



# A VIRTUOUS KNIGHT

Defending Marshal Boucicaut  
(Jean II Le Meingre, 1366–1421)

CRAIG TAYLOR

## A Virtuous Knight



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(Jean II Le Meingre, 1366–1421)

Craig Taylor



THE UNIVERSITY *of York*

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## Preface and Acknowledgements

The *Livre des fais du bon messire Jehan le Maingre* is one of the most famous chivalric biographies of the middle ages. Written in 1409, it presented the controversial figure of Jean II Le Meingre, known as Boucicaut (1366–1421), as a chivalric hero and role model. It is an important and, at times, unique source for the study of the history of warfare and crusading, as well as French, Italian and papal politics at the beginning of the fifteenth century. It also offers an important case-study through which to explore the complex and energetic debates surrounding knighthood in France during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, themes that I first addressed from a broader perspective in a monograph entitled *Chivalry and the Ideals of Knighthood in France During the Hundred Years War* (2013).

I first began to look more closely at the *Livre des fais* while collaborating with Jane Taylor on an English translation of the text. Up to that point, my understanding and appreciation of this text was framed by the excellent work of Denis Lalande who had first edited the text in 1985 and then published an important modern biography of Boucicaut (*Jean II le Meingre, dit Le Boucicaut (1366–1421): étude d'une biographie héroïque*) three years later. The more closely that I read and studied the *Livre des fais*, the more dissatisfied I became with recent debates regarding the identity of the author, and hence the position of this text between aristocratic and learned clerical cultures, as well as the scholarly consensus that the biography championed a conservative, nostalgic vision of chivalry at a time of mounting crisis for the French aristocracy.

In this book, I argue that the *Livre des fais* was a collaborative effort between the famous scholar Nicolas de Gonesse and the lay companions of Boucicaut, including most notably the squire named Jean d'Ony. Their efforts were directed firmly at the goal of defending the reputation of the beleaguered marshal, rather than offering wider statements about the state of the French aristocracy in the year 1409. Above all the biography set out detailed explanations for his failure to force the two rival popes to meet to bring an end to the Schism, to save Pisa from falling into the hands of the Florentines, for military defeats at the hands of the Turks and the Venetians, and for the degenerating situation in Genoa. But thanks

to the learned framework provided by Nicolas Gonesse, the *Livre des fais* carefully presented Boucicaud as a virtuous and moral man, an image that may not have rung true for modern historians but served at the time to align him with the latest cultural fashions at the French court and also to make the case that any setbacks and misfortunes that he had endured were not a sign of divine disfavour.

I am very grateful to all those who have helped me with this project. First and foremost, I owe a great debt to Jane Taylor who has been a wonderful collaborator on our translation of the biography of Boucicaud, as well as our new project on Jean de Bueil's *Le Jouvenel*. I have presented my developing ideas to a number of welcoming audiences at Dartmouth College, the University of Exeter, the University of Glasgow, the University of Manchester, the University of Odense, the University of Western Australia and the International Medieval Congress at Kalamazoo, Michigan. I would like to offer particular thanks to Andrea Tarnowski, Andrew Lynch, Anne D. Hedeman, Anne-Hélène Miller, Cecilia Gaposchkin, Charles Insley, Charles-Louis Morand-Métivier, Daisy Delogu, Emma Cayley, Godfried Croenen, James Clark, Jean-Claude Mühlethaler, Joan McRae, Justin Sturgeon, Kristin Bourassa, Lori Walters, Matthew Strickland, Rosalind Brown-Grant and Stephen Rigby. I also owe a great debt to the anonymous readers who provided invaluable guidance in shaping the final version of this book.

I could not have completed this book without the help of Erika Graham-Goering and Luke Giraudet who located important items for me in various French libraries, photographing and even transcribing key documents at very short notice so that I could meet my deadlines. At the very last minute, Hanno J. Wisman managed to identify a miniature that I had found depicting Boucicaud's fleet en route to Constantinople as coming from Sébastien Mamerot's *Les passages d'outremer*; that unlocked a very exciting new case-study in the reception of the *Livre des fais* that I discuss in the conclusion below.

Mélanie Leboucher and the Musée Jacques-Andemart were kind enough to provide me with the images from the *Boucicaud Hours* (Paris, Institut de France, Musée Jacquemart-André, MS 2, fos. 26v and 38v), which appears on the cover of this book and on page 161 below.

I undertook this project while serving as Director of the Centre for Medieval Studies at the University of York. That gave me a ringside seat to watch and to admire the work being done by Gillian Galloway and Brittany Scowcroft, who not only handle their administrative responsibilities with great skill and professionalism, but also bring together our entire community through their warmth, generosity and kindness – I am delighted to dedicate this book to them, to thank them for their support.



I am also pleased to have the chance to publish this book with the York Medieval Press, and owe a debt of thanks to Pete Biller, Caroline Palmer, the editorial board at YMP and the entire team at Boydell & Brewer.

## Abbreviations

AN	Archives Nationales
BM	Bibliothèque Municipale
BNF	Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France
DMF	<i>Dictionnaire du moyen français</i> , at <a href="http://www.atilf.fr/">www.atilf.fr/</a> dmf
fr.	français
KBR	Koninklijke Bibliotheek van België/Bibliothèque royale de Belgique
<i>Livre des fais</i>	<i>Le livre des fais du bon messire Jehan le Maingre, dit Bouciquaut, Mareschal de France et gouverneur de Jennes</i> , ed. D. Lalande (Geneva, 1985)
MS	Manuscript
n.a.f.	nouvelle acquisition française
Online Froissart	<i>The Online Froissart. A Digital Edition of the Chronicles of Jean Froissart</i> , at <a href="http://www.dhi.ac.uk/onlinefroissart">www.dhi.ac.uk/onlinefroissart</a>
Valois	Valois, Noël. <i>La France et le Grand Schisme d'Occident</i> . 4 volumes (Paris, 1896–1902)

## Timeline

- 1366** Birth of Jean II Le Meingre, dit Boucicaut
- 1368** **6/7 March**, death of Jean I Le Meingre, dit Boucicaut
- 1378** Boucicaut served as a page to Louis II duke of Bourbon in a campaign in Normandy
- 1380** **August to September**, Boucicaut joined the expedition to defend against the *chevauchée* of Buckingham
- 16 September**, death of King Charles V
- 1381** Boucicaut joined the service of Louis de Sancerre
- 1382** **26 September**, Boucicaut was knighted by Bourbon
- 27 November**, the battle of Roosebeke
- 1383** **1 to 17 September**, royal expedition to protect Flanders from the ‘crusade’ led by Bishop Hugh Despenser
- 1385** Combat with Sicart de La Barde at Chalusset
- 1386** Louis de Bourbon’s expedition to Castile to fight against John of Gaunt
- 1388** **March to June**, visit to the court of the Ottoman Sultan Murad I
- 1390** **21 to 24 March**, Saint-Inglevert combats
- 1391** **23 December**, Charles VI appointed Boucicaut as marshal of France
- 1393** **24 December**, marriage to Antoinette de Turenne
- 1396** **25 September**, the battle of Nicopolis
- 1398** Expedition against Archambaud V count of Périgord
- 1399** Expedition to Constantinople
- 1400** **14 February**, the foundation charter for the Cour Amoureuse was published in Paris
- 1400** **11 April**, foundation of the Order of the Enterprise of the Green Shield of the White Lady
- 1401** **23 March**, Boucicaut appointed governor of Genoa

- 6 November**, execution of Battista Boccanegra
- 1403**    **3 April**, Genoese fleet set sail for Cyprus  
**6 August**, attack upon Tripoli  
**10 August**, attack upon Beirut  
**7 October**, battle of Modone
- 1404**    **15 April**, Gabriele Maria Visconti paid homage to the king of France  
**27 April**, death of Philip the Bold, Duke of Burgundy  
**22 October**, Genoa withdrew from the obedience of the Roman Pope Gregory XII
- 1405**    **16 May**, Pope Benedict XIII arrived in Genoa  
**20 July**, Pisa rose up against Gabriele Maria Visconti  
**27 August**, Gabriele Maria Visconti sold Pisa to Florence
- 1406**    **6 March**, the French royal council ratified the sale of Pisa  
**25 March**, death of Boucicaut's mother Fleurie de Linières  
**27 July**, Burgundy and Orleans pay homage to King Charles VI for Pisa  
**9 October**, Pisa surrendered to Florence
- 1407**    **21 April**, planned meeting between Pope Benedict XIII and Pope Gregory XII failed to take place  
**23 November**, assassination of Louis Duke of Orleans by John the Fearless, duke of Burgundy
- 1408**    **25 April**, King Ladislaus of Naples seized Rome  
**25 May**, Charles VI called for a General Council to depose Popes Benedict XIII and Gregory XII  
**15 December**, execution of Gabriele Maria Visconti
- 1409**    **6 March**, completion of the *Livre des fais*  
**25 March**, opening of the Council of Pisa  
**30 July**, Boucicaut left Genoa  
**2 September**, uprising in Genoa
- 1410**    **10 November**, Boucicaut ordered to return to Paris
- 1411**    **10 October**, Boucicaut arrived in Paris
- 1414**    **April**, Boucicaut appointed Captain-General for Languedoc by the duke of Berry
- 1415**    **25 October**, Boucicaut captured at the battle of Agincourt
- 1416**    **19 July**, death of Antoinette de Turenne
- 1421**    **25 June**, death of Boucicaut



## INTRODUCTION

THE late middle ages was a golden age of chivalric writing. This period witnessed an exponential increase in the numbers of manuscripts of romances, vernacular chronicles and manuals of both knighthood and warfare in circulation, particularly in France. This was fuelled in part by a dramatic increase in the creation of a string of new works in both verse and prose, written by clerics but also by laymen, including experienced knights like Geoffroi de Charny, Philippe de Mézières, Antoine de La Sale and Jean de Bueil.<sup>1</sup>

This trend is illustrated by the genre of chivalric biography that became increasing popular during the fourteenth century.<sup>2</sup> There was a longstanding history of biographical writing shaped by both classical and Christian traditions, but it was very rare for knights to be commemorated in such texts until the late middle ages.<sup>3</sup> The earliest example of a chivalric biography was

<sup>1</sup> P. Contamine, 'Les traités de guerre, de chasse, de blason et de chevalerie', in *La littérature française aux XIV<sup>e</sup> et XV<sup>e</sup> siècles. Tome I (Partie historique)*, ed. D. Poirion (Heidelberg, 1988), pp. 346–67; J. Blanchard and J.-C. Mühlethaler, *Écriture et pouvoir à l'aube des temps modernes* (Paris, 2002), pp. 85–127; C. D. Taylor, *Chivalry and the Ideals of Knighthood in France During the Hundred Years War* (Cambridge, 2013); S. Fourcade, 'De l'utilité des lettres dans la carrière des armes. Guerre et culture écrite en France au XV<sup>e</sup> siècle', *Le Moyen Age*, 121 (2015), 21–40.

<sup>2</sup> For overviews of the genre, see E. Gaucher, *La biographie chevaleresque. Typologie d'un genre (XIII<sup>e</sup>–XV<sup>e</sup> siècle)* (Paris, 1994); D. B. Tyson, 'Authors, Patrons and Soldiers. Some Thoughts on Four Old French Soldiers' Lives', *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, 42 (1998), 105–20; R. A. Griffiths, 'Royal and Secular Biography', in *Understanding Medieval Primary Sources. Using Historical Sources to Discover Medieval Europe*, ed. J. T. Rosenthal (Abingdon, 2011), pp. 9–23; C. Given-Wilson, 'Chivalric Biography and Medieval Life-Writing', in *Barbour's Bruce and its Cultural Contexts: Politics, Chivalry and Literature in Late Medieval Scotland*, ed. S. Boardman and S. Foran (Cambridge, 2015), pp. 101–17.

<sup>3</sup> For the medieval tradition of biography, see T. J. Heffernan, 'Christian Biography: Foundation to Maturity', in *Historiography in the Middle Ages*, ed. D. M. Deliyannis (Leiden, 2003), pp. 115–53; M. Goodich, 'Biography, 1000–1350',

the verse life of William Marshal, 4th earl of Pembroke, that was written around 1226 and survives in just one manuscript.<sup>4</sup> From the second half of the fourteenth century, such works became increasingly common, with John Barbour's *The Bruce* (1375), the Chandos Herald's life of the Black Prince (c.1377–85), Jean Cuvelier's biography of Bertrand Du Guesclin (1381) and a partial account of the life of Jean de Montfort, duke of Brittany, written by Guillaume de Saint-André (c.1382–5).<sup>5</sup> By the start of the fifteenth century, chivalric biographies were consistently written in prose rather than verse. In 1409, for example, an anonymous author completed the *Livre des fais du bon messire Jehan le Maingre*, a biography of Jean II Le Meingre, known as Boucicaut.<sup>6</sup> The French tradition then continued with works like *La chronique du bon duc Loys de Bourbon* (c.1429) by Jean Cabaret d'Orville, the *Livre des fais de messire Jacques de Lalaing* (c.1470) and the *Histoire de Gaston IV, comte de Foix* by Guillaume Leseur (1477–9).<sup>7</sup>

Where medieval chronicles usually presented a broad narrative within which the tales of various individuals played out, chivalric biographies focused upon the life of a single knight, highlighting his adventures, heroism and courtesy.<sup>8</sup> The biographers highlighted the actions and

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in *Historiography in the Middle Ages*, ed. D. M. Deliyannis (Leiden, 2003), pp. 353–85; J. Rubenstein, 'Biography and Autobiography in the Middle Ages', in *Writing Medieval History*, ed. N. Partner (Oxford, 2005), pp. 22–41.

<sup>4</sup> *L'Histoire de Guillaume le Maréchal*, written around 1226. *The History of William Marshal*, ed. A. J. Holden, S. Gregory and D. Crouch, 3 vols. (London, 2002–6).

<sup>5</sup> J. Barbour, *Barbour's Bruce*, ed. M. P. McDiarmid and J. A. Stevenson, 3 vols. (Edinburgh, 1981–5); J. Cuvelier, *La chanson de Bertrand du Guesclin de Cuvelier*, ed. J.-C. Faucon, 3 vols. (Toulouse, 1990–3); Chandos Herald, *La vie du Prince Noir [The Life of the Black Prince]*, by Chandos Herald. Edited from the Manuscript in the University of London Library, ed. D. B. Tyson (Tübingen, 1975); G. de Saint-André, *Chronique de l'état breton. Le bon Jehan & Le jeu des échecs*, ed. J.-M. Cauneau and D. Philippe (Rennes, 2005). Another related example is Guillaume de Machaut's life of King Peter I of Cyprus (1372/3), in G. de Machaut, *La prise d'Alexandrie (The Taking of Alexandria)*, ed. and trans. R. B. Palmer (London, 2002).

<sup>6</sup> *Livre des fais*. Five years earlier, Christine de Pizan had completed the related *Livre des fais et bonnes meurs du sage roy Charles V* (1404), in C. de Pisan [Pizan], *Le livre des fais et bonnes meurs du sage roy Charles V*, ed. S. Solente, 2 vols. (Paris, 1936–40).

<sup>7</sup> J. C. d'Orville, *La chronique du bon duc Loys de Bourbon*, ed. A. M. Chazaud (Paris, 1876); E. Springer, 'Les Fais de messire Jacques de Lalaing' (unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Paris III, 1982); G. Leseur, *Histoire de Gaston IV de Foix, par Guillaume Leseur. Chronique française inédite du XVe siècle*, ed. H. Courteault, 2 vols. (Paris, 1893).

<sup>8</sup> E. Gaucher, 'Entre l'histoire et le roman: la biographie chevaleresque', *Revue des langues romanes*, 97 (1993), 15–29; *idem*, *La biographie chevaleresque*; *idem*, 'Le

accomplishments of their subjects more than their inner personalities and emotional journeys.<sup>9</sup> Most traced the five main elements of the hero's career: his childhood and chivalric education; his martial career including tournaments, formal combats and service in war; his romantic activities as a young, courtly lover, usually culminating in his marriage; his relationship with the lords or princes who advanced the hero's career by entrusting him with military or political office; and finally his death and posthumous legacy, cemented, of course, by the writing of the chivalric biography itself.<sup>10</sup>

There was naturally a close relationship between chivalric biographies and romances. Romances had long told stories of great knights, from King Arthur and his companions to Alexander the Great, Charlemagne and Godfrey de Bouillon and their supporters.<sup>11</sup> In both genres, authors were happy to employ a range of literary techniques and to embellish their characters and stories by imagining dialogue, scenes and events. In part, this reflects the close relationship between the writing of history and literature during the middle ages, and behind that, the lack of a clear distinction between the concepts of truth and fiction.<sup>12</sup> During the fifteenth century, many writers continued to explore the boundaries between biography and romance by offering fictionalized stories of real historical figures from the more recent past. The most famous example is Antoine de La Sale's *Petit Jean de Saintré* (1456), a romance that told a largely fictional story about a French knight who had served at the court of King Jean II a century earlier.<sup>13</sup>

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héros biographique, enfant bâtard de la littérature', *Bien Dire et Bien Apprendre: Revue de médiévisique*, 20 (2002), 77–88; Tyson, 'Authors, Patrons and Soldiers', pp. 105–20; R. Brown-Grant, 'Jacques de Lalaing and Chivalric Biography', in *A Knight for the Ages: Jacques de Lalaing and the Art of Chivalry*, ed. E. Morrison (Los Angeles, 2018), pp. 65–75.

<sup>9</sup> S. Ferris, 'Chronicle, Chivalric Biography and Family Tradition in Fourteenth-Century England', in *Chivalric Literature: Essays on Relations Between Literature and Life in the Later Middle Ages*, ed. L. D. Benson and J. Leyerle (Kalamazoo, 1980), pp. 25–38 (p. 35).

<sup>10</sup> W. T. Cotton, 'Teaching the Motifs of Chivalric Biography', in *The Study of Chivalry: Resources and Approaches*, ed. H. Chickering and T. H. Seiler (Kalamazoo, 1988), pp. 583–609.

<sup>11</sup> Given-Wilson, 'Chivalric Biography and Medieval Life-Writing', pp. 113–14.

<sup>12</sup> P. Courroux, *L'écriture de l'histoire dans les chroniques françaises (XIIe–XVe siècle)* (Paris, 2016), together with E. Gaucher-Rémond, '"Authentiquement et en bel stile": L'écriture biographique dans le *Livre des faits de Boucicaut* (1409)', in *Fiction et histoire. France–Italie*, ed. A. Peyronie, *Atlantide*, 3 (2015), 3–8.

<sup>13</sup> A. de La Sale, *Jehan de Saintré*, ed. J. Misrahi and C. Knudsen, 3rd edn (Geneva, 1978). Related works include *Gérard de Nevers* (c.1451–64), *L'histoire de Gilles de Chin* (c.1453–67) and *L'histoire de Gillion de Trazegnies* (1450–60).



Chivalric biographies commemorated and glorified their subjects, usually presenting these individuals as role models for their own descendants, their immediate circle and other young squires.<sup>14</sup> Such claims positioned the texts as inherently conservative and nostalgic works, self-consciously championing the heroes of the past as a template for future generations. It is therefore very tempting to see chivalric biographies as further evidence for a fantasy at the very heart of aristocratic society, especially given that they continued to celebrate tournamenting, courtly love and other aspects of chivalric culture that appear frivolous to modern audiences, and that stand in contrast to the brutality and violence hidden behind such games. This was the view of the highly influential Dutch historian Johan Huizinga, who often cited chivalric biographies to illustrate his claim that there was a significant gap between the ideal of knighthood and the reality of life during the late middle ages.<sup>15</sup> Echoing such ideas, modern commentators persist in presenting chivalric biographies as self-conscious attempts 'to reinforce and propagate the self-image and collective ideals of the noble and warrior elite'.<sup>16</sup>

Yet chivalric biographies deserve more careful attention. One of the greatest challenges of studying chivalry is the fact that the vast majority of texts from the middle ages were produced by clerics rather than by knights themselves, whose voices rarely appear unfiltered in such sources. This raises difficult questions about the relationship between the surviving evidence provided by chivalric writings and the reality of the lived culture of knights and aristocrats concealed by such texts. Chivalric biographies can offer an important contribution to that debate, given that their subject matter was the lived experience of real knights, that the authors usually drew heavily upon eye-witness accounts provided by men-at-arms and heralds, and that the resulting books were very popular among aristocratic audiences.

Furthermore, chivalric biographies were not simply written to educate and to mould future generations of knights, and thereby to defend traditional chivalric values and ideals. Some examples were certainly intended to provide role models for future knights, particularly members of the immediate family of the deceased: this was the case, for example, with the *Livre des faits de messire Jacques de Lalaing*, which was almost certainly commissioned by the Lalaing family that still owns a number of the surviving manuscripts.<sup>17</sup> But in most cases, the biographies served

<sup>14</sup> Cotton, 'Teaching the Motifs of Chivalric Biography', p. 589.

<sup>15</sup> See pages 100 and 167 below.

<sup>16</sup> Given-Wilson, 'Chivalric Biography and Medieval Life-Writing', p. 107.

<sup>17</sup> R. Brown-Grant, 'Commemorating the Chivalric Hero: Text, Image, Violence,

a more complicated function, not just championing their subjects as role models but also actively attempting to preserve, shape and control their posthumous reputation and fame. To do this effectively, authors could not simply rely upon nostalgic visions of knighthood, but had to be alive to the contemporary values and ideals of their potential audiences in order to have any chance to achieving their objectives. This leads to a second and even more important point. Chivalric biographers were not simply articulating a traditional consistent ideal of aristocratic behaviour, but rather participating in constant debate and discussion about these questions that marked the age of chivalry, shaped by changing historical contexts and by a range of different intellectual influences: chivalry 'was a malleable concept', and therefore different writers inevitably presented different visions of the ideals of knighthood.<sup>18</sup> It is no surprise, then, that individual chivalric biographies championed subtly different sets of values, placing varied emphasis upon the relative value of different kinds of deeds of arms, the continued importance of crusading service, loyalty to fellow companions-in-arms, ethical behaviour in war and other aspects of knightly behaviour.

In this book, I focus upon one of the most remarkable French chivalric biographies, the *Livre des fais du bon messire Jehan le Maingre*. Completed on 9 April 1409, this book celebrated the life of the controversial French knight, Jean II Le Meingre, known as Boucicaut. The first part of the book recalled his childhood and the early stages of his career up to 1400, reporting for example on his participation in the celebrated jousts at Saint-Inglevert in March 1390, his travels to Prussia to fight alongside the Teutonic Knights, his role in the great Nicopolis expedition to assist Sigismund king of Hungary against the Turks in 1396 and his successful relief of Constantinople in 1399. The second and third parts focused upon the story of his governorship of Genoa from 1401 until the end of the narrative in December 1408, and his involvement in both the politics of the Italian peninsula, and in particular his efforts to resolve the Papal Schism. The fourth and final part of the text presented a 'list [of] the virtues, the good habits and the good disposition of the marshal'.<sup>19</sup>

The anonymous author claimed that the *Livre des fais* had been commissioned by Boucicaut's companions-in-arms as a celebration of

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and Memory in the *Livre des faits de messire Jacques de Lalaing*, in *Violence and the Writing of History in the Medieval Francophone World*, ed. N. D. Guynn and Z. Stahulkak (Cambridge, 2013), pp. 169–86, and *A Knight for the Ages: Jacques de Lalaing and the Art of Chivalry*, ed. E. Morrison (Los Angeles, 2018).

<sup>18</sup> C. Given-Wilson, 'Chivalric Biography and Medieval Life-Writing', pp. 107–12.

<sup>19</sup> *Livre des fais*, pp. 390 and 456.

his deeds and accomplishments, designed to inspire future generations to emulate his accomplishments and virtues.<sup>20</sup> Yet it is difficult to take seriously the claim that the book was written for posterity. Unlike most chivalric biographies, it was not written after the subject's death but while the marshal was at the height of his career. Indeed, the *Livre des fais* was clearly completed in some haste, with the narrative stopping somewhat abruptly in December 1408. Furthermore the only surviving manuscript of the book is incomplete, missing a planned programme of illuminations and even including a number of blank pages upon which the narrative might have been continued. It therefore seems more reasonable to assume that the *Livre des fais* was written for a more immediate and specific purpose, that it to say to defend his reputation at the French court in the aftermath of a series of dreadful setbacks.<sup>21</sup>

During the course of his governorship of Genoa, Boucicaut had suffered a naval defeat at the hands of the Venetians in 1403, lost control of the city of Pisa to Florence in 1406 and, worst of all, had publicly failed to broker a solution to the Papal Schism that was tearing Christendom apart. All of this risked jeopardizing Boucicaut's relationships with the leading royal princes at the French court, upon whose support he depended when King Charles VI was incapacitated by illness. There were certainly many critics of the marshal in France during this period, and the echoes of this can be seen in a number of contemporary texts. For example, in 1406, the anonymous *Songe véritable* identified Jean II Le Meingre as one of the greedy members of a regime profiting from and exploiting the generosity of Charles VI.<sup>22</sup> Even more aggressive was the chronicler of Saint-Denis, Michel Pintoin. Reporting upon Boucicaut's elevation to first marshal of France in 1397, Pintoin offered a famous description of Jean II Le Meingre: 'he was a small man, but strong and robust; he was resolute, but carried away; active, but impetuous, and could not keep any measure in his anger'.<sup>23</sup>

This was an effective summary of the powerful criticisms that Pintoin had levelled against Boucicaut for his role in the ill-fated Nicopolis

<sup>20</sup> *Livre des fais*, pp. 79. For similar statements, see *Livre des fais*, pp. 35–6, 300, 365, 394–5 and 410.

<sup>21</sup> For a detailed discussion of this argument, see chapter 2 below.

<sup>22</sup> *Le songe véritable, pamphlet politique d'un Parisien du XVe siècle*, ed. H. Moranville (Paris, 1891), p. 290. This echoed criticisms of Boucicaut's father, Jean I Le Meingre: see pages 12–13 below.

<sup>23</sup> *Chronique du Religieux de Saint-Denis contenant le règne de Charles VI, de 1380 à 1422*, ed. L. Bellaguet, 6 vols. (Paris, 1839–52), II, 548, together with B. Guenée, *L'opinion publique à la fin du moyen âge d'après la 'Chronique de Charles VI' du Religieux de Saint-Denis* (Paris, 2002), p. 53.

expedition the previous year. The chronicler had described the marshal as a young man unable to control his boiling ardour who had ignored the prudent advice of Sigismund at the start of the campaign, dismissed the warnings of the approach of the Turkish army at Nicopolis, and again rejected Sigismund's advice before the battle itself, leading to disaster.<sup>24</sup>

The anonymous author of the *Livre des fais* denounced the slander against Boucicaut circulating at the French court, revealing the real reason why he was writing the biography – to present the ‘authorized’ account of the marshal’s governorship of Genoa, and in the process highlight his outstanding qualities as a knight and as a military leader.<sup>25</sup> The *Livre des fais* offered a sophisticated defence of Boucicaut, not merely setting out his version of events but also describing the moral foundations of his character. It recounted how Jean II Le Meingre had learned to be such a successful and respected knight as a young man, underlining his absorption and hence his embodiment of core chivalric qualities like bravery and loyalty. Then in the final part, the biographer abandoned the narrative account of the life of Boucicaut and offered a more analytical discussion of virtues, morals and good habits of the marshal, praising his piety and charity, ethical and disciplined approach to war, bravery, generosity, chastity, self-discipline, love of justice, mercy and eloquence. The purpose of this was to demonstrate that Boucicaut was such a worthy individual that one could not regard any setback or misfortune that he might have endured as a divine judgement against him.

Modern commentators frequently view the emphasis placed upon Boucicaut’s virtues and qualities in the *Livre des fais* in conservative attempt to champion traditional knightly ideals in reaction to a crisis consuming the French aristocracy at the start of the fifteenth century. For example, Gaucher-Rémond has recently argued that the *Livre des fais* sought to glorify Boucicaut by reimagining him in terms of a nostalgic ideal of knighthood based upon the great heroes of chivalric literature, and that the reason for doing this was both to defend him in the face of his personal challenges, but also to advocate the old-fashioned courtly values to which he ascribed as a solution to the wider crisis highlighted by military defeats like Nicopolis. She therefore views the *Livre des fais* as an example of propaganda on behalf of the knightly class as a whole, written to respond to their critics and to shape public opinion.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> *Chronique du Religieux de Saint-Denis*, II, 488, 500 and 502, and also see pages 85–7 below.

<sup>25</sup> *Livre des fais*, pp. 336–8, and see chapter 2 below.

<sup>26</sup> Gaucher-Rémond, “Autentiquement et en bel stile”, pp. 1–10, and *idem*, ‘Propagande et opinion publique dans le *Livre des faits du Maréchal Boucicaut*’,