

Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art and Objects of Cultural Interest, Case 2 (2023-24) The Old French New Testament, formerly owned by Jean le Bon	
Statement from Expert Adviser	Statement of the Expert Adviser to the Secretary of State that the manuscript meets Waverley criterion three. See below
Statement from the Applicant	Statement from the applicant referencing the three Waverley criteria. The Reviewing Committee will designate an object as a 'national treasure' if it considers that its departure from the UK would be a misfortune on one or more of the following three grounds: a) Is it closely connected with our history and national life? b) Is it of outstanding aesthetic importance? c) Is it of outstanding significance for the study of some particular branch of art, learning or history? The applicant did not dispute that the manuscript met the Waverley Criteria.
Note of case hearing	See below
Press release	A press release was issued by the Secretary of State on 8 November 2023: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-testament-owned-by-royalty-at-risk-of-leaving-uk
Recommended price	£800,000
1st Deferral period	7 February 2024
2nd Deferral period	
Note of outcome	

RCEWA – The Old French New Testament, formerly owned by Jean le Bon

Statement of the Expert Adviser to the Secretary of State that the manuscript meets Waverley criterion three

Please note that images and appendices referenced are not reproduced.

1. Brief description of object

The New Testament in an Old French translation, with fine illuminated initials, attributable to the Cholet Master. Contains the autograph inscription of Jean II (Jean le Bon), King of France (reigned 1350–1364). Owned by members of the English royal family in the 1400s, as revealed by a series of erased inscriptions.

Manuscript on parchment, c. 1270–1300, post-medieval binding. Fair condition.

2. Context

The known ownership of the manuscript is set out in full in Appendix A. Surviving manuscripts owned by Jean le Bon are listed in Appendix B. Images of certain erased inscriptions are in Appendix C.

Owned by Jean le Bon, King of France, whose name is inscribed on the final page. Other erased inscriptions, readable under ultraviolet light, show that the manuscript was owned by Thomas of Lancaster, Duke of Clarence (1387–1421), second son of King Henry IV of England, and by Edmund Beaufort, 1st Duke of Somerset (1406–1455). Beaufort gave the manuscript to Humfrey of Lancaster, Duke of Gloucester (1390–1447), fourth son of Henry IV and bibliophile.

Owned after 1700 by Thomas Martin FSA (1696/7–1771), antiquarian and lawyer, and by Sir George Augustus William Shuckburgh-Evelyn, 6th Baronet (1751–1804), MP for Warwickshire, mathematician and astronomer, and then by descent.

Another twelve manuscripts are attributable to the Cholet Master, one of which is in the United Kingdom (British Library Royal MS 1 C II).

3. Waverley criteria

I consider the manuscript to meet the third Waverley criterion, namely that it is of outstanding significance for the study of Anglo-French cultural exchange, learning and patronage during the period of the Hundred Years' War, with especial relevance to the book collections of Jean le Bon and of Humfrey, Duke of Gloucester.

- The manuscript is an exceedingly rare example of a book with the autograph inscription of Jean le Bon, a renowned figure in medieval European book culture;

- It throws new light on the collecting activities of Duke Humfrey, who possessed one of the greatest libraries of his time and is credited with introducing humanism to England;
- The circulation of this French royal book among leading Lancastrians may be connected with English claims to the French Crown;
- Much remains to be discovered about the manuscript's early ownership, thereby enhancing its research value.

DETAILED CASE

1. Detailed description of object if more than in Executive summary, and any comments.

The manuscript was made in France, most likely in the decades immediately preceding the year 1300. It contains the entire text of the New Testament in Old French, in the so-called 'version du xiii^e siècle' translation of the Bible. This was the first complete translation of the Bible into French, possibly the work of Dominicans in Paris around 1235–1260.

Each book of the Bible is introduced by a decorated initial containing a picture, with the decoration being fine and fresh throughout. The decoration provides new evidence for the work of the Cholet Master, known for their high technical level and innovative use of deep shading to give a three-dimensional quality to their draperies. The style of the initials is particularly close to that of the following four manuscripts:

- the Arsenal Psalter (Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, ms 702);
- a Bible ([British Library Royal MS 1 C II](#));
- the Cholet Missal (Padua, Biblioteca Capitolare, MS C. 47);
- *Les Grandes chroniques de France* (Paris, Bibliothèque Sainte-Genevieve, ms 782).

More broadly, the decoration overlaps with the early style of Master Honoré, who worked for the French royal family and is considered the most significant illuminator in late thirteenth-century Paris. The Cholet Master and Master Honoré share a similar ornamental vocabulary; in the present manuscript the Cholet Master adopts a deeper modelling, comparable to the early work of Master Honoré. For example, the New Testament can be compared with a manuscript of Gratian's *Decretum* that was purchased from Master Honoré in 1288 ([Tours, Bibliothèque municipale, ms 558](#)).

There are marginal notes throughout the manuscript, including liturgical notes and corrections. The margins have been trimmed slightly by a later binder.

The evidence for the manuscript's ownership is noted in Appendix A. At present, information is lacking for the period of approximately sixty years between the making of the manuscript and its acquisition by Jean le Bon in the 1340s. As well as Jean's autograph inscription, there is a series of erased marks of ownership on

the final page. With the applicant's assistance, we have been able to identify some of these inscriptions with the aid of ultraviolet light. The erased ownership inscriptions belong to members of the English royal family in the 1400s, demonstrating that this book was a treasured possession and part of the culture of courtly exchange.

2. Detailed explanation of the outstanding significance of the object

This manuscript was formerly unknown to scholarship, having only come to attention as the result of the export licence application. It provides important evidence for the book ownership of Jean le Bon, King of France, and of Humfrey, Duke of Gloucester, and more widely for elite literary culture at the time of the Hundred Years' War.

Jean le Bon was the first King of France to use his signature. His autograph inscription, entered on the final page of the manuscript, is an exceedingly rare survival. It is known only in two other manuscripts (held at the Bibliothèque nationale de France and at Leiden Universiteitsbibliotheek, in which it has been mainly erased). The present manuscript came into Jean's hands before he became King of France in 1350, since the inscription names him as Duke of Normandy and of Guyenne. It therefore pre-dates his capture by the English at the Battle of Poitiers in 1356.

Jean remained in English captivity until 1360. He was held at Windsor Castle, the Tower of London and other locations in England, before being allowed to return to France in order to raise his own ransom. In 1364, the terms for his release were breached, and so Jean surrendered voluntarily to Edward III and travelled back to England. He died at the Savoy Palace, London, on 8 April 1364.

Jean le Bon was a notable patron of learning, literature and manuscript production. These activities began before he became King of France and continued while he resided in England. He commissioned new compositions (such as a romance on the theme of hunting) as well as translations of the Bible and of the works of Livy. Jean was a major patron of artists, bookbinders and booksellers, both in France and in England. He made a significant contribution to Anglo-French literary and artistic culture, and to the dissemination of important texts.

The evidence for Jean's book ownership and patronage includes records of his expenses while in captivity, an inventory of possessions at his death, and a small group of around seven surviving manuscripts. Among Jean's books is a fine illuminated copy of the *Grandes chroniques de France* ([British Library Royal MS 16 G VI](#)), commissioned before he became King. Two surviving manuscripts were probably seized with him at Poitiers ([British Library Royal MS 19 D II](#); [Bibliothèque nationale de France ms nouv. acq. fr. 24541](#)). The Old French New Testament provides significant evidence for Jean le Bon's book-collecting interests, not least because it contains his own signature.

The erased inscriptions in the manuscript reveal a series of English royal owners who were central figures during the 'Lancastrian Phase' of the Hundred Years' War between England and France. Their ownership and gift exchange of this French royal book suggests that it served the political agenda of the time. After 1337, the Kings of England claimed the right to the French throne by descent from Philippe IV of France (through the marriage of Isabella of France to Edward II of England). All three of the manuscript's known owners in the 1400s — Thomas of Lancaster, Edmund Beaufort and Duke Humfrey — commanded English armies in France. As grandsons of John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster (d. 1399), they were also descendants of Philippe IV of France (and therefore distant cousins of Jean le Bon).

Scholars have noted that the English appropriation of French royal books in this period has direct parallels with the English claims to the French throne. This is evidenced by the seizure of Jean le Bon's books at the Battle of Poitiers in 1356, as well as the wholesale acquisition of the library of King Charles V of France (reigned 1364–1380) by John of Lancaster, Duke of Bedford (Thomas and Humfrey's brother), in 1424. It has been suggested that the Duke of Bedford acquired this highly symbolic library especially to promote the English King's claim to the French Crown. The circulation of Jean le Bon's New Testament among leading Lancastrians may point to a similar political motivation.

The association of this manuscript with Humfrey, Duke of Gloucester, has great importance for the study of elite literary culture in fifteenth-century Europe. Humfrey was probably the greatest English royal bibliophile of the Middle Ages, who amassed one of the most significant libraries of his time. He was a key figure in introducing Italian humanism into England, and his reputation was European in extent. From a library that numbered more than 500 volumes, only forty-eight of Humfrey's manuscripts are known to survive ([listed here](#) but without the newly-identified manuscript). Humfrey routinely added ownership inscriptions to his books, often with details about how he acquired them, giving rare insight into the development of his collection.

During his own lifetime, Humfrey donated around 300 books to the University of Oxford. On his death in 1447, the Crown seized his possessions, with some of Humfrey's manuscripts entering the English royal library. These include his personal Psalter ([British Library Royal MS 2 B I](#)), his copy of Matthew Paris' *Historia Anglorum* ([British Library Royal MS 14 C VII](#)), and the manuscript of the *Grandes chroniques de France* that formerly belonged to Jean le Bon ([British Library Royal MS 16 G VI](#)). This indicates that the English Royal Library placed great emphasis on acquiring Humfrey's French illuminated manuscripts, and those with a royal provenance or personal connections.

The presence of the Old French New Testament in Duke Humfrey's library throws new light on his book-collecting activities. Humfrey owned considerable numbers of rare Classical texts as well as new humanist works, alongside medical treatises, canon and civil law texts, and works by the Church Fathers and scholastic theologians. Notably few Biblical manuscripts can be assigned to his ownership, the exceptions being three Psalters (held at the British Library and in Leiden) and

a Latin Bible (in Oxford). The newly-identified copy of the New Testament in Old French is an important addition to our picture of Humfrey's deeply personal collecting habits, and perhaps his own sense of royal identity and lineage.

The presence of other erased inscriptions in the manuscript, as yet undeciphered, means that there is potential to discover more about its provenance in the 1400s and later. Specialist imaging techniques may in future allow us to supply more gaps in this important manuscript's history.

Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art and Objects of Cultural Interest, note of case hearing	
Meeting date	Wednesday 13 September 2023
Object	The Old French New Testament, formerly owned by Jean le Bon
Expert Adviser's objection	The Head of Western Heritage Collections, British Library, had objected to the export of the manuscript under the third Waverley criterion on the grounds that its departure from the UK would be a misfortune because it was of outstanding significance for the study of Anglo-French cultural exchange, learning and patronage during the period of the Hundred Years' War, with especial relevance to the book collections of Jean le Bon and of Humfrey, Duke of Gloucester.
Committee Members & Independent Assessors	All of the regular eight Committee members were present and able to inspect the manuscript. They were joined in person by three independent assessors, acting as temporary members of the Committee.
Value on the licence	The value shown on the export licence application was £800,000, which represented an agreed sale price subject to the granting of an export licence.
	<p>The applicant was informed that there was currently an interim process in place for Committee hearings. The Committee was still holding hybrid meetings but any Committee members, including the independent assessors, were required to inspect the object under consideration prior to discussing the case and voting. Any permanent Committee members or independent assessors who were not able to view the object were not able to vote.</p> <p>The applicant confirmed that the owner understood the circumstances under which an export licence might be refused.</p>
VAT	The applicant confirmed that the value did not include VAT and that VAT would not be payable in the event of a UK sale.
Private treaty sale	The applicant confirmed that there would be a benefit from a tax-free private treaty sale to a UK institution.

<p>Expert Adviser's comments</p>	<p>The expert adviser stated that they did not have anything further to add to their submission.</p> <p>When questioned about the marginalia in the manuscript, the expert stated that it had been analysed but did not add great significance. The marginalia were clearly the work of different hands and at different times, but they were unable to identify the individual people who had written them.</p>
<p>Applicant's comments</p>	<p>The applicant stated that they did not have anything further to add to their submission and did not contest that the manuscript met the Waverley criteria.</p>
<p>Committee's discussion</p>	<p>The expert adviser and applicant retired and the Committee discussed the case. They found the manuscript to be a beautiful object in excellent condition and with incredibly interesting provenance. The newly revealed connection with Humfrey, Duke of Gloucester and the newly discovered Lancastrian provenance, was of outstanding scholarly and national significance. As arguably the most important medieval book collector, Duke Humfrey's collection was extremely important and further investigation would shed light on the culture of book collecting, specifically Biblical collecting, at the time.</p> <p>The Committee agreed that the more recent provenance was also of interest and contributed to the national significance of the manuscript, particularly Thomas Martin in the early 18th century who was a highly important collector. Additionally, the connection with Jean le Bon (King John II of France) and the likelihood that the manuscript was brought to England by the King was of outstanding significance to our national history.</p> <p>The Committee noted that from a philological perspective, analysis of the textual content of the Bible would be extremely valuable to research, as knowledge of the 13th century Bible was not as complete as it could be. There would be particular interest in studying this specific, and previously unknown, translation with consideration of the New Testament books and readings that were chosen to compile this volume.</p>
<p>Waverley Criteria</p>	<p>The Committee voted on whether the manuscript met the Waverley criteria. Of the 11 members, all 11 members voted</p>

	<p>that it met the first Waverley criterion. No members voted that it met the second Waverley criterion. 11 members voted that it met the third Waverley criterion. The manuscript was therefore found to meet the first and third Waverley criteria for its outstanding significance for the study of Anglo-French cultural exchange, learning and patronage during the period of the Hundred Years' War, with especial relevance to the book collections of Jean le Bon and of Humfrey, Duke of Gloucester.</p>
Matching Offer	<p>The Committee recommended the sum of £800,000 as a fair matching price.</p>
Deferral periods	<p>The Committee agreed to recommend to the Secretary of State that the decision on the export licence should be deferred for an initial period of three months. At the end of the first deferral period, if the Arts Council received notification of a serious intention to raise funds with a view to making an offer to purchase the manuscript, the owner will have a consideration period of 15 Business Days to consider such offer(s). The Committee recommended that there should be a further deferral period of four months that would commence following the signing of an Option Agreement.</p>
Communication of findings	<p>The expert adviser and the applicant returned. The Chairman notified them of the Committee's decision on its recommendations to the Secretary of State.</p> <p>The expert adviser agreed to act as champion if a decision on the licence was deferred by the Secretary of State.</p>