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CLÉMENT PRINSAULT, *Traité du blason* [Treatise and Armorial]

In French, illuminated manuscript on paper

France, likely northern France (Artois? Picardy?), c. 1475-1500

63 ff., preceded and followed by two paper flyleaves, complete (collation: i10, ii-vi8, vii4 [of 6, last 2 leaves of quire cancelled blanks] + viii10 [added later quire, 17th century paper]), on paper, with watermarks in two different types of paper, not offering a perfect match but nonetheless close to 1) Briquet, "Main au naturel surmontée d'un fleuron," no. 11417, Troyes, 1477-1480; Saint-Omer, 1480 etc. and no. 11421, Troyes, 1483-1498; 2) Briquet, "Main aux quatre doigts serrés, le pouce seul écarté, sommée d'une fleur," no. 11163, Nantes, 1490, but also Piccard, *Wasserzeichen Hand und Handschuh* (1987), no. 1284, Ingolstadt, 1468 and no. 1286, Frankfurt, 1474, illustrated with 271 (99 in the Treatise and 172 in the Armorial) finely executed and painted heraldic shields, likely executed by a skilled arms painter, some pages contain both text and shields, used as illustrations to the text, other pages contain shields alone, in which case there are 3 to a page, outlines to the shields are hand-drawn in brown ink, full range of color necessary in French heraldry is used, here bright and clear, an early shelf-mark number on front pastedown: "D 17". Bound in an elegant 17th century binding of tan polished calf over pasteboard, smooth spine with gilt lettering: "Armaries. M. S.," double gilt fillets forming frame on boards, edges red (Stitching of first quire a bit loose, boards a bit stained or scratched, else in fine condition, very fresh internal condition). Dimensions 197 x 140 mm.

This neatly written and carefully painted workaday copy of a fifteenth-century manual is by the well-known herald Clement Prinsault. It includes his published Treatise, along with an Armorial of northern French origin, which is unrecorded, providing an adapted version of the published work. Containing some 271 colored shields, the codex offers an excellent heraldic picture of northern French nobility, otherwise unaccounted for. Perhaps originally owned by a herald, it presents opportunities for further study with its legible explanations of metals, colors, charges, etc.

PROVENANCE

1. Copied and illuminated in France, likely in northern France (Artois, Picardie?) as suggested by the linguistic particularities with characteristic northern spellings and forms such as "faichon" (f. 6v) or "fachon" (f. 9v); "tierche" (f. 3); "commenchie" (f. 5v), etc., and the choice of shields, with a clear selection of shields representing northern families such as "Le conte de Ponthieu" (f. 40v); "Crequy" (f. 45); "Le chastelain d'Arras" (f. 47); "Le comte de Flandres" (f. 49v); "Le chastelain de Bergues Saint Winoc" (f. 51v); "Le chastelain de Douay" (f. 51v) and cities, such as Lille (f. 53v), Saint-Omer (f. 54), Théroutanne (f. 54), Bethune (f. 55) *et passim*.

2. Robert Sohier, as indicated in the inscription starting in the upper margin, continuing in outer margin, of f. 4: "Ce present livret d'escuchons appartient a Robert Sohier et luy fut donné par Ancel Sohier son frere et l'avoit en la prinse (?) de Hesdin l'an Vc .xxxv. [1535] Fu depuis donné a moy [...] advocat 16[...] et depuis donné a Mr Boignault le curé de Hanouart [Normandie] lequel l'a donné a Mr. Bigot seigneur de Sommesnil, conseiller en la Cour des Aydes de Normandie l'an 1635." Might both Robert and Ancel Sohier be related to Jean Scohier, Canon of Bergues (spelled with a "c" or sometimes Sohier), author of a number of works on heraldry, in particular his *Estat et comportement des armes...*, Bruxelles, 1597 and Paris 1632?

3. Jean Bigot (1588-1645), seigneur of Sommesnil, counselor at the court of Normandy, his armorial bookplate pasted on the front pastedown, with his name "Johannes Bigot." According to the inscription on f. 4 (see above), the manuscript was given to Bigot by a priest named Boignault, of the parish Church of Henouart (Normandy). The manuscript was listed in the sales catalogue of his collection: *Bibliothecae Bigotianae Pars V continens codices MSS. Catalogus codicum manuscriptorum Bibliothecae Bigotianae*, Paris, 1706, no. 418: "Traité d'armes ou d'armoiries, avec les blasons enluminez par Clément Prinsault (in membr.)." Most of this sale was acquired en bloc by the Bibliothèque nationale in Paris and the collection counted some 8744 lots, including hundreds of manuscripts. Bigot was a voracious collector, of the type of Sir Thomas Phillipps, actively seeking rarities and particularly interested in manuscripts. On the *Bibliotheca Bigotiana*, see L. Delisle, *Cabinet des manuscrits...*, vol. I, pp. 322-329: "Bibliothèque des Bigot. 1706"; and L. Delisle, *Bibliotheca Bigotiana manuscripta. Catalogue des manuscrits rassembles au XVIIe siecle par les Bigot*, Rouen, 1877. It is quite possible the binding was commissioned by Jean Bigot or his son Emeric, given the presence of the armorial bookplate pasted on the front pastedown.

4. Pierre-Robert Le Roux d'Esneval (1717-1788), President "à mortier" of the Parliament of Rouen, one of the most important judicial posts of the Old Regime, his armorial bookplate imprinted on a loose leaf, tipped in and placed before the first paper flyleaf, facing the Bigot bookplate pasted on the front pastedown. Le Roux d'Esneval married into the Bigot family and was likely the possessor of this manuscript after Jean Bigot, and presumably his son Emery Bigot. See OHR, *Manuel de l'amateur de reliures armoriées françaises*, pl. 196.

5. European Private Collection.

TEXT

ff. 1- 10, Clément Prinsault, *Traité du blason*, part I, Treatise in 12 chapters, rubric, *Cy commence la table des rubriques de ce present traitté du blason et premierement le prologue*; following rubric, *Cy commence le premier chapiltre contenu parquelles personnes a quel fin ont esté trouvees armes et a quelle condicion de gens ont esté ottroyés*; incipit, "Le tresvaillant et victorieux roy alixandre de macedon, ne le tresprudent empereur Jules Cesar..."; explicit, "[...] et quant elles sont de plusieurs pieces on les doit tenir aussy grant l'ung que l'autre"; [rubric] *Sensuit mis par figure les metaulz couleurs et penne*;

Here the painted shields occur as illustrations to the text, demonstrating first the metals and colors used in heraldry and the two furs (penne) [fol. 2v], the partitions and ordinaries [f. 4], and then various charges (ff. 4v-9), and again the metals, colors and furs (f. 10). Edition in L. Jefferson, 1996, pp. 101-115.

ff. 10v-54v, Clément Prinsault, *Traité du blason*, part II, Armorial, rubric, *Sensuivent .xii. peres de france, princes des ducs temporeulx*; incipit, "Le duc de bourgongne porte bendé de six pieces d'or et d'azur a le bordure de geulles et crye nostre dame bourgongne et porte au sacre du roy le couronne et luy chanit l'espee et est le .Ile..." ;

In the second part of the treatise, the shields take precedence over the text. The shields are set off to the left and their heraldic description copied to the right. Edition of part of this Armorial in L. Jefferson, 1996, pp. 117-127, but beginning very differently from the present manuscript. The Armorial as published by Jefferson begins with the following rubric: "S'ensuyt le verger de France. Le Roy de France, Monsieur le Daulphin, le Duc de Guienne...." Some of the shields certainly occur in our manuscript, but not in the same order. For instance "Le roy de Franche" is found in our manuscript on f. 13 and not at the beginning of the Armorial as in the "canonic" version of Prinsault's Armorial as published by L. Jefferson. Indeed, as discussed below, our manuscript presents a very different roll of arms, mostly from very local northern French localities and fiefdoms. It is thus a local adaptation that differs substantially from the original Prinsault Treatise and Armorial.

ff. 55-59v, blank [added leaves in the 17th century, when the index of quoted names was added];

ff. 60-63, Table of names found in the Armorial, heading, *Table des surnoms contenus en ce livre*;

ff. 63v-65v, blank.

With the beginning of heraldry in the Flemish and Anglo-Norman regions toward the end of the twelfth century, anyone could create a coat of arms. Gradually, however, a set of rules developed that controlled the right to bear arms and the designs that were used. These rules were written down in heraldic treatises, of which one of the first, *De Heraudie*, is in Anglo-Norman about 1300 by an unknown author. As time went on, such treatises were sometimes accompanied by Armorial, that is, by a record of actual painted shields of important families, such as occurs in the present manuscript. One of the functions of a medieval herald was to visit noble households and make sure that what they had on their coat-of-arms was correct and to record it. With the popularity of tournaments and jousts, the also herald helped in the organization and operation of such pageants, verifying the credentials of the combatants, listing the names and coat of arms of the various knights. Manuscripts like the present copy were probably the property of medieval heralds, who used them to go about their day to day tasks.

This manuscript contains a rediscovered copy of Clément Prinsault's *Traité du blason*, an early heraldic treatise, augmented by a selection and a roll of painted arms not found in the known manuscripts of Prinsault's work. The work consists of two parts, the Treatise proper (in 12 chapters) and a painted Armorial (that here differs from the known manuscript tradition). The original Prinsault Armorial and its accompanying treatise was compiled between 1466 and 1470, probably in preparation for the edition published later anonymously, with a number of successive editions throughout the sixteenth century. The *editio princeps* is apparently [Prinsault, Clément], *Le blason des armes*, Paris, G. Nyverd, between 1500 and 1515 (see Popoff, 1985, p. 130 and G. Saffroy,

1968, vol. I, no. 2022, copy in Paris, BnF, Res. P. V. 107; for dating, see Jefferson, 1991, p. 91). The work is an introductory treatise to the rules governing the blazoning of arms. All the necessary elements of fifteenth-century heraldry are clearly explained and illustrated: the tinctures (metals, colors and furs), the ordinaries, the charges, and the technical language as it applies to the coat of arms or blazon.

Clément Prinsault was a fifteenth-century heraldist, strongly influenced by the *De Insigniis et Armis* by Bartolo da Sassoferrato (1315-c. 1359), but little is known about his biography, although he was apparently close to Jacques d'Armagnac. Prinsault's work is a basic introduction to the rules of heraldry and coats of arms and is found in a number of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century manuscripts (see the listings in G. Saffroy, vol. I, no. 2022-2048, of which no. 2036-2045 are fifteenth- and sixteenth-century manuscript copies, thus at least 10 extant manuscripts in France). The main part of the treatise and accompanying illustrations are usually transmitted consistently, but there also appears to be significant variation between extant codices when it comes to the accompanying armorial. Only a full study of the extant manuscripts and early imprints would allow for a better mapping of the manuscript tradition of this popular text and armorial. The early printed editions name no author, and there are apparently only two manuscripts that provide actual elements of authorship (see Jefferson, 1991, p. 89: these are respectively Paris, BnF, MS fr. 5936 [15th century author's copy, dedicated to Jacques d'Armagnac] and Paris, BnF, MS n.a.f. 1075 [later 16th c. copy]). The Treatise by Prinsault is amply discussed by Jefferson, pp. 89-95, who provides an edition of the Prologue as found in Paris, BnF, MS fr. 5936 and BnF, n.a.f. MS 1075 revealing the name of the author: "Cy commence certain traictié du blason darnier composé et donné a Jacques, mon seigneur, filz de monseigneur le duc de Nemours...par Clement Prinsault, tresobeisant de mondit seigneur le duc, et treshumble serviteur de...Monseigneur de Castres...." (see Jefferson, 1991, p. 90, with dedication transcribed p. 100). The present version of Prinsault's Treatise omits the dedicatory prologue and begins directly with the first of the twelve chapters that make up the treatise.

The treatise and the "original" version of the accompanying armorial have been published in part by Douët d'Arcq, 1858, pp. 321-342 and more recently by L. Jefferson, 1996, pp. 100-127. Jefferson's recent edition is based on a manuscript now in a private collection, once offered by Sam Fogg and whose existence was known only from the partial edition of Alphonse de Bangy in 1897. The chief interest of the now privately-owned manuscript lies in its illuminated roll of arms of the Knights of the Round Table, but it also includes two other texts, that is the heraldic treatise by Clément Prinsault, followed by a roll of arms in blazon only ["blazon" is here used in the restricted sense of "technical language of heraldry"] and a treatise on Arthurian tournaments, probably by Jacques d'Armagnac.

Less than 350 medieval armorials have survived. The present copy of Prinsault's treatise is interesting because the accompanying armorial clearly differs from the "canonic" one previously published, in that it has been adapted for a local northern use, with a selection of shields and armories clearly relating to Artois, Picardy and Normandy. Further research might allow one to determine how the popular Prinsault textual and armorial tradition evolved and was adapted to local use for northern France. There are three armorials in Lille (respectively Lille, BM MS498 (16th c.);

Lille, BM MS 499 (15th c.); Lille, BM Fonds Godefroy 179 (16th c.) that might provide interesting comparisons.

LITERATURE

Blangy, A. de. *La forme des tournois au temps du Roy Uter et du Roy Artus, suivie de l'Armorial des Chevaliers de la Table ronde*, Caen, 1897.

Douët d'Arcq, L. "Un Traité du blason du XVe siècle," *Revue archéologique* 15 (1858), pp. 257-274 et 322-333.

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Pastoureau, Michel. *Traite d'héraldique*, Paris, Picard, 2008.

Popoff, Michel. *Marches d'armes. II. Normandie*, Paris, Le Léopard d'or, 1985, pp. 130-140.

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ONLINE RESOURCES

On Clément Prinsault:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cl%C3%A9ment_Prinsault