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Autor: Rickard, Peter
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«Prier» and its constructions from Old to early Modern French

The purpose of this article is to examine the ways in which dependent constructions used with *prier* have evolved, from the earliest Old French texts to the early modern period. Some aspects of this question could certainly be paralleled in the case of other verbs too, but the parallel would not be complete, for 'chaque mot a son histoire', and *prier* is unique in having a cluster of denotations and connotations not matched by any other verb, and this must be taken into account when we consider the constructions in which it occurs. Excluded from consideration is the use of *prier* in *incise* (the common type *je vous (en) prie* in its medieval forms), and also the use of *prier* with a pronominal or substantival complement but without a dependent construction, as in *prier Dieu*, which in Modern French constitutes a rather special case, whereas in medieval French *prier* admitted of a far wider range of complements, as *TL*, s.v. *prier* col. 1842–3 shows. What this means in semantic terms is that today, as a general rule, *prier* with a substantival complement but no dependent verb is limited to the idea of prayer, whereas in Old French this was not so. Where, however, the sense is further completed by a dependent construction, it is context, and context alone, which tells us that in *priez Dieu de nous pardonner*, *prier* implies prayer, and is an extension of *prier Dieu*, whereas in *priez le médecin de venir* only a more or less polite request is being expressed, and the sentence is, in modern terms, hardly an extension of **priez le médecin*.

My aim then is to examine the dependent constructions found with *prier* in the course of its history, in the kind of grammatical situation in which a request is being made, or an invitation issued, or a prayer uttered, in order that a desired consequence shall ensue. Naturally, prayers, requests and invitations are not made in a vacuum: it will normally emerge from the context that the wished-for action is to be carried out by a particular agent or by particular agents. There are different grammatical ways of indicating this agency. The person or deity to whom the request, invitation or prayer is addressed may be explicitly indicated by means of a pronoun or by a substantive which is the complement of the verb *prier*¹. Convention has it that if the construction used is *prier de* + infinitive, the agent of the action expressed by the dependent infinitive will be taken to be identical with the complement of *prier*. This convention provides an admirably concise construction of a kind which has found favour with many other verbs too. There are however two restrictions in the use of *prier de* + infinitive. The first is that it is impossible to use *prier* in this way without a substantival or pronominal complement, and if the speaker or writer has no particular agent in mind for

¹ The question whether the complement was direct or indirect, i.e. whether *prier* was transitive or intransitive, is one which will be dealt with at the end of this article, see p. 155s.

the carrying out of the action expressed by the dependent verb, then he has to use a different construction. The second restriction is that, by convention, *prier quelqu'un de* + infinitive excludes the possibility that the subject of *prier* can also be the subject of the dependent verb², and this restriction has applied ever since the construction came into being³.

It is generally true to say that dependent infinitive constructions were much more rare in medieval French than they are today; thus such verbs as *commander*, *ordonner*, *requerre/requerir*, *conseiller*, *louer*, *defendre*, *veer*, *empêcher*⁴, as well as *prier*, were normally constructed with the subjunctive and not the infinitive. The former construction had the advantage of being grammatically explicit – if not slightly redundant – in a way in which the infinitive was not. In what is by far the most common type in medieval French, grammatical explicitness was achieved by indicating the complement of *prier* and then, in a subordinate clause introduced by *que*⁵, by referring back to that complement by means of a subject pronoun which could however be omitted. A very simple and truly basic example will serve to illustrate the point:

Je vos pri que vos me diez qui vos estes
(*La Queste del Saint Graal*, ed. Pauphilet, p. 260, 11.15–16)

It sometimes happened of course that *prier* had no explicit complement, yet the identity of the agent of the subordinate action would be implied by the context and above all by the usually explicit subject of the subordinate verb:

Puis eut conseil qu'il envoya grands messages par tous ses amis, en humblement
prient que chascun fut prest et appareillié de faire son devoir
(Jean le Bel, *Chronique*, ed. Viard & Déprez, i., p. 281–2)
Quant cil oïrent ce, si furent en grant esperance, et commencerent a proier que il
eüst merci d'eus
(*Li Fet des Romains*, ed. Flutre & Sneyders de Vogel, p. 31)

also, not entirely parallel with the last two examples, since the implied complement of *prier* is not the same as the subject of the dependent verb:

Les genz du chastel proient selonc leur creance por lui que il puist repaier a joie
et a santé
(*Perlesvaus*, ed. Nitze & Jenkins, ll. 2025–6)

There are other ways, too, in which the subjunctive construction had advantages over the infinitive.

² It is interesting to note that whereas in Modern French *demander de* + infinitive has in general been replaced by *demander à* + infinitive, it is still correct to say *il me demanda de s'en aller*, where the subject of both verbs is the same.

³ I have found only one aberrant example, and that a late one, in the sixty-six texts examined. In *Et ainsi l'abondant, le pria de luy pouvoir dire un mot en particulier*, the subject is Lindamor, whereas *l'*, *le* and *luy* all refer to Polemas. (d'Urfé, *L'Astrée*, ed. Vaganay, vol. i, p. 334).

⁴ This would be less true, however, of *rover* which was already frequently used with the infinitive in Old French.

⁵ *Que* could be omitted paratactically.

1) when the subject of the dependent verb was indefinite:

Et li visquens si hurta a l'uis et pria que on le laissast ens
 (*Le Roman de Cassidorus*, ed. Palermo, i, parag. 86)

2) when the subject of the dependent verb was different from the complement of *prier*:

E prioit doucement sa fame que force ne pacience ne li fausist au besoing
 (*Vie de S. Eustace*, ed. Murray, parag. xi, 11–12)
 e si te pri, Sire, que cist feus ardanx deviegne fine rosee
 (*ib.* parag. xxxvii, l. 23)
 Et por ce pri je au Sauveor, se cist est chevaliers qui ci vient, qu'il ait force et
 hardement et vertu de desfendre son cors envers le mien
 (*Perlesvaus*, ll. 2955–7)

We could also include in this category those cases where the subject of the dependent verb, though not identical with the complement of *prier*, is subsumed in it. It can easily be seen that the infinitive would be impossible here:

Et, por ce que je face ce que vos n'oseroiz requerre, vos pri ge que *nos* lessons
 ceste bataille
 (*La Mort le roi Artu*, ed. Frappier, parag. 157, ll. 23–5)

Of fairly common occurrence in this sub-category is the type *je pri a toz ... que chascun ...*

3) when the dependent verb is in the passive voice:

Je vous pri que la loi au Sauveor ne soit mise en oubli ne en nonchaloir la ou vous
 la porroiz essaucier
 (*Perlesvaus*, ll. 5428–30)

4) when the dependent verb is impersonal:

Souvent prie a Dieu qu'i li plaise
 A li alegier ceste paine
 (*Le Roman du comte d'Anjou*, ed. Roques, ll. 5638–9)
 si vos pri por Dieu que il vos en soviegne
 (*Perlesvaus*, l. 2386)
 mais je vous pri de tout mon pooir que en vous ait pitié et droiture et misericorde
 (*Le Roman de Cassidorus*, i. parag. 68)⁶

5) when the subject of the dependent verb is the same as the subject of *prier* (as we have seen, convention made this impossible when the infinitive was used):

E [jo] pri que jo puisse venir devant lui
 [*Obsecro ergo ut videam faciem regis*]
 (*Li quatre livre des reis*, ed. Curtius, p. 85)

⁶ Categories 3) and 4) may of course legitimately be regarded as sub-categories of 2).

Grant pieça qu'ele pria a ses dez qu'ele ne veïst gote tresqu'a icele eure que la
Novele Lois seroit abatue

(*Perlesvaus*, 11. 9052–3)

Icelui jor meïsmes proierent li dui frere d'Escalot a Lancelot que il fussent de sa
compaignie et que il i fussent comme chevalier de sa banniere

(*La Mort le roi Artu*, parag. 56, 11. 8–11)

- 6) when the subjunctive in the dependent clause is followed by *que* and another clause in the indicative, implying a switch from the literal meaning of *prier* to a loose use of the verb as a simple declarative:

Et lui prieras et requerras doucement qu'il se veuille amender *et que en la fin tu ne le
pourroies souffrir*

(*Le Songe du vieil pelerin*, ed. Coopland, ii, p. 312)

et bien y paru, car elle veoit les clerks de l'université de Paris qui si humblement
la prioient qu'elle se repentist et revocast de celle malle erreur, *et que tout luy seroit
pardonné* par penitance

(*Journal d'un bourgeois de Paris*, ed. Tuetey, p. 269, parag. 578)

In this last type, although there is a kind of semantic breakdown, the presence of two *que*-clauses at least provides some measure of grammatical symmetry, which the infinitive construction could not match⁷.

If I have dwelt on special cases where the subjunctive had obvious advantages over the infinitive, or at least could not be replaced by it, I must now emphasize that all such cases, even considered collectively, were found, not surprisingly, to be of much less frequent occurrence, throughout the length and breadth of the texts examined, than the basic and indeed for a long time the dominant type represented in its most elementary form by the example *je vos pri que vos me diez qui vos estes* already quoted on p. 134 above. It was essentially this type which gradually came to be replaced by the infinitive construction, and it is a major purpose of this article to trace the history of that construction and of its use side by side with the traditional subjunctive construction which it eventually ousted wherever it was grammatically possible for it to do so. By 'infinitive construction' I mean in the first instance the infinitive introduced by *de*, the earliest to occur in the texts considered. A further complication is presented by the rise – and fall – in Middle French of a 'pure' infinitive which it would be question-begging to describe as an accusative and infinitive construction; and there is also the minor case of *prier à* + infinitive – if it is not also question-begging to call it an infinitive. These questions will be dealt with later.

In order to trace the rise, the coexistence and the respective fortunes of these constructions, a total of seventy texts were examined, ranging in date from the Strasbourg Oaths to the *Mémoires* of Saint-Simon. Four of the texts examined proved entirely negative, but all occurrences of any of the relevant constructions in the remaining sixty-six were noted and classified.

⁷ For the nearest equivalent, see the three examples on p. 142s. below.

The following table will show, in progressive chronological order, the relative frequencies of subjunctive and infinitive constructions, as well as the significant presence or absence of the one or the other.

	subj.	de + inf.	pure inf.	à + inf.
<i>La Séquence de sainte Eulalie</i> (ed. Foerster & Koschwitz)	1	—	—	—
<i>Jonas (Fragment de Valenciennes)</i> (ed. Foerster & Koschwitz)	1	—	—	—
<i>La Passion de Clermont</i> (ed. Foerster & Koschwitz)	1	—	—	—
<i>La Vie de saint Leger</i> (ed. Foerster & Koschwitz)	3	—	—	—
<i>La Vie de saint Alexis</i> (ed. Meunier)	8	—	—	—
<i>La Chanson de Roland</i> (ed. Whitehead)	9 ⁸	—	—	—
<i>The Voyage of St. Brendan</i> (ed. Waters)	7	—	— ⁹	—
<i>Le Pèlerinage de Charlemagne</i> (ed. Koschwitz)	3	1	—	—
<i>Li quatre livre des reis</i> (ed. Curtius)	12	—	—	—
Maurice de Sully, <i>Sermons</i> (ed. Robson)	36	—	—	—
Garnier, <i>La Vie de saint Thomas</i> <i>Becket</i> (ed. Walberg)	22	—	—	—
Chrétien, <i>Le Conte du Graal</i> (ed. Roach)	27	5	—	—
<i>Partonopeu de Blois</i> (ed. Gildea)	12	4	—	—
<i>Perlesvaus</i> (ed. Nitze & Jenkins)	98	3	—	—
Villehardouin, <i>La Conquête de Constantinople</i> (ed. Faral)	15	—	—	—
Henri de Valenciennes, <i>Histoire de</i> <i>l'empereur Henri de Constantinople</i> (ed. Longnon)	12	—	—	—
<i>Li Fet des Romains</i> (ed. Flutre & Sneyders de Vogel)	26	3	—	—

⁸ This figure disregards 11. 1177–8 and 1741, where *Pur Deu vos pri* is best regarded as parenthetical, and what follows as imperative rather than dependent but paratactic. Cf. *Brendan* 11. 329–30.

⁹ I discount *Enfern pried vetheir oveoc* (1.65), where both verbs have the same subject. This was one of two examples of this kind where the pure infinitive was used. The other is in Rabelais: *Plus tost [je] prie Dieu estre à vos piedz veu royde mort en vostre desplaisir que, sans vostre plaisir, estre veu vif marié* (*Tiers livre*, ch. 48, p. 455).

	subj.	de + inf.	pure inf.	à + inf.
Robert de Clari, <i>La Conquête de Constantinople</i> (ed. Lauer)	3	—	—	—
<i>La Queste del Saint Graal</i> (ed. Pauphilet)	79	2	—	—
<i>La Mort le roi Artu</i> (ed. Frappier)	38	1	—	—
<i>La Vie de saint Eustace</i> (ed. Murray)	4	—	—	—
Philippe de Novare, <i>Mémoires</i> (ed. Kohler)	15	—	—	—
<i>Récits d'un ménestrel de Reims</i> (ed. De Wailly)	9	—	—	—
<i>Le Roman de Cassidorus</i> (ed. Palermo)	75	—	—	—
Guillaume de S. Pathus, <i>Les Miracles de S. Louis</i> (ed. Fay)	43	—	—	—
Joinville, <i>La Vie de S. Louis</i> (ed. De Wailly)	45	1	—	—
Jean Maillart, <i>Le Roman du comte d'Anjou</i> (ed. Roques)	37	1	—	—
Jean le Bel, <i>Chronique</i> (ed. Viard & Déprez)	47	2	—	—
<i>Le Livre du chevalier de La Tour Landry</i> (ed. Montaiglon)	34	5	—	—
<i>Le Livre du roi Modus et de la royne Ratio</i> (ed. Tilander)	29	—	—	—
Philippe de Mézières, <i>Le Songe du vieil pelerin</i> (ed. Coopland)	24	1	—	—
<i>Le Ménagier de Paris</i> (ed. Pichon)	43	1	—	—
Froissart, <i>Chroniques</i> (xii & xiii) (ed. Mirot)	45	4	—	1
<i>Les quinze joies de mariage</i> (ed. Rychner)	16	—	—	—
Chartier, <i>Le Quadrilogue invectif</i> (ed. Droz)	—	—	1	—
Jean Cabaret d'Orville, <i>La Chronique du bon duc</i> <i>Loys de Bourbon</i> (ed. Chazaud)	43	2	—	—
Perceval de Cagny, <i>Chroniques</i> (ed. Moranvillé)	5	—	—	—
Antoine de la Sale, <i>La Salade</i> (ed. Desonay)	12	4	—	—
<i>Journal d'un bourgeois de Paris</i> (ed. Tuetey)	6	2	—	—
François Villon, <i>Oeuvres</i> (ed. Thuasne)	6	—	—	—

	subj.	de + inf.	pure inf.	à + inf.
<i>La Farce de maistre Pierre Pathelin</i> (ed. Holbrook)	5	–	–	–
<i>Les cent nouvelles nouvelles</i> (ed. Sweetser)	80	9	1	–
Jean de Roye, <i>Journal</i> (ed. Mandrot)	13	4	1	–
<i>Le Roman de Jehan de Paris</i> (ed. Wickersheimer)	25	–	–	–
Commynes, <i>Mémoires</i> (ed. Calmette)	23	5	8	–
Philippe de Vigneulles, <i>Les cent nouvelles nouvelles</i> (ed. Livingston)	62	4	–	–
Le Loyal Serviteur, <i>Bayard</i> (ed. Prior)	29	1	3	–
Rabelais, <i>Gargantua/Pantagruel</i> (ed. Garnier)	17	–	23	–
Hélisenne de Crenne, <i>Les Angoysses douloureuses</i> (Paris, Denys Janot, 1538)	27	11	3	–
Noël du Fail, <i>Baliverneries & Propos rustiques</i> (ed. Lefèvre)	8	3	14	2
Marguerite de Navarre, <i>L'Heptaméron</i> (Paris, Prevost; Orleans, Gybres, 1559)	50	72	55	–
Pierre de Boaistuau, <i>Histoires prodigieuses</i> (Paris, pour Jean Longis & Robert le Mangnier, 1561)	1	7	–	–
Montaigne, <i>Essais</i> (ed. Strowski)	4	17	3	–
D'Urfé, <i>L'Astrée</i> , vols. i & ii (ed. Vaganay)	21	73	–	–
D'Aubigné, <i>Histoire universelle</i> , vol. i (Maillé, 1616)	3	12	3	–
Sorel, <i>Histoire comique de Francion</i> (ed. Fay)	6	73	–	2
Guez de Balzac, <i>Lettres 1618–34</i> (Oeuvres, Paris, chez Thomas Jolly, 1665, vol. i)	2	17	–	–
Scarron, <i>Le Roman comique</i> (ed. Bénac)	5	55	–	1
<i>Le Roman comique</i> (anon. continuation) (ed. Bénac)	1	27	–	–
Furetière, <i>Le Roman bourgeois</i> (ed. Mongrédien)	2	32	–	–
Molière, <i>Comédies en prose</i> (Oeuvres, Paris, chez Thierry, 1682)	1	62	–	–
Mme de Lafayette, <i>La Princesse de Clèves</i> (ed. Ashton)	1	17	–	–
Mme de Sévigné, <i>Lettres choisies</i> (ed. Faguet)	6	33	–	–

	subj.	de + inf.	pure inf.	à + inf.
Bossuet, <i>Oraisons funèbres</i> (ed. Truchet)	2	1	–	–
La Bruyère, <i>Caractères</i> (ed. Garapon)	–	5	–	1
Saint-Simon, <i>Mémoires</i> , vol. i (ed. Truc)	4	63	–	1

It will be seen at once from the foregoing table that the construction involving *de* + infinitive, though clearly attested, is rather rare up to the end of the Middle Ages, and is greatly outnumbered in its occurrences by the subjunctive construction, which must be regarded as the traditional one, as well as the one enjoying the wider range of grammatical possibilities. We have already seen grammatical situations in which *de* + infinitive, however well established, could not have been substituted for the subjunctive in any case, but that factor accounts to only a relatively minor extent for the numerical disproportion.

Let us, then, look first at the earliest examples of *de* + infinitive in order to discover if possible what their common characteristics are, and in order to form some opinion as to their theoretical interchangeability with the subjunctive. Nineteen examples were found altogether, in twenty-five texts composed before 1300. The earliest attestation of all is not ideally clear-cut. It occurs in *Le Pèlerinage de Charlemagne à Jérusalem*:

Et dist li patriarches: 'Savez dont je vos pri?
De Sarazins destruire, qui nos ont en despit' (11. 226–7)

We can easily identify this as an example of the type listed in *TL* (s.v. *prier*, col. 1841–2) as *prier aucun d'aucune rien*, a type in which *aucune rien* could include the infinitive, viewed perhaps as a verbal noun. Loosely, then, our first example fits that category, and the same applies to the following passage from *La Queste del Saint Graal*:

car por amor qu'il eussent a toi ne voloient il prier Nostre Seignor
fors de ce qu'il devoient, ce est de rendre a chascun son droit
(p. 137, 11. 8–11)¹⁰

as well as to a somewhat later example from Joinville's *Vie de saint Louis*:

'Sire, faites ce que messires vous proie, de demourer avec li tant
comme il yert en Provence' (p. 237, F–G)

A particularly well-attested type (considering the limited number of early examples)

¹⁰ For another example of *ne prier fors de*, cf. *La Mort le roi Artu*, parag. 184, 11.51–2: *Je ne vos pri fors de ma mort vengier*.

consists of a very elementary structure, *prier de* followed by a simple intransitive verb such as *remanoir*, *herbergier*, or *revenir*.

Remanoir:

Car se vos avant aliez
 Bon hostel hui mais n'ariez;
 Por che de remanoir vos pri
 De remanoir molt li prîa,
 Mais mesure Gavains li a
 Toute sa proiere escondite
 Et comande a tote sa gent
 Que de remanoir molt li prîent
 Quant levé furent de table,
 Li preudom, qui molt fu cortois,
 Prîa de remanoir un mois
 Le vallet qui dalez lui sist

(Conte du Graal, 11. 5179–81)
 (ib., 11. 5635–7)
 (ib., 11. 2924–5)
 (ib., 11. 1570–3)

Herbergier:

Se li prîa de herbergier
 Molt debonairement et bel
 Je vos pri d'o moi herbergier
 je vos proiasse molt volentiers de herbergier
 se ge n'eüsse grant essoine

(ib., 11. 5174–5)
 (Partonopeu de Blois, 1. 7869)
 (Perlesvaus, 11. 1663–4)

Revenir:

Parthonopex remaint dolens
 Et le proie de revenir

(Partonopeu de Blois, 11. 6342–3)

In these examples, can the infinitive be regarded as the equivalent of a substantive? It is well known that *any* medieval French infinitive could be used substantivally, and the absence or presence of the definite article is not a very reliable criterion for deciding, but it is difficult to reconcile substantival use with *pria de remanoir un mois*. The type *pria dou remanoir* is as a matter of fact attested, but it proved to be very rare in the texts examined¹¹.

The other type represented in the texts composed before 1300 consists of *prier de* used with a transitive verb, which is in most cases accompanied by an explicit complement which may be substantival or pronominal:

Qant on out mangié as tables, la damoisele prie le roi
 de faire sa besoige
 A l'ainzjornee ot Drappés toz ses homes a armes aprestez,
 si les charja Lucterius et Cadorix, [et] lor proia de la
 besoigne bien fere, car il estoit bleciez, si remandroit
 por la vile garder

(Perlesvaus, 11. 8188–9)
 (Li Fet des Romains, p. 322, 11. 14–17)

¹¹ *Du demourer fut moult prié et requis, mais pour neant estoit occurs in La Salade* (c. 1440), p. 98 (B). In a much earlier example, *ne me proies ja dou remanoir* (*Li Fet des Romains*, p. 472, 1.12), it should be realized that *dou remanoir* is the equivalent of *que tu remaignes*, not of *que je ramaigne*! And when transitive verbs are used, *dou* should be interpreted as *de* + pronominal *le* not *de* + masculine definite article, as in *si ne me priet nus dou relaier, que je n'en feroie nient* (*Perlesvaus*, 11. 6883–4).

De la viande querre et porveoir proia mout cels d'Ostun,
 mes il ne l'en firent pas grant aide (ib., p. 248, 11. 3–4)
 se je voi que il ait tort, *je li proierai de l'adrecier* (Perlesvaus, 11. 8032–3)
 et voloît que tuit cil qui de rien l'amoient *proiassent le senat de lui*
essaucier et d'otroier li honor de vesque que il requeroit
 (Li Fet des Romains, p. 335, 11. 11–13)

Further complication of this type is however already possible. Thus a transitive infinitive and its complement may be followed by one or more intransitive ones:

Ses vos envoie Melior
 Et vos prie d'armes porter
 De tornoier et de joster (Partonopeu de Blois, 11. 2016–8)
 Et prie tos de lui amer,
 D'a lui venir et retorner
 Quant il en oront son besoing (ib., 11. 3749–51)

Prier de + infinitive may even be followed, asymmetrically, by the subjunctive construction:

Et cil li done volentiers, mes *mout le prie de bien fere et qu'il ne lest*
en nule maniere qu'il ne soit chascune semaine confés
 (La Queste del Saint Graal, p. 129, 11. 22–24)

Since the date 1300 was an arbitrary cut-off point, we should not expect the situation to change dramatically at first, when we begin to examine texts of the period 1300–1500. In fact we continue to find fairly frequent occurrences of a very basic type, where the infinitive is intransitive and is self-contained, e.g. *aller*, *descendre*, *venir*, *demourer*, or is completed by a minimal adverbial indication such as *y*. But side by side with these, we soon find more elaborate complements: *de demourer encores un petit de temps*; *de demourer avec li tant comme il yert en Provence*; *de venir loger avec eux*; *de venir mangier en leurs maisons*; *de venir herbergier chiez son seigneur et chiez elle*; and, involving two infinitives, *de venir au duc et de couchier avec lui*. Also of frequent occurrence (and no less frequent later too) is the use of *prier* in the sense of 'to invite', associated particularly with meals, a sense not found before 1300 in the context of meals, though it is possible that something of it is present in the type we have already seen: *prier de demourer* and *prier de herbergier*. We now find regularly such combinations as *de disner avec luy*; *de soupper avecques eulx*; *de bancquetter*; *de disner*; *de disner avec vous*; *de disner chez ung tel et chez ung tel*; *de soupper à l'ostel*; *de soupper au chasteau*; *de disner en son logis*.

We occasionally find an asymmetrical construction in which *de* + infinitive is followed by *que* + indicative, reflecting a loose use of *prier* as a mere declarative verb¹²:

¹² For a less asymmetrical construction involving the subjunctive, see p. 136 above. *Prier de* + infinitive, *et que* + indicative, might be compared with the switch from injunctive to declarative use in *dire de ... et que*. See my article *The Syntax of 'dire' used injunctively*, in *ZRPh* 96 (1980), 57s.

ilz desirerent sa compagnie et luy prierent de venir loger avec eulx,
et qu'ilz feroient la meilleur chere de jamais

(*Les cent nouvelles nouvelles*, 63, 11. 11–13)

mais Eutrapel ... l'arresta, le priant pour la pareille,
aussi bien puis qu'on sçavoit qu'il estoit coqu, d'achever,
et qu'il avoit grand haste pour un homme de pié.

(Du Fail, *Baliverneries*, p. 119)

This construction is found even later, in Montaigne:

& l'embrassant estroitement, comme, par la pesanteur de sa douleur,
elle deffailloit de coeur & de forces, la pria de porter un peu plus
patiemment cet accident pour l'amour de luy, & que l'heure estoit
venue où il avoit à montrer ... le fruit qu'il avoit tiré de ses estudes

(*Essais*, ii, 35, p. 561–2)

Rather more rare, though already attested in *La Queste del Saint Graal* as we have seen on p. 142 above, is the type where the sense of *prier* remains constant, but *de* + infinitive is followed by *que* + subjunctive:

Et celluy qui parloit de ce au duc c'estoit Chastelmorand, qui lui pria
de vouloir donner les meubles de la forteresse aux gens de son hostel ...
et que Goudinot, qui à lui s'estoit rendu, lui demourast prisonnier

(*Chronique du bon duc Loys de Bourbon*, p. 95–6)

It will be noted however that in this last case, the subject of the verb in the subjunctive is no longer the complement of *prier*, so that the asymmetrical construction is unavoidable: to that extent, the parallel with the example on p. 142 is incomplete.

Where the infinitive is transitive, the construction may still be minimally brief, and no complement may be present, e.g. *de bien fere* (*Journal d'un bourgeois de Paris*, p. 195 and 232; Ph. de Vigneulles, *Les cent nouvelles nouvelles*, p. 180); *de bien en mieulx continuer* (Jean de Roye, *Journal*, i, 44 and 63); *d'amer* (*Livre du chevalier de La Tour Landry*, p. 55); *d'attendre* (Commynes, *Mémoires*, iii, 140); or, the complement may be simply pronominal: *de les attendre* (Antoine de La Sale, *La Salade*, p. 88); *de les adreschier* (*ib.*, p. 166); *de les bien retenir et les garder* (*Livre du chevalier de La Tour Landry*, p. 278). With increasing frequency, however, we find quite elaborate complements:

Et aussi molt nous mercia
Et pria de li moustrer voie
Par ou s'en voit, c'on ne la voie

(*Le Roman du comte d'Anjou*, 11. 5214–6)

Je vous prie de bien celler ce conseil

(*Livre du chevalier de la Tour Landry*, p. 280)

Sy me pria de retenir .iii. enseignemens entre les autres

(*ib.*, p. 286)

fist prier à l'endemain en son nom de donner à tous les
chevaliers qui la estoient, à disner

(Froissart, *Chroniques*, xiii, 230)

... nous prieroit de remettre arriere ce que nous tenons pour la belle
aventure et bonne fortune que eusmes à Poitiers

(*ib.*, xii, 16)

et [je] prie à chascun de croire que ce ne sont que choses
controuees par l'ancien commun parler des simples gens

(Antoine de La Sale, *La Salade*, p. 123)

Elle ne fut pas honteuse de le requerre et prier de continuer
ce qu'il avoit encommencé

(*Les cent nouvelles nouvelles*, 55, 11. 52-53)

Mais luy prya ... d'amener vers elle ung aultre gentilhomme

(*ib.*, 11. 72-4)

... de m'exprimer la cause pourquoy vous n'estes en vostre liberté

(Hélisenne de Crenne, *Les Angoysses douloureuses*, LL vii ^{vo})

je vous prie ... de m'exprimer la cause de vostre sy subite departie

(*ib.*, HH i^{ro})

The relative frequencies of the subjunctive and the construction involving *de* with the infinitive can be clearly seen from the table, both for the earlier period and for the later one, and it will be observed that it is not until the middle of the sixteenth century that the situation is reversed and that for the first time the subjunctive becomes less frequent than *de* + infinitive, though it will also be noted that just before this happens, the pure infinitive springs into prominence and outnumbers the subjunctive slightly earlier than the older infinitive construction.

But what of the subjunctive construction itself during the same period? It has already been stated that it was a more elaborate construction, but on the other hand one which, precisely for that reason, allowed for a wider range of grammatical possibilities. We have already explored some areas in which the infinitive could not be substituted for it. Since, in the period before the middle of the sixteenth century, the subjunctive was by far the more frequent, we ought at least to look at some typical examples of it. It could be shown that up to c. 1300 many elaborate subjunctive constructions are attested, of a kind not represented, or only marginally represented, in our early examples of *de* + infinitive.

The earliest example of all ought to be recorded simply because it is the earliest, though it is as a matter of fact of a type where the infinitive could not have been substituted (supposing that *de* + infinitive already existed as a grammatical possibility *in other respects*) because *prier* has no complement:

Tuit oram que por nos degnet preier
Qued auuisset de nos xps mercit
Post la mort & a lui nos laist venir

Par souue clementia

(*La Séquence de Ste. Eulalie*, 11. 26-9)

On the other hand in an example like

si te pri que tu m'essonies

from the *Sermons* of Maurice de Sully (p. 138, l. 13) it looks as if, in theory, the infinitive could have been substituted. However, in that particular text, *prier de* + infinitive

does not occur at all. It will be salutary to look more closely at a twelfth-century text in which *both* constructions occur. We have already seen (p. 141 above) the five occurrences of *de* + infinitive in Chrétien's *Conte du Graal*, and we have seen that they are greatly outnumbered by the subjunctive (27/5). Some of the categories into which those five early examples fall are paralleled by uses of the subjunctive. Six of the latter occur with such intransitive verbs as *aller* (11. 567–9, 2610–11, 2625–7, 6593) *revenir* (6629–35), and *remanoir* (6476–9). *Remanoir* affords the closest parallel to one of Chrétien's uses of the infinitive:

Or te pri que *deus jors entiers*
Aveques moi çaiens remaignes
 Et que en penitance praignes
 Tel viande com est la moie

Compare:

Li preudom, qui molt fu cortois
Pria de remanoir un mois
 Le vallet qui dalez lui sist (11. 1571–3)

Yet there are two points of divergence. The first example has *three* adverbial modifications of *remanoir*, while the second has only one. The second point is that there are *two* dependent clauses in the first example, not one. Finally we would do well to remember that Chrétien was writing verse and had to consider the needs of rhyme and metre. In the following lines:

Molt volentiers *vos prieroie*
Que se Diex l'onor vos otroie
 C'onques chevaliers a nul tens
 Ne pot avoir, ne ja ne pens
 Que ja aviegne que nus l'ait,
 Ne vos ne autres por nul plait,
Que vos en revenez par chi (11. 6629–35)

it will be seen that the intercalated hypothetical clause, together with the relative clause and the parenthetical comment, would have made it impossible for the infinitive to be used, and in the subsequent history of the constructions used with *prier* (and, no doubt, with other verbs too) this was undoubtedly an important factor, inhibiting the use of the infinitive when in theory both constructions were available. Here, then, we touch upon another area where the subjunctive and the infinitive are not really interchangeable. It could, it is true, be argued that in an example like

si proie a Monseigneur Gavain, se il ot dire q'il ait
 mestier d'aide, q'il le viege secorre (Perlesvaus, 11. 7795–6)

de le venir secorre could have been substituted: the fact remains that this type is not found until a much later period. Furthermore, the example just given is a relatively simple one, with which we might compare more complex ones like

Je li priaï molt docement, se il avoit tel vertu e tel
puissance come li pluisor disoient, que il me feïst veoir
cler par issi que je querroie en lui (ib., 11. 9215–6)

and

Mes il li prioit molt docement, se Damedex le lest eschaper
vif de la ou il va, que il se mete encore en aucun tans en liu et en ese
o il le puissent veoir sans desconnoistre (ib., 11. 5738–40)

More frequent in later texts is the type – already as a matter of fact represented in *Perlesvaus* – where the dependent clause is announced by *que* before the hypothetical clause (etc.) is allowed to begin, and is taken up again later by means of a second, technically pleonastic *que*:

Ele me pria molt doucement em plorant *que* se je vos trouvoie qui ses fiz
estes, *que* je vos deïsse ausi com il li est couvent (ib., 11. 4760–2)

It would certainly be no easy matter to substitute an infinitive construction here, and this is even more conspicuously the case in the following:

et por pes vos pri ge *que* vos Mordret que ge tenoie à neveu –
mes il ne l'est pas – *que* vos en faciez roi de la terre de Logres
(*La Mort le roi Artu*, parag. 135, 11. 5–7)

Examples from later texts, usually with pleonastic repetition of *que*, are

Mais je vous prie *que*, si bonnement pavez icy demeurer,
pour nous monstrier Jehan de Paris, *que* demeuriez
(*Le Roman de Jehan de Paris*, p. 60)

je vous prie *que* si les aultres m'accusent de cecy, *que*
m'excusez en gardant mon honneur
(*Les cent nouvelles nouvelles*, 59, 11. 196–7)

et vous prie bien chierement *que*, si vous aviez loisir, *que*
m'eussiez fait ces petit chiens icy camus
(Ph. de Vigneulles, *Les cent nouvelles nouvelles*, p. 123, 11. 35–7)

si vous prie *que*, incontient que mon grant tabourin sonnera,
qui sera sur le midy, vous faictes tenir prestz tous les
gentilzhommes françois qui sont soubz vostre charge
(*Bayard*, p. 117)¹³

vous priant *que* si vous voulez que je continuë l'affection
que je vous porte, *que* vous ostiez non seulement la volonté,
mais la pensée (Marguerite de Navarre, *L'Heptaméron*, f° 106^{vo})
et la pria *que* au moins puis qu'il estoit hors de son cuer,
qu'un autre ne tint point sa place (ib., f° 40^{ro})

Where *de* + infinitive was used, there seems to have been a marked reluctance to intercalate hypothetical clauses between the two parts of the construction. We do

¹³ For *fai(c)tes* as a form of the present subjunctive, see J. N. FAABORG, *La Question des formes dites et faites en moyen français*, *FM* 33 (1965), 256–70.

however find cases where the complement of *prier* is qualified by a relative clause, with the result that *de* + infinitive is, as it were, held over for a short while:

Quant a moy, je priay les deux amis que j'avois sauvés,
de se vouloir retirer avec moy ... (D'Urfé, *L'Astrée*, ii, 491)
elle pria Leonide qui estoit pres d'elle de prendre la lettre de Ligdamar,
et dire à Egide qu'il s'en allast chez elle (ib., i, 435)
Elle dit de surplus qu'elle l'avoit desja vendu, et pria les trois
auxquels il appartenoit, et Monsieur le Commissaire aussi,
d'en venir manger ce qu'elle en avoit retiré (Sorel, *Francion*, i, 77)
Santillane pria Dom Pedro, le Commissaire et tous ceux qui estoient
dans la chambre de le suivre (Scarron, *Le Roman comique*, i, 257)

We also find a participial construction, amounting to an adverbial indication of manner, intercalated between *prier* and *de* + infinitive:

La sœur de Saldagne ... en sortit alors et vint nous prier, parlant
bas et fondant toute en larmes, de l'emmenner avec nous
(ib., i, 193)
Elle print donc en main sa promesse pour la porter à son oncle,
et le prier, en luy demandant pardon de sa faute, de luy faire
reparer son honneur (Furetière, *Le Roman bourgeois*, p. 56)

Other types of adverbial expression of manner are represented by

et je vous prie, avec toute l'honnêteté qu'il m'est possible,
de donner à votre chagrin un fondement plus raisonnable
(Molière, *Les Amants magnifiques*, Act 5, sc. 4)
Elle la pria, non pas comme sa mère, mais comme son amie, de lui faire
confidence de toutes les galanteries qu'on lui diroit
(Mme de Lafayette, *La Princesse de Clèves*, p. 16)

Even as late as the *Mémoires* of Saint-Simon, the infinitive introduced by *de* is kept as close to *prier* as possible: the longest separation in Vol. i (which has no fewer than 63 occurrences of *prier de*) is:

il pria d'Alègre, par un courrier qu'il lui dépêcha en Auvergne,
de revenir sur-le-champ (i, 587)

To the very end of the period considered, then, there was a strong tendency for *prier de* + infinitive to be as dense as possible, and for the two parts of the construction to admit of only very limited types of separation. This, then, was yet another way in which it was not readily interchangeable with the subjunctive.

There is yet another factor, not yet mentioned, which helps to some extent to account for the paucity of early examples of *de* + infinitive, yet another factor which helped to boost the preponderance of subjunctive constructions. Sixty examples of the *de* + infinitive construction were found altogether, in texts composed before 1500, and it is only at the very end of that period, in the *Mémoires* of Commynes, that we find the first example of a *negated* infinitive after *prier de*:

Dist, entre autres choses, qu'il vouloit que le seigneur des Cordes ne
bougeast d'avec le roy son filz de six moys et que on le priast
de ne mener nulle practique sur Callaix ne ailleurs (ii, 316)

But during the same period, subjunctive constructions negated by *ne* are commonplace, as can be seen from the table given below, which indicates the proportion of subjunctive constructions which are negative, in some medieval and late medieval texts:

<i>Li quatre livre des reis</i>	4/12
Garnier, <i>La Vie de S. Thomas Becket</i>	5/22
Chrétien, <i>Le Conte du Graal</i>	8/27
<i>Perlesvaus</i>	12/98
<i>Le Fet des Romains</i>	8/26
<i>La Mort le roi Artu</i>	7/38
<i>Le Roman de Cassidorus</i>	12/75
<i>Le Livre du chevalier de la Tour Landry</i>	6/34
<i>Le Ménagier de Paris</i>	7/43
<i>Les cent nouvelles nouvelles</i>	7/80
<i>Le Roman de Jehan de Paris</i>	3/25

Even when we allow for the fact that there were in any case far fewer occurrences of the infinitive construction during the same period, the complete absence of any negative example before the end of the fifteenth century is striking. In fact, even after that first example occurs in Commynes, the negative construction continues for another fifty years to be rare with the infinitive, but very well attested with the subjunctive. We next find it in Hélienne de Crenne's *Angoysses douloureuses* in 1538:

parquoy par prieres instantes continua toujours, *me priant de ne luy
vouloir celer* cependant que nous avions l'opportunité (H ii^{vo})

and again, a little later, in Noël du Fail:

feras bonne mine, *prieras le curé* pour la pareille *de ne te plus fascher*
en tes possessions (*Baliverneries*, p. 126)

From that point onwards, i.e. from the middle of the sixteenth century, the situation is reversed. To begin with, the infinitive introduced by *de* becomes more common *in general* than the subjunctive, and furthermore the earlier inhibition about negation has clearly been removed, as can be judged from the figures given below:

	NEG. Subj.	NEG. <i>de</i> + inf.
<i>L'Heptaméron</i>	13/50	8/72
<i>L'Astrée</i> , i & ii	4/21	8/73
Scarron, <i>Le Roman comique</i>	0/5	7/55
Saint-Simon, <i>Mémoires</i> , i	2/4	5/63

It is, of course, easy to account in historico-linguistic terms for the absence of a negated infinitive with *prier de* before the end of the fifteenth century. In the first place, the infinitive in medieval French was negated, when it had to be, by *non* rather than *ne*, but, far more important, *Old French in general avoided the negation of the infinitive altogether, when it was introduced by a preposition*, as was of course the case in the construction we are considering¹⁴. When, in late medieval texts, we find a negated infinitive introduced by *de* (though never after *prier*, until we reach Commynes) the negative is *non*, e.g.

les preuves veritables dont il s'armoit le sauverent *de non estre ars*
trop de fois (Froissart, *Chronique*, xii, 232)¹⁵
et luy faisoit jurer *de non jamais y enter* (Les cent nouvelles nouvelles, 5, l. 162)
La demoiselle ... voyant son tort evident ... crya mercy, et promist
de non plus faire (ib., 65, ll. 140–3)

Ne appears as something quite exceptional around 1440 in *La Salade*, and is preceded by *jamais* – instead of the more usual combination *non jamais*:

Entre lesquelles [sc. choses] dist qu'il se gardast *de jamais ne entrer*
en Florence (p. 171)

Jean de Roye, in the late fifteenth century, still uses *non*, *non plus* and *non jamais* after *de* and before the infinitive, but the tide was turning, and Commynes, though he only provides one example of *ne* after *prier de*, regularly uses this form of the negative with the infinitive after a preposition:

mais il avoit commission *de ne la bailler point* audict Simon
(i, 232)
entre les rois de France et empereurs, y a grandz sermens
et confederations *de n'entreprendre* l'ung sur l'empire,
l'autre sur le royaume (ii, 260)
ledict cardinal escrivoit à Mons^r de Guyenne, l'exhortant *de ne prendre*
nul autre partaige (i, 171)
pourveü que le roy feüst serment ... *de ne faire nul* mal à
sa personne *ne consentir* que autre le feüst (ii, 34)¹⁶

Although Brunot (*Histoire de la langue française* ii, 474) and Huguet (*Dict. de la langue française du XVI^e siècle*, v. 441–2) provide a few examples of *non* + infinitive in sixteenth-century contexts, and Haase (*Syntaxe française du XVII^e siècle*, 99B) even

¹⁴ See the valuable article by GERARD MOIGNET, *L'Opposition 'non/ne' en ancien français*, Strasbourg 1965 (*Travaux de linguistique et de littérature publiés par le Centre de philologie romane de Strasbourg* 3), p. 41–65, especially p. 54, 64.

¹⁵ It is interesting to compare this example with a somewhat parallel one, also from Froissart, but involving the subjunctive: *je ne vous pourray sauver ne voz compaignons que vous ne soyez mors des communes de ce pays* (xii, 40).

¹⁶ Where the infinitive is *not* introduced by a preposition, Commynes still hesitates, compare: *suppliant le roy ne vouloir legierement croire contre luy ne son filz* (i, 8) and *leur dist tout hault qu'il supplioit au roy non vouloir riens entreprendre sur le pays de Bretagne* (i, 102).

has one from Guez de Balzac, it was exclusively *ne* which occurred in those sixteenth- and seventeenth-century texts which were used in the present investigation. In any case, the real point at issue is that the earlier inhibition, which in effect led to the use of the subjunctive rather than the infinitive construction when negation was involved, was substantially overcome by the end of the fifteenth century, so that the subjunctive lost one of its advantages.

There were other circumstances too in which *prier de* + infinitive was *not* used in medieval French, while *prier que* + subjunctive was, and those circumstances had a semantic basis. When *prier* meant 'to pray', the possibility of using *de* and the infinitive did not arise until almost as late as the possibility of negating the infinitive after *de* – presumably a coincidence. The earliest example, out of 55 found up to that date, occurs in the *Journal* of Jean de Roze, dated c. 1490, and is quite isolated in the texts of the period:

... et que de ce on merciast Dieu, *en lui priant de donner*
bonne prosperité au roy et audit connestable (i, 251)

Far more typical of the period is this example from the same text:

y fist aussy venir grant nombre de bigotz, bigottes et gens de
devocion comme hermites et saintes creatures pour sans cesse
prier à Dieu qu'il permist qu'il ne mourust point (ii, 122)

Occasionally, of course, the subjunctive was in any case unavoidable, as in

Et continua ladicte mort [= mortalité] jusques en la fin de novembre,
que, pour faire cesser et *prier Dieu que ainsi il lui*
pleust de le faire, furent faictes de moult belles processions
generales à Paris (i, 165)

where the fact that the subordinate verb is impersonal makes it clear that the infinitive construction could not have been used. From the earliest texts to the end of the fifteenth century, the use of *prier* in the sense of 'to pray', with a dependent subjunctive clause, accounts for a far from negligible proportion of all occurrences of the subjunctive construction with that verb – though the proportion, of necessity, was conditioned by the nature of the text. In the table given below, the figure in square brackets represents the total for *prier* = 'to pray' after subtraction of those cases where for grammatical reasons the infinitive would not have been possible *in any case* (e.g. absence of a complement of *prier*, difference between the complement of *prier* and the subject of the dependent verb, etc.):

<i>La Vie de saint Thomas Becket</i>	8/22	[7]
Chrétien, <i>Le Conte du Graal</i>	6/27	
<i>Perlesvaus</i>	31/98	[26]
<i>La Queste del Saint Graal</i>	25/79	[24]
<i>La Mort le roi Artu</i>	3/38	
<i>Le Roman de Cassidorus</i>	19/75	[11]

<i>Les Miracles de saint Louis</i>	27/43	[25]
Joinville, <i>La Vie de s. Louis</i>	7/45	[6]
<i>Le Roman du comte d'Anjou</i>	11/37	[8]
<i>Le Livre du chevalier de La Tour Landry</i>	10/34	[6]
<i>Le Songe du vieil pelerin</i>	8/24	[6]
<i>Le Ménagier de Paris</i>	11/43	[9]
<i>La Salade</i>	5/12	
Villon, <i>Oeuvres</i>	5/6	[2]
<i>Les cent nouvelles nouvelles</i>	9/80	[7]
Jean de Roye, <i>Journal</i>	2/13	[1]
Commynes, <i>Mémoires</i>	3/23	[1]

Even in the sixteenth century – and the seventeenth – the use of *prier* = ‘to pray’ with *de* and the infinitive is rare, although by the middle of the sixteenth century the subjunctive construction was sharply declining in other respects. Among the 72 occurrences of *prier de* in the *Heptaméron* of Marguerite de Navarre, there is not a single example where *prier* = ‘to pray’. Boaistuau, in 1560, provides one example of each construction:

moy rustique et malheureux ... saluë vous autres Senateurs de
Rome ... et *prie aux dieux immortelz qu'ils vous inspirent à bien*
gouverner la Republique (fo. 172^{ro})
... mais qu'il prie seulement *Dieu de luy donner quelque*
mechant proces (fo. 177^{ro})

Montaigne has two of each, though it will be seen from the second subjunctive example that it would not have been grammatically possible to substitute the infinitive:

... En ce cas, de laisser tout la; sulemant de *prier Dieu qu'il y porte*
sa main extraordinaire (iii, 12, p. 33)
Eudoxus souhetoit & *prioit les Dieux qu'il peut* une fois
voir le soleil de pres, comprendre sa forme, sa grandeur &
sa beauté, à peine d'en estre brulé soudainement (ii, 12, p. 239)
Quand ceux de Crete vouloyent au temps passé maudire quelqu'un,
ils prioient les dieux de l'engager en quelque mauvaise coustume
(i, 33, p. 147)
... ne representa qu'un souin de la conservation de ses juges:
priant les dieus de tourner ce jugement à leur bien (i, 3, p. 21)

In *L'Astrée*, no fewer than 15 of the 21 subjunctive constructions with *prier* involve an act of prayer, whereas the verb is not used in this way in any of the 73 occurrences of the infinitive with *de*. In fact, in the texts examined, only *one* further example of the infinitive was found for the rest of the seventeenth century:

et je *prierois Dieu de me faire pauvre*, s'il me vouloit donner
d'autres richesses (Guez de Balzac, *Lettres*, i, 10, p. 49 [1623])

but it must be added that examples involving the subjunctive too happen to become

rare in the later texts examined – a total of a mere 8 for *Francion*, *Le Roman bourgeois*, Guez de Balzac, Mme de Sévigné, and – surprisingly – Bossuet, and none at all in *Le Roman comique*, in the prose works of Molière, in La Bruyère, and in Saint-Simon.

Such, then, is the story, on the basis of the positive and negative evidence supplied by 66 texts, of the rivalry between the subjunctive construction and *prier de* + infinitive. For a long time excluded from circumstances of negation¹⁷ and from contexts of prayer, *prier de* + infinitive very gradually overcame those disadvantages, but although it was – and indeed still is – an admirably concise and convenient construction to use, there are still some limits beyond which it cannot go, and those limits are already foreshadowed, as we have seen, in medieval texts. Even at the end of the period we have considered, the subjunctive was still indispensable in certain grammatical circumstances. It will be useful to look at what were by the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries unavoidable exceptions to the by then overwhelming preponderance of *prier de* + infinitive.

In Scarron's *Roman comique* all five of the subjunctive constructions have the indefinite *on* as the subject of the dependent verb. In the anonymous continuation of the same work, the only exception to *de* + infinitive occurs when the subject of the dependent verb is the same as the subject of *prier*. In *Le Roman bourgeois*, of two occurrences, one, a prayer, is part of the text of a will, where one would expect conservative language in any case, while in the other, the subject of the dependent verb is different from the complement of *prier*, a factor which rules out the infinitive. The only example of *prier que* in Molière's prose comedies involves *on* as the subject of the dependent verb; the only one in *La Princesse de Clèves* is a case where the subject of the dependent verb is the same as the subject of *prier*. The six examples in Mme de Sévigné's letters are accounted for as follows: two involve prayer; in one, the subject of the dependent verb is *on*, in two, the subject of the dependent verb is different from the complement of *prier*, and in the last one the subject of the dependent verb is the same as the subject of *prier*. In a selection of Bossuet's *Oraisons funèbres*, the only two examples occur in a context of prayer, and in one of those cases the subject of the dependent verb is different from the complement of *prier*. Finally, in Saint-Simon's *Mémoires*, two of the four uses of the subjunctive with *prier* are accounted for by the presence of *on* in the subordinate clause, while in the other two, the subject of the dependent verb is different from the complement of *prier*. We can say, then, that by the early eighteenth century, *prier de* + infinitive was used essentially as it is used today.

We must now turn our attention to the use of the pure infinitive, i.e. the infinitive without a preposition, as used with *prier*.

To judge from the evidence of the texts analysed, this is, chronologically at least, a simpler matter. It is chronologically simpler, because it is found only during a

¹⁷ Except in the well-known Old French negative-imperative type *nel dire ja, ne m'ocirre tu pas* etc.

limited portion of the period considered altogether, namely between 1422 (Chartier, *Le Quadrilogue invectif*) and 1616 (D'Aubigné, *Histoire universelle*, vol. i). No examples were found in texts earlier or later than those limits, and it should be added that even within those limits, some texts contain no examples at all. Positive evidence for the pure infinitive was in fact found in only eleven texts out of twenty-one falling within the period 1422–1616, whereas *prier de* + infinitive was found in fifteen of them. In four of them *neither* infinitive construction was found (see Table, p. 138s. above). In case we feel tempted to see in the pure infinitive construction, precisely because of the period in which it seems to have originated with this verb, a fashionable *calque* of the Latin accusative and infinitive construction, which, as a result of the activity of translators from the late fourteenth century onwards, was being imitated in French, it should be pointed out that in the earliest texts to contain the construction, *prier* is intransitive. The earliest example is

et a chascun lecteur prie le voulloir interpreter favourablement et y jugier
a cognoistre la bonne affection plus que la gloire de l'ouvrage
(Chartier, *Le Quadrilogue invectif*, p. 66)

The only occurrence in *Les cent nouvelles nouvelles* is not cogent, since the complement of *prier* appears as the 'equivocal' pronoun *vous*, but the only occurrence in Jean de Roye's *Journal* has *leur*:

en leur priant humblement excuser et supployer à mon ignorance et
adresser ce qui y seroit mal mis ou escript (i, 2)

and in all eight of the examples supplied by Commynes, *prier* has an unequivocal indirect complement (i, 169, 180, 224; ii, 295–6, 312; iii, 93, 121 [2 ex.]). However, from then onward, although Bayard provides only examples with equivocal pronouns (3), we soon have to do with what is unmistakably an accusative and infinitive construction. Of twenty-three examples occurring in Rabelais, sixteen have clearly direct complements, the remaining seven being equivocal. The evidence of Hélienne de Crenne's *Angoysses douloureuses* and Noël du Fail's *Propos rustiques* and *Baliverneries* suggests that for those authors *prier* was transitive in this grammatical context, and it was no less transitive for Marguerite de Navarre, Montaigne and d'Aubigné.

The contextual ways in which *prier* was used with the pure infinitive are not markedly different from those which we have seen to obtain in the case of *prier* + *de*. The construction is in general minimally brief. Negation, invariably with *ne* rather than *non*, occurs in Commynes (3), Rabelais (1), Du Fail (2) and Marguerite de Navarre (10); but a minor difference perhaps worth noting is a slightly more frequent occurrence of *prier* in contexts of prayer: there are three in Rabelais (but we should remember that he does not use *prier de* at all) and four in the *Heptaméron*, a text in which, as we have seen, *prier de*, occurring 72 times, is never used in this sense. Conspicuous exceptions to the principle that with the infinitive the construction tends to be minimally brief are afforded by this somewhat artificial one from Rabelais:

*Ne prioient ilz continuellement leur grand Dieu Mercure, avecques Dis,
le pere aux escuz, longuement en santé les conserver?* (*Tiers livre*, ch. 3, p. 310)

and by this one from Marguerite de Navarre:

*Et je vous prie, mon compere, si vous sçavez point quelque
drogue, qui luy puisse servir à changer sa complexion, m'en
vouloir bailler* (*L'Heptaméron*, f^o. 196^{vo})

On the evidence of the texts examined, then, it can be said that *prier* + pure infinitive, which had been as rare in the fifteenth century as *prier de* + infinitive had been in an earlier period, becomes more common and is in frank competition with the latter in the first half of the sixteenth century, but tails off sharply in the later part of that century, and becomes rare in the early seventeenth century. It is true that Maupas in 1607 still included *prier* in his list of verbs which could take either *de* + infinitive or the pure infinitive – both being in his opinion more elegant than the older construction involving the subjunctive¹⁸ – but by 1647 Vaugelas, condemning *il m'a prié que je fisse* as 'mal dit', indicates *il m'a prié de faire* as the desirable construction, and has nothing at all to say about the pure infinitive¹⁹.

A final look at the table on p. 137–40 will show that the construction *prier à* + infinitive was rather rare. The earliest example occurs in Froissart:

*Et furent priet ces deux loingtains seigneurs à estre en ce voyage
avecques le roy* (*Chroniques*, xiii, 3)

But Froissart also has *priet au disner* (xiii, 238), where the sense of *prier* is 'to invite'. We find both this type and the type without the definite article, and in the latter case it is legitimate to ask whether we have to do with the infinitive or a substantive:

Il en pria un jour à souper des meilleurs drosles	(Sorel, <i>Francion</i> , iv, 112)
je ne laissay pas de les prier tous deux à disner	(<i>ib.</i> , iv, 88)
et le Capitaine pria à souper les comediens et Ragotin	(Scarron, <i>Le Roman comique</i> , ii, 121)
il la prie à souper	(La Bruyère, <i>Caractères</i> , p. 300)
il les pria l'un et l'autre à dîner	(Saint-Simon, <i>Mémoires</i> , i, 1017)

As we have seen, *prier de* was used in that sense as well, but it seems that, unlike *prier à*, it did not admit of the possibility – in this sense – of combining a substantival infinitive with the definite article. It is perhaps significant that *prier de* (= 'to invite') + infinitive could be 'completed' (see p. 141 above) in ways which suggest that the infinitive was a true infinitive and not a substantive. If a qualification of *disner*, *souper* etc. was required, it seems that *prier de*, and not *prier à*, was the construction used. Maupas (*op. cit.* p. 323) does not include *prier* in his list of verbs which could take *à* with the

¹⁸ *Grammaire françoise*, Blois, p. 318, 322.

¹⁹ *Remarques sur la langue françoise*, p. 322.

infinitive. Apart from the first example quoted from Froissart, I have found only two other cases in which *prier à* is not used with direct reference to invitation to a specific meal, though the context is admittedly one of conviviality

Vivoyent au jour la journée, le premier à la porte passoit sans difference,
ne se faisoient prier à laver leurs mains, encore moins à se seoir a table
 (Du Fail, *Propos rustiques*, p. 6)
 lave ses mains, se met à table voyant toute la compagnie, qui
se prioient l'un l'autre à laver et s'asseoir. (id., *Baliverneries*, p. 137)

* * * * *

The *dépouillement* on which this article is based naturally threw incidental light on the question of the transitivity or intransitivity of *prier*. Only truly cogent evidence was taken into account for this purpose. In that connection it is regrettable that *TL*, s.v. *prier*, col. 1840–1 includes under the heading of transitive use several cases where transitivity cannot be reliably deduced, for example where the pronoun complement of *prier* is of an 'equivocal' kind, e.g. *je vos vueil prier, Que ...*, and *doucement te vueil preier, que*. Furthermore, given that the oblique case of a substantive could, in Old French, stand without the preposition *à* as an indirect complement, how can we be sure that *prier* is transitive in examples like the following, cited in the same article in support of transitive use:

Dido.....
son oste prie qu'il li die
 De Troie la destrucion
 et il recont la traïson (Eneas, 842)

and

E prie Deu omnipotent
 Que il li doinst hastive mort
 E que ja mès ne vienge à port
 S'il ne repuet avoir s'amie (M. de France, *Lais*, G. 624)?

As regards pronoun complements, *le la les* may be regarded as evidence of transitivity, and *leur* as evidence of intransitivity, while the equivocal forms *me, te, se, nous, vous* are of no evidential value²⁰, and *li, celi, lui, cestui, cesti, celui* are best regarded as unreliable in Old and Early Middle French. On the other hand a form like *vous* was sometimes disambiguated by context, in combinations like *je vos pri a toz/ totes* and *si vos prient come a seignor*. Until the end of the fourteenth century, oblique

²⁰ It is true that equivocal forms like *me, te, se, nous, vous* were found to account for an appreciable proportion of all pronoun complements of *prier*, and this may have been a statistical factor making for *uniformity in the long run* – though it must be added that it does nothing to explain why transitive use, rather than intransitive, should have come to be preferred in the end.

forms of substantives too are best regarded as ambiguous, unless preceded by *à*. Passive constructions of the type *fut prié que/de* may of course be admitted as cogent, and the same applies to combinations like *m'a priée, les a priés, l'ont priée*. Even *l'* is somewhat unreliable, since, particularly though not exclusively before *en*, it could stand for the 'dative' *li*.

Nevertheless, if one observes the precautions just referred to and takes only truly cogent evidence into consideration, a definite pattern emerges which suggests that until the end of the thirteenth century, intransitive use was overwhelmingly dominant, although at the same time there are enough cases of demonstrably transitive use for it to be unwise to try to dismiss them as mere scribal error! After 1300, transitive use becomes very slightly more common, but it is not until the early sixteenth century (*Bayard*) that the tables are turned and intransitive use begins to recede rapidly. For Marguerite de Navarre, *prier* is overwhelmingly transitive (85/3), and the last bit of evidence for intransitivity, in the texts surveyed, occurs in Sorel's *Francion* (1622–33) (1/37).

A final question remains to be considered. During the period – and it was a long one – in which *prier* could be either transitive or intransitive, can we discern any corresponding differences in use? Did transitivity, or intransitivity, tend to go hand-in-hand with the one type of dependent construction rather than the other? Was there a correlation between the meanings 'to pray' and 'to request' and transitivity/intransitivity or subjunctive/infinitive? The answer must be that there is simply no marked tendency. To take the subjunctive construction first, throughout the centuries *prier* seems to have been used indifferently as a transitive or an intransitive verb²¹, with either meaning, for as long as grammar allowed either transitive or intransitive use, and irrespective of the at first marginal and later firmly established availability of infinitive constructions. In the late thirteenth-century work *Les Miracles de saint Louis*, for instance, *prier* is used in both senses, whether transitive or intransitive; in Joinville, on the other hand, it so happens that only transitive uses are attested, but they occur in both senses. In *Les quinze joyes de mariage*, where *prier* is used both transitively and intransitively, both senses are present within each category, and the same is true of the *Journal d'un bourgeois de Paris*. In *Les cent nouvelles nouvelles*, notwithstanding a clear numerical predominance of intransitive over transitive use, it must be allowed that *prier* 'to request' and *prier* 'to pray' are both well represented.

The construction *prier de* + infinitive was for a long time, as we have seen, much less frequent than the subjunctive, but when it occurred, it proved to have no bearing on whether *prier* was used transitively or not. As for the sense of 'prayer', we have seen (p. 150 above) that the verb does not occur in this construction until the end of

²¹ NYROP (*Grammaire historique de la langue française*, vi, 187–8) seems to imply that a dependent construction could not occur when *prier* was used transitively. This is too categorical: see *Vie de saint Alexis* 1.185; *Conte du Graal* 11. 5967–9; *Partonopeu de Blois* 11.6342–3; and *Li Fet des Romains*, p. 163 11. 19–23, for example.

the fifteenth century. There is no time-lag between the retreat of the intransitive from the subjunctive construction and its retreat from the *de* + infinitive construction. The pure infinitive, as we have seen (p. 152s. above), begins with *prier* used intransitively, but its heyday coincides with the general shift from intransitivity to transitivity. Prayer is not attested, as it happens, in the intransitive examples, but it occurs, side by side with request, in Rabelais (3/16) and Marguerite de Navarre (4/55), who use *prier* transitively here.

Cambridge

Peter Rickard