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# Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences

journal homepage: [www.elsevier.com/locate/shpsc](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/shpsc)

## A 'college of astrology and medicine'? Charles V, Gervais Chrétien, and the scientific manuscripts of Maître Gervais's College ☆

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### ARTICLE INFO

#### Keywords:

Charles V  
Gervais Chrétien's College  
Astrology  
Medicine  
Scientific manuscripts

### ABSTRACT

Considered an institution mainly devoted to astrology and medicine by Simon de Phares and by some historians who believe that he was reliable, the college founded in 1371 by Charles V's first physician, Gervais Chrétien, was in fact primarily dedicated to theological students. It was not before 1377 that there were created there two bursaries for *scholares regis*, specialising in 'licit mathematical sciences', and two medical fellowships. Yet the influence of the activity of these fellows seems to have been rather moderate and—as far as we can learn from the material still extant, notably from manuscripts that belonged to Maître Gervais' College and to some of its members—this institution was devoted much more to theological studies than to medicine and the *quadrivium*.

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When citing this paper, please use the full journal title *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences*

### 1. Introduction

In the historical part of his *Elucidaire* (1494–1498), known from the end of the sixteenth century as *Recueil des plus celebres astrologues*, Simon de Phares presents Charles V as a model of a learned king to Charles VIII, and he attaches a great importance to the college founded under Charles V's patronage by Gervais Chrétien, his first physician. He mentions this institution and its library four times, first of all in his prologue:

le tres sage et debonnaire roy Charles le Quint, lequel tant estudia et ayma ceste science de astrologie, en congnoissant et voyant l'utilité d'icelle, fonda et renta a perpetuité ung college et estudians icelle, en ladicté université de Paris, ainsi qu'il sera veu cy après en son ordre, et leur donna belle librairie bien garnie de livres, speres, astrolabes, saphes et autres instrumens servans a ladicté science,<sup>1</sup> qui encores y sont, et mesmement des semblables et pareilz livres que ce detracteur ignorant a

voulu calumpnier a tort et sans cause,<sup>2</sup> laquelle fondacion fut confirmee par nostre Saint Pere le pape, lors estant, qui sur ce octroya bulle expresse, par laquelle, entre autres choses, il anathematiza tous ceulx qui presumeroyent oster ou diminuer aucuns d'iceulx livres, ce qu'il n'eust esté fait s'ilz eussent esté autres que bons.<sup>3</sup>

Simon de Phares returns to this 'college of astrology and medicine' in a more detailed way in a paragraph devoted to Charles V:

Il eut en merueilleuse recommandacion les astrologiens et se gouverna par eulx et, par especial, par ung nommé maistre Gervais Chrestien, qui fut grant et proffond astrologien et medicin, comme dit est, a la requeste duquel et autres de son sang, aymant ladite science et par grande deliberacion de son grant conseil et de toute l'université de Paris, il voulut construire—et de fait le fist—et edifier et après fonder, ou meilleur lieu de l'université de Paris, ung colliege de astrologie et medicine, ou

☆ A first version of this paper was published in French in *Médiévales*, 52, Spring 2007, 15–38.

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<sup>1</sup> For a brief survey of these instruments, see Poulle (1983).

<sup>2</sup> This 'ignorant detractor' is Guillaume de Rochefort, Chancellor of France, who, in November 1490, accused Simon de Phares of possessing a 'familiar spirit' and managed to organize a trial against him as a diviner by the official of Lyons. About the circumstances of writing of the *Elucidaire* and what Charles VIII's astrologer called his 'first persecution' (see Boudet, 1997–1999, Vol. 2, pp. 85–103).

<sup>3</sup> Boudet (1997–1999), Vol. 1, p. 22.

il mist livres, plusieurs livres singuliers desdites sciences en grant et merueilleux nombre, et telz et semblables livres que la court de Parlement me a renduz et des semblables de ceulx qui sont en differant et que l'on—ses ebethés ignorans—maintient superstitieux contre verité.<sup>4</sup> Y mist aussi plusieurs astralables, equatoires, speres et autres instrumens, comme saphees, desirees et semblables. Laquelle fondacion il fist confermer par le pape Urban V<sup>e</sup>, ensemble leur donna la disme du village de Caugie qu'il ordonna pour le vivre des deux bourciers qu'il y mist, qui furent appellés escoliers du roy. Fist en outre anathematizer tous ceulx qui presumeroyent oster ou diminuer iceulx livres et instrumens, estans oudit colliege.<sup>5</sup>

He gives some other details about what he calls 'the King's College' and its founder in a paragraph on Maître Gervais:

Maistre Gervais Chrestien, souverain medicin et astrologien, stipendié et moult aprecié du roy Charles le Quint, fut en ce temps en si grande estyme que le roy voulut que sondit colliege eust son propre nom, pour ce qu'il avoit esté l'inventeur et promoteur d'icelle fondacion. Cestui predist la mort du roy Jehan, qui fut le VIII<sup>e</sup> jour de avril mil III<sup>e</sup> LXVIII, a Londres en Angleterre. Le colliege du Roy est a Paris, entre la rue de la Herpe et Saint Severin, ou milieu de la rue de la Parcheminerie, tirant vers la conservacion, et sont diz les bourciers du coliege de astrologie et medicine, escoliers du roy.<sup>6</sup>

Lastly, a paragraph devoted to the Arabic astrologer Alubater provides some interesting details about the library of the college. Simon de Phares designates it 'the library of astrology' and tells us that he has frequented this place personally:

Alubater, le tres cler philozophe et souverain astrologien fut, selon aucuns, en ce temps. Cestui monstra les subtilles reigles de astrologie que l'on doit investiguer es nativités. Cestui a escript particulièrement sur icelles nativités et commence son livre *Dixit Alubater* et procede par les XII maisons, lequel livre ay veu au colliege du roy Charles le Quint, en la librairie de astrologie a Paris, jouxte le *Livre des IX juges*, bien correct et approuvé et, par ce, incathéné et en usage a qui en veult.<sup>7</sup>

In an article published in 1976, Richard Lemay, who believed that Simon de Phares was reliable, said

that astronomy, most probably in its astrological orientation, was in the fourteenth century a central preoccupation among scholars in the arts and medicine and among theologians at the *studium* of Paris, and that it was probably under pressure

from physicians that the teaching of the subject received the special sanction of Crown, University, and Papacy.<sup>8</sup>

Guy Beaujouan, Danielle Jacquart and I have already had the opportunity to put forward some reservations about this hypothesis.<sup>9</sup> But my participation in the jury of the thesis of Karine Rebmeister-Klein, who gave us a precious study of the library of Maître Gervais' College,<sup>10</sup> encouraged me to see all the available material in order to understand more clearly Gervais Chrétien's motives and to better estimate the place of sciences in his college and the diffusion of scientific knowledge in Paris at the end of the Middle Ages.

## 2. Gervais Chrétien and the foundation of the 'King's College'

The career of the founder is quite well known.<sup>11</sup> Gervais Chrétien was born in the 1320s, probably in Vendes (Calvados), into a family who belonged to the Norman gentry. Fellow of the King in 1345, he studied in arts and medicine in Paris, became master in medicine in 1352, and became physician of the Dauphin in 1363 and Charles V's first physician ca. 1370. Elected in 1359 as dean of the Medicine Faculty of Paris, he had his seat among regent masters of the Faculty, at last until 1379, and collected canonical prebends: canon of the Saint-Sepulchre of Caen, Notre-Dame of Bayeux, Saint-Liphard of Meung-sur-Loire (1362), of Saint-Quentin (1364), Notre-Dame of Rouen (1367), Notre-Dame of Paris (December 1370), he died in Bayeux on 10 May 1382, where he was buried in the cathedral.

In 1349, Master Robert Clément tried to create a new 'College of Bayeux', different from the institution of the same name which had been founded in 1308 by the bishop Guillaume Bonnet. Situated on the rue Hautefeuille, this college had some difficulties surviving, whereas Gervais Chrétien, Robert Clément's compatriot, had since 1360 bought several buildings and private incomes in the Latin Quarter.<sup>12</sup> On 3 June 1370, by request of the Norman Nation, the University Council decided that the students of Robert Clément's college would be settled in another one. On 22 September 1370, Maître Gervais accepted the fusion,<sup>13</sup> and six houses or parts of buildings were allocated to the new college, placed under the patronage of Notre-Dame of Bayeux.<sup>14</sup> The official act of foundation, signed on 20 February 1371 (NS), under the authority of the provost of Paris, stated that

Maistre Gervaise Crestian, maistre es arts et en medecine en l'université de Paris, premier phisicien de tres excellent et tres crestien prince Charles, par la grace de Dieu roy de France, nostre dit seigneur, afferma et dist en bonne verité que comme ja pieça, il eust propos, devocion et entencion de fonder et creer escoliers a Paris, estudians en la faculté de theologie, du diocese de Bayeux en Normandie ... des pieça avoit fondé et encores par la teneur

<sup>4</sup> These 'dazed ignorants' were the members of the Parisian Faculty of Theology, who, in February 1494, condemned as superstitious eleven volumes belonging to Simon de Phares, which had been confiscated in 1490 by the official of Lyons. It was partly in order to recover these books that Simon de Phares had appealed against the official's sentence before the Parlement of Paris, who finally rejected the appeal and condemned him to pay costs by judgment on 24 March 1494 (see Boudet, 1997–1999, Vol. 2, pp. 104–120).

<sup>5</sup> Boudet (1997–1999), Vol. 2, pp. 504–505.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 492–493.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 291–292. The first of these two treatises may be identified with the *De nativitatibus* of Abū Bakr al-Hasan ibn al-Khāsib (Alubater), translated from Arabic into Latin by Salio of Padova in 1218: cf. Carmody (1956), pp. 136–137; Vadet (1975). The second one is the *Liber novem judicum*, a twelfth-century Latin compilation on astrological interrogations ascribed to nine 'judges' and translated in 1361 by Robert Godefroy in French, by request of the Dauphin Charles. The presentation copy of this *Livre des neuf anciens juges d'astrologie* (Brussels, Bibl. Royale, MS 10319) belonged to Charles and the Dukes of Burgundy; another copy of the late fourteenth century is Paris, Bibl. de l'Arsenal, MS 2872, fols. 85<sup>ra</sup>–309<sup>vb</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> Lemay (1976), p. 204.

<sup>9</sup> Beaujouan (1997), esp. 193–194; Jacquart (1998), pp. 448–465 (esp. 453–457), Boudet (1997–1999), Vol. 2, pp. 248–254.

<sup>10</sup> Rebmeister-Klein (2005). On Maître Gervais's College, see Vol. 1, pp. 153–154, 167, 199; Vol. 2, pp. 684–701; Vol. 3, pp. 1087–1112. See also Bernard (2010), Vol. 1, pp. 217–236.

<sup>11</sup> Le Paulmier (1897), Wickersheimer (1979), Vol. 1, pp. 189–190; Bernard (2010).

<sup>12</sup> See esp. Paris, Arch. nat., MS M 163, no. 2: sale of a building in Paris, rue Saint-Jacques, by Jean Saquary, 'bourgeois de Paris', to M<sup>e</sup> Gervais Chrétien, master of arts and medicine, 19 March 1360 (NS); MS M 163, no. 6: Guillaume Mignon sales to M<sup>e</sup> Gervais Chrétien, 'fisicien du roi', 20 sous paris of private income on a house, rue des Parcheminiers, 18 April 1366; etc. The detailed list of the buildings of Maître Gervais's College is given in the foundation act of February 1371: see below, n. 14 and n. 15.

<sup>13</sup> Paris, Arch. nat., MS M 167, no. 6.

<sup>14</sup> Paris, Arch. nat., MS MM 400, fols. 15<sup>v</sup>–16.

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