Some French Holdings of the Codrington Library

Le nogramme de Monseigneur, Henry de Valois duc en Anjou. Je voy la dedans vn roi cheny.

En votre nom, Monseigneur, tay conui Le retournant, en merveilleux proue Qui vous promet un Royal honneur, Comme dedans ie voy vn Roy cheny.

An exhibition for
The Annual Conference
Of the Society of French Studies

Pridie Kal. Jul. MMIX
The eighteenth-century Library of All Souls College takes its name from Christopher Codrington, a Fellow of the College who died in 1710, bequeathing to his alma mater £10,000 to build and endow a new library together with his own collection of some 12,000 volumes. The fabric was completed between 1716 and about 1720, but the Codrington was not furnished and ready to accommodate the College's books until some thirty years later. William Blackstone, a Fellow of the College from 1743 to 1762, was active in overcoming the financial and aesthetic problems (and the evident lethargy of many of his colleagues) which stood in the way of its completion.

The first Library Minute Book was begun in November 1751. It is by no means a complete record of transactions relating to the Library, but it does contain certain lists of books approved for purchase by the Library Committee. The lists begin early in 1752 and though they, too, are certainly not exhaustive (quite apart from the fact that they naturally exclude donations), they provide positive evidence about some of the books which it was considered proper for the Library to acquire by purchase. French titles appear from the beginning. In January 1744, the policy was adopted of acquiring 'modern [European] classics' in the 'best editions' (not the earliest, but the most sumptuous), and of supporting these acquisitions with historical and bibliographical manuals, as well as natural-historical and scientific publications. The full list is to be found at the end of this exhibition catalogue. Before 1752, literary monuments in any language other than Latin and Greek were only sporadically acquired, almost always by donation.

It is not known when the bindings from French royal collections came into the possession of the College. It is to be surmised that they were purchased after the French Revolution from a sale or auction of books which their vendors had acquired if not illegally, then, at the very least, without the sanction of the previous owner.

Ian Maclean

La manière de language qui tenseignera bien a droit parler et escrire douz francsentr, All Souls MS 182, ff. 309ff.

One of the earliest manuals of French written for 'les bones gens du Roiaume dengleterre'. In the same recueil factice are to be found collections of prose and verse proverbs in French. The collection was probably made for John Stevenes, a Canon of Exeter (d. 1459), and given to All Souls between 1466 and 1494 by William Elyot, who was sometime Registrar of the Bishop of Exeter, to be placed in the chained library. It is protected by an anathema ('quis seu qui hunc liberum [...] alienare presumperit vel presumperint noverit seu noverint indignacionem omnipotentis dei ac eius maladictionem incurrere').

Watson, Descriptive catalogue of All Souls MSS, pp. 211-13.

Les Essais de Michel Seigneur de Montaigne.
Edition nouvelle, 'Leyden', Jehan Doreau, 1602

The eleventh printing of Montaigne's Essais, preceded by the short version of Marie de Gournay's preface. The bibliographical address is fictitious; Jean Doreau was a Geneva printer, who probably hoped to achieve a greater European sale of the book by avoiding any reference to the Swiss Calvinist city, as do his colleagues Eustache Vignon, Jean Crespin and the Jean and Pierre Chouët. Some titlepages of Doreau's edition record the Catholic city Cologne as the place of printing for the same reason. This is not strictly speaking a pirate, as it was produced outside the jurisdiction of France, but an example of opportunistic unauthorized printing. The College did not have this copy in its possession before 1639; it was possibly a much later acquisition. The earliest copy of Montaigne's Essais acquired by an Oxford Library is probably the edition of 1598 in the Bodleian with the shelfmark 8 M 217 Art., acquired in or before 1605.

Seyce and Maskell, Descriptive bibliography, no.11, pp. 44-6.
Society for French Studies

A small display on the

Chanson de Roland

for the Society's 50th Anniversary Conference

complementing the Bodleian's of the oldest manuscript of La chanson de Roland Proscholium, Old Bodleian Library: Tues 30 June, Wed 1 July 2009, 10 - 6.30 p.m.

29 - 30 June 2009
9 a.m. – 6.45 p.m.

in the Library's Voltaire Vestibule

Access is through the doors on the far side of the Main Reading Room (1st floor) – go down the stairs to the ground floor and through the door marked 'Voltaire Room'.

The other small Taylorian display is on Tuesday 30 June, 4.45 – 6 p.m. (drop in session), in Room 2 (on the right by the main entrance to the building).