land, veterans of the wars in Asia Minor and Palestine, merchants from the whole of the Levant, and men who had lived in India and remote China.

Of Philippe's activities as chancellor we know little or nothing, although he kept the title with apparent pride to the end of his days. Certainly he can have spent little time in carrying out his official duties, for in the sixties of the century began that intensive propaganda campaign in which three men tried to persuade the West of the urgency and possibility of a crusade. They travelled to the Italian cities, to Avignon, to France and the Empire; they endured the endless delays; they had to meet the ambitions and jealousies of commercial interests in Genoa and Venice, the indifference of the Empire, and the preoccupations of the great feudal princes.³ Success seemed in sight in 1365. A great fleet and army sailed from Cyprus to Alexandria. The city was captured and in large measure ruined. But the European contingents had their way against the advice of the old soldiers of the eastern wars and the expedition withdrew. The crusade had failed and Philippe, Pierre Thomas and the young king had learnt a bitter lesson. Philippe, in particular, realized that without order and discipline and a common policy the West could not prevail.

In the following year Pierre Thomas died and, with the murder of Peter of Cyprus in 1369, hopes of an even partial union of the West against the eastern menace were for the time extinguished. For some two or three years Philippe lived in Venice and acquired an immense respect for that city and its institutions. He was in Avignon in 1372 at the election of Gregory XI as pope, on which occasion he obtained official recognition for the Feast of the Presenta-

¹ Philippe wrote his *Vita S. Petri Thomasi* in 1366. It should be noted that, despite this title, Pierre Thomas was never canonized.

² For illustration of the activities of a chancellor in our period see H. Moranville, *Journal de Jean Lefevre* (1887).

³ To which may be added the fact that the Venetian preoccupation with Crete began early in 1363, and an expedition landed there in the May of 1364.

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tion, and, in the following year, at the age of forty-seven, returned once more to France.

It is clear that at this stage we may consider Philippe as a man whose plans had been brought to nought, his support in the Near East had disappeared and he turned to Charles V of France as his main hope. He tells us that he had wedded solitude and sought her in the convent of the Celestines in Paris.¹ This seeming retirement, however, did not prevent great literary activity and obviously close contact with the king and with French and European affairs. We shall have to deal later with some of these relations, but for our present purpose we may infer from his own statements in the *Songe* that his association with the king was of the most intimate and personal sort.

His appointment as king's councillor, as member of the regency council, and the pension awarded to him would not distinguish him from other notables of his time, but it is clear that he was deeply in the king's confidence and that they talked together as friends and, while the king was gaining victories over his English enemies, *lui seant en sa chaere*, Philippe was often employed as, in his own words, his special messenger. 16811

The king's death (1380) brought abrupt changes and Philippe's solitude was to be less broken. There was a little room for either

¹ For a view of the Paris in which Philippe de Mézières spent his later years, the following works have been found useful. They show the city in a phase of 'demolition and development' and, in particular, help towards a view of the immediate neighbourhood of the Célestines, that is to say, the rue St-Antoine and the new Bastille, the Palace of St-Pol and the cemetery of the same name. For the underworld of the great city the Criminal Register of the Châtelet is of unique value. L. Batiffol, *Le Châtelet de Paris*, *Rev. Hist.* vol. LXII, pp. 225-44 (based mainly on the Criminal Register); Adolphe Berty and L. M. Tisserand, *Topographie historique du vieux Paris* (1866, etc.); Fernand Bournon, *La Bastille (Hist. Gén. de Paris, 1893)*; Fernand Bournon, *Le palais royal de St-Pol*, *Mém. Soc. Hist. de Paris*, vol. VI, pp. 55-179 (1879); A. Christian, *Etudes sur le Paris d'autrefois*: (1904) *Les médecins, l'université*; (1906) *Les demeures royales aux portes de Paris*; (1906) *Les demeures royales, les demeures aristocratiques*; Barelli de Sèvres, *L'agrandissement du palais de la cité sous Philippe le Bel*, *Mém. Soc. Hist. de Paris*, vol. XXXVII (1911); Louis Hauteœur, *Histoire du Louvre, le château, le palais, le musée*, n.d.; Jacques Hillairet, *Evocation du vieux Paris* (1954) (of recent works the most useful); Lucien Lambeau, *La rue St-Anthoine dans le passé*, *Comm. Mun. de Vieux Paris* 1924, 1927; Léon Le Grand, *Les Maisons-Dieu, etc. et les léproseries du diocèse de Paris au milieu du XIV^e siècle* (1891-8); *Registre criminel du Châtelet de Paris du 6 Septembre 1389 au 18 mai 1392*, ed. H. Duplès-Agier.

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him or his ideas under the government of the princes, but one so active in mind and body, one so well versed in the politics of his time, could not easily be divorced from the perplexities and crises of those years. We shall find, for example, in the *Songe* bitter comment, direct or indirect, on the Flemish expedition of 1382 and the battle of Roosbeke, on the outbreak of the Maillotins and its suppression, on the abolition of the provostship of the merchants, on the fêtes on the occasion of the king's marriage, and on the failure of the great army assembled in Flanders in 1386 to carry out the invasion of England. To the matter of the schism he evidently devoted anxious thought, and his conclusions, moderately dispassionate, are revealed. His close and sympathetic contacts with that strange prodigy, Pierre of Luxembourg, must be of significance for our estimate of Philippe himself and, indeed, he uses the miraculous proofs of Pierre's sanctity in his arguments in favour of Pope Clement V.

With the declaration of Charles VI's majority in December 1388, great possibilities presented themselves. Philippe had seen the young king grow up, had taken some share in his education and was clearly free to address him in bolder terms than are usual in any age between subject and sovereign. Allowing for some over-optimism, he had, perhaps, reason to persuade himself that internal reform could be achieved in France, the schism healed, lasting peace made with England, and that a united Europe under French and English leadership might march, and this time effectively, against the infidel. These hopes were to furnish the main theme of the *Songe*.

The king's attack of madness in the May of 1392 must have seemed to Philippe to cancel all the anxious and elaborate schemes for reform set forth in the *Songe*, and in the following years his worst fears, for both East and West, were realized. The disaster at Nicopolis (1396) brought from him his last work, *Epistre Lamentable et Consolatoire*, a final appeal to Christendom to discipline itself and save all that it stood for from the Turkish threat. From 1397 to his death in 1405 we have no knowledge whatever of our author's life.

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Gaps in the evidence. Students of the middle ages are well acquainted with the incompleteness of the biographies of eminent personages, especially of those of less than royal or princely rank. There are very obvious gaps in our sketch of Philippe's career. A part from his life up to the age of twenty, there is, first of all, the period between 1346 and 1354, broken only by one brief mention of Philippe's presence at Avignon; and in the interval between 1354 and 1358, the years apparently of the beginning of the Cyprus connection, we are left in doubt as to exact chronology. Again, after the death of Pierre Thomas in 1366, we have two or three years with little detail and we know only, as already noted, that Mézières spent these two or three years, or the greater part of them, in Venice. In the time of his retirement there are many gaps to be filled, and for the last eight years of his life evidence fails completely.

Avoiding elaborate analysis, we may say that at least twenty-three years of a very active life are not accounted for in evidence other than what we may draw from his writings. In the *Songe* itself there are three fields of experience clearly indicated which must lie within some portion of these twenty-three years. These may be described roughly, as experience of the Middle East, sojourn in Spain, and the northern journey or journeys.

Philippe's experience of the Moslem lands. It seems likely that Philippe was the best informed man of his day in the West on Middle Eastern affairs. He shows, for example, in the *Epistre Lamentable* of 1397 remarkably clear knowledge of the progress of the Turkish advance, and, at the same time, what appears to be first-hand acquaintance with parts of the Middle East.¹ We may select for consideration a few of the many passages in the *Songe* which point to close knowledge of the Moslem world. Speaking of the 'Black King of Nubia', he says that this monarch at some time in the past

¹ Cf. *La Substance de la Chevalerie de la Passion de Jhesu Crist en francois* (see n. 1, p. 15, below), p. 99: 'Les Sarrasins, grans clers et astrologiens, de jour en jour le prophetisent et ne le puellent [*sic*] celer a nos crestiens et dient publiquement a aucuns crestiens que le tamps est venu qu'il doivent perdre la Terre Sainte et estre boute hors par la poissance des Frans. Et est chose veritable qu'il a passe plus de xl. ans que aucuns les plus saiges Sarrasins de Surie le revelerent secretement a moy, grant pecheur, zelateur et seul en Dieu dictateur de ceste nouvelle Chevalerie de la Passion de Jhesu Crist.'

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turned the course of the Nile, so as to prevent it from passing through Egypt. As a result the sultan of Babylon and all the Egyptians, fearing death from thirst, became tributary to the king of Nubia, so that they might recover the river. As we shall show later, it may be taken as established that Philippe uses 'Nubia' for Ethiopia and 'Ethiopia' for Nubia. The legend, of course, is not original with Philippe, but he goes on to say, 'Even today the Nubians, whenever they wish, may pass through Cairo carrying *une belle croix de fer taillee* and may travel through Saracen lands as far as Jerusalem, without payment of any toll.¹ No other Christians have this right.' Now follows the definite statement: 'The Old Pilgrim has often seen this happen.' We shall see later that our author is capable of some distortion of fact, but the reasons, patriotic, religious, and so on, are fairly obvious in each case. That is not so in this particular instance and we are left with something approaching belief that he had actually seen the cross carried as he described. It may be added that we have no specific statement of his as to first-hand knowledge

4811-12 of Cairo, although he describes that city as a sort of Utopia, in which no one ill clothed or poverty-stricken or ailing was to be seen; where the hospitals² were full of sick people well looked after, some cured and others convalescing; where one man could say to another, 'I have no fear of thieves, for what I have is mine.'

240v2 In another passage, Philippe, recommending that the king of France should be distinguished from his barons by a certain richness of dress, makes an interesting comparison with the manners of the sultan of Babylon, whom he describes in the midst of ten or twenty thousand of his knights, all clad in simple clean white garments. The sultan's robe resembles theirs in style, but greatly surpasses them in splendour, being in appearance not only royal, but imperial.

¹ For the presence of bodies of Ethiopian Christians in Jerusalem see Enrico Cerulli, *Etiopi in Palestina* (1943), vol. 1, cap. xviii, p. 155, 'L'Étopia in due opere de Filippo de Mézières', in which, however, no comment is made on the matter of the iron cross.

² It seems established that the provision of schools and hospitals was a normal part of Moslem policy under the various régimes which held power in Cairo. See S. Lane-Poole, *History of Egypt in the middle ages* (1925), pp. 283-4; Dorothea Russell, *Medieval Cairo* (1962); T. T. Rice, *The Seljuks in Asia Minor* (1961); E. Simon, *The piebald standard* (1959), cap. 4, The Enemy; and for an admirable summary of the Mamluke period in Egypt, H. Munier and G. West, *Précis de l'histoire d'Égypte* (1938), vol. II, cap. VII, L'Égypte byzantine et musulmane.