



HISTORY

Collection 16

French Culture in the Early Modern Period

Early European Books Collection 16 presents a generous survey of early modern French culture through a selection of more than a hundred printed items from the *Bibliothèque nationale de France* in Paris. This collection, extending across a multitude of subject areas to highlight the many facets of the French cultural scene, builds on previous BnF-based releases through the inclusion of items from the *Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal*, a treasured part of the national library which houses numerous unique historic archives.

Classical items, printed in France and often in French translation, reveal both a shared European heritage and the emergence of a distinctive French identity and culture. These include editions by France's leading classical scholars such as Isaac Casaubon (1599-1614), Michel de Marolles (1600-1681) and André Dacier (1651-1722). Also featured are influential burlesques of classical literature such as a 1669 two-volume edition of Paul Scarron's (1610-1660) *Virgile travesty* and a 1665 *L'Ovide Bouffon* by Louis Richer. Medieval items provide a look to a broader European culture and beyond, such as a 1678 edition of Petrarch's prose in French translation, incunable editions of Jean Gerson and Lyon imprints of the works of the Islamic Golden Age physician Avicenna.

Early modern French literary works are well-represented across the genres. Poetry includes a 1587 edition of Pierre Ronsard's (1524-1585) *Les Eclogues et Mascarades*, an original 1686 printing of Balthazar de Bonnewcorse's (1631-1706) *Lutrigot* and versions of Ovid by the dramatist Thomas Corneille (1625-1709). A 1682 edition of his *Poèmes dramatiques* also features, sitting alongside a 1648 printing of the tragedy *Polyeucte martyr* by the author's more celebrated brother, the great Pierre Corneille (1606-1684). Central to Collection 16's drama selection is the work of France's pre-eminent comedic playwright, Molière (1622-1673), whose collected plays are presented in late-17th century illustrated editions printed in Paris, Lyon and Toulouse. Prose works include satirical dialogues by Eustache Le Noble (1643-1711), a 1646 first edition of Mlle de Senecesterre's *Orasie*, and a 1699 Paris edition of the multifarious *Oeuvres* of François de La Mothe Le Vayer (1588-1672).

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La Mothe Le Vayer was a champion of scepticism and Collection 16 features individual editions of his philosophical dialogues such as *La Promenade* (1663). Other philosophy titles include a 1626 edition of the 17th-century bestseller *Summa philosophiae quadripartite* by Eustache de Saint-Paul (1573-1640) and Rouen editions of Scipion Dupleix's (1569-1661) *Corps de philosophie*. A 1666 edition of La Rochefoucauld's famous *Maximes* can also be found, as can copies of Michel de Montaigne's great *Essais*, originally published in 1580 but featured here in corrected editions dating from the mid-1600s. Works of a more spiritual nature include an early edition of Léon de Saint-Jean's (1600-1671) *Le Portrait de la sagesse universelle* and a 1675 first edition of the poet Jean Desmarets de Saint-Sorlin's (1595-1676) *Les Délices de l'esprit*.

A leading literary figure of his day, Desmarets de Saint-Sorlin was an inaugural member of the *Académie française*, the national institution established in 1635 tasked with regulating the French language. Collection 16 encompasses related writings, as well as items reflecting France's development as a nation-state, such as legal documents, political tracts and histories. Items on the French language include a 1647 edition of *Remarques sur la langue françoise* by Claude Favre de Vaugelas (1585-1650) and a 1692 *Réflexions ou remarques critiques sur l'usage présent de la langue françoise* by Nicolas Andry de Boisregard (1658-1742). Legal documents feature some intriguing 17th-century *factums* or *memoires judiciaires* outlining court case arguments. History books cover a range of topics but tend towards French ecclesiastical and civic history, as well as to royal and heraldic ancestry. One highlight is Marcus Vulson de la Colombière's (d. 1658) *Les portraits des hommes illustre françois* which features full-length portraits of many historical figures.

Works on pedagogy include a 1539 Lyon edition of the earliest handbook on child education, *De Civilitate morum puerilium* (1530) by Erasmus (1456-1536), as well as a 1542 Paris edition of Christoff Hegendorff's (1500-1540) *Christiana studiosae juventutis institutio*. Similar texts by homegrown French authors include Christophe Plantin's (d.1589) *Dialogues françois pour les jeunes enfans* (Antwerp, 1567) and a 1687 Paris edition of Pierre Coustel's (1624-1704) *Les règles de l'éducation des enfants*. Instructional volumes also include titles on etiquette and the art of conversation. Among these are *Le parfait courtesan*, a 1690 translation of Castiglione's (1478-1529) *Il Cortegiano* (1528) which first established the genre, as well as editions of Nicolas Faret's (d.1646) *L'Honneste homme*, a first edition of *La Fortune des gens de qualité* (Paris, 1661) by Jacques de Callières (d.1662) and a 1676 edition of Antoine de Courtin's (1622-1685) popular *Nouveau traité de la civilité*. Related items examine the institution of marriage and the role of women within it. These range from Guillaume Le Roy's (1610-1684) *Du Devoir des mères*, to Antoine de Courtin's (1622-1685) *Traité de la jalousie* and to François Poullain de La Barre's (1647-1725) *De l'éducation des dames*, all Paris publications from the mid-1670s.

Everyday life is reflected through popular almanacs, catalogues and periodical news books. Highlights include a 1692 catalogue of the curiosity cabinet of the Abbey of Saint-Genevieve and a first edition of Mathieu La Porte's (d.1722) *Le Guide des négocians et teneurs de livres*, a double-entry bookkeeping manual which went through an impressive 23 editions between 1685 and 1787.

This eclectic survey offers a fitting tribute to France's cultural richness and diversity during a formative period of its history.

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