

Translating the Past



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In 1409 Laurent de Premierfait (c. 1380-1418) produced a French translation of

Boccaccio's "De casibus virorum illustrium" ("On the Fates of Famous Men"), a fourteenth-century text containing cautionary historical tales about the corrupting effects of power. Richly illustrated copies of the translation, known as "Des cas des nobles homes et femmes", became enormously popular throughout Europe, allowing a consideration not only of how Boccaccio's Latin made its way into Laurent's French but also how the text was converted into visual images."Translating the Past" traces the history of Laurent's work from the first copies made for the dukes of Berry and Burgundy to manuscripts independently produced by artists and booksellers in Paris. In certain cases, the results of these copies were artistic masterpieces in their own right - as is the example owned by the J. Paul Getty Museum, which was painted around 1415 by the Boucicaut Master under King Charles VII of France.

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