

NICOLAS DE HOUSSEMAINE, *Gestes des premiers comtes de Dammartin*

In French, with some Latin, illuminated manuscript on parchment

France, Paris, between 1500 and 1503

6 large miniatures by the Master of the Paris Entries (Paris, active 1490/95 to 1520s) and the Master of Etienne Poncher

ii (i as pastedown) + 60 ff. (with ff. 56-60 blank ruled parchment), missing 11 leaves, including eight with miniatures (collation: i8, ii7 (of 8, lacking iv), iii6 (of 8, lacking i and vi), iv6 (of 8, lacking iii and viii, unfoliated cancelled blank), v4 (of 8, lacking iii, iv, v, vi), vi6 (of 8, lacking ii and vi), vii-viii8, ix6, x2), some quire signatures still visible, some catchwords written vertically on versos of final rectos, original foliation in Roman numerals in upper right margins of rectos, 18 lines written in black ink in a lettre bâtarde between two verticals and 19 horizontals ruled in pink, prickings for both verticals and horizontals (justification: 144 x 86 mm), one-line initials and line-endings in liquid gold on grounds of blue or maroon, 6 large miniatures set in architectural frames of liquid gold, accompanying 6 large initials in gold, blue, maroon and white and 6 borders of sprays of acanthus leaves, flowers and fruit on grounds of liquid gold with the arms of Chabannes impaling Bourbon-Roussillon. Bound in contemporary 16th-century velvet in six horizontal bands colored gold and purple over wooden boards, spine reinforced in 17th-century brown sheep gilt, with gilt lettering piece (mis-titled), marks of five metal attachments and two clasps on each cover. Fitted cloth box. (Velvet a bit worn, especially at lower edge, front pastedown probably lifted and reglued, but nonetheless in remarkable condition given the rarity of such bindings, a few miniature rubbed, a bit of smudging and offsetting in margins). Dimensions 258 x 175 mm.

This is the presentation copy for Jean de Chabannes, count of Dammartin, of a highly personalized text, a chronicle composed to glorify his noble lineage and place him on the level of his "cousins," the kings of France. Accompanied by a dedicatory prologue giving the name of the author (absent in the other copy of the text), the manuscript is mostly by the Master of the Paris Entries, an artist-stationer who produced manuscripts in series for figures at the royal court. In a remarkably rare Renaissance velvet heraldic binding, the manuscript constitutes a significant addition to the lavish, flamboyantly egocentric manuscript collection of Jean de Chabannes.

PROVENANCE

1. Undoubtedly copied and painted in Paris, as suggested by the script, language and style of miniatures. A *terminus ante quem* date of 1503 is inferred by the date of death of Jean de Chabannes, the patron who either commissioned the manuscript or was its dedicatee. Both the author and his patron are fittingly represented in the opening miniature, the author Nicolas de Houssemaine kneeling and presenting his book to the enthroned Jean de Chabannes.

Jean de Chabannes, comte de Dammartin (d.1503), as recorded in the dedicatory prologue, ff. 2v-3 : "Toutesvoyes, ie Nicolle Houssemayne...et que vous mon tres honnoré seigneur Jehan de Chabannes, comte de dampmartin...aymés l'étude et estes extrait de lignee royale...", and confirmed in the shields in the borders of ff. 1, 28, 39v, 44, 47, 52, where the arms of Dammartin (*d'argent à trois fasces d'azur*, see OHR, *Manuel de l'amateur des reliures armoriées* (1926), pl. 612 and preface of 7e serie) impale those of Bourbon-Roussillon (*de France, à la bande brochante de gueules*) for Jean de Chabannes and his second wife, Suzanne, daughter of Louis, *bâtard de Bourbon*, comte de Roussillon, and Jeanne, the legitimated bastard daughter of Louis XI. Noteworthy, is the absence of the Chabannes arms, with here preferred those of the Dammartin lineage, in keeping with the theme of the work. The Prologue was written after the death of Anne, his eldest daughter by his first wife, Margaret of Calabria, daughter of Nicolas of Anjou, duke of Calabria, grandson of King René, so that the manuscript can be dated after 12 June 1500 and before his own death in July 1503 (see La Chenaye-Desbois, *Dictionnaire de la noblesse...*, Paris, 1864, tome IV, col. 961-962: "Branche des comtes de Dammartin"; see also Chaix d'Est-Ange, *Dictionnaire des familles françaises* (1910, reprint 1983), V, p. 149-156: "La maison de Chabannes est une des plus illustres de la noblesse de France..." (p. 149)).

A preliminary census of manuscripts owned or commissioned by Jean de Chabannes was provided by L. Delisle, *Le cabinet des manuscrits...*, II, p. 350 (he lists some 6 codices in Paris, BnF) and further manuscripts belonging to Jean de Chabannes or close members of his family have since been discovered by scholarship (see below).

2. Nicolas d'Anjou-Mézières, comte de St-Fargeau (1518-68), grandson of Jean de Chabannes and Suzanne de Bourbon, through their daughter, Antoinette, the wife of René d'Anjou-Mézières, as indicated by the inscription on the front pastedown: "Ce present livre appartient a Monsieur Nicollas danjou, comte de saint fergeau et des pays de puyseye, baron de mezieres de mareulh et de villeboys, seigneur de cenesche... augeac charente de charny et de saint morise sur l'avron [Saint-Maurice sur l'Aveyron], gentilhomme ordinaire de la chambre de monseigneur le daulphin" (front pastedown). Antoinette had continued the Chabannes tradition of allying with bastard royal lines, since René was the son of Louis d'Anjou-Mézières, the bastard of Charles d'Anjou, comte de Maine, brother of King René. The inscription can be dated to after 1551 when Nicolas was made comte de St-Fargeau and married Gabrielle, the heiress of Mareuil. For the family, see H. de Chabannes, *Histoire de la maison de Chabannes*, with *Preuves* and *Suppléments* 1893-1929. In all likelihood, if the inscription dates after 1550, Nicolas d'Anjou-Mézières was probably at the service of the dauphin François II (dauphin from 1547-1558).
3. Price of 30 [livres tournois ?] inscribed in ink on the lower pastedown (16th c. hand?).
4. Nicolas Riche and Jehan Riche: written in a later 16th-century hand, f. 59v; request for any finder to return the book; various pen trials etc on final leaf and pastedown.
5. Richard Heber (1773-1833): his sale 10-19 February 1836, no 642, label on spine; his name recorded in pencil inside upper cover.

6. Sir Thomas Phillipps (1792-1872): his number 8161 inside upper cover and remnants of label on spine. British Library, Loan 36/24.

TEXT

ff. 1-9, Nicolas de Houssemaine, [*Gestes des premiers comtes de Dammartin*], dedicatory prologue to Jean de Chabannes, "Comme ainsi soit iouxte la sentence du philosophe en son premier de methaphisique tous hommes naturellement desirent savoir..."; explicit, "[...] la matiere dicelluy ie le ay divisé en douze chapitres";

ff. 9v-11v, list of chapters, beginning, "Comment le regime et gouvernement de monseigneur loys filz de dagobert roy de france fut baillé a assaillant conte de dampmartin. Chapitre premier feuillet .xii.";

ff. 12-55v, Nicolas de Houssemaine, [*Gestes des premiers comtes de Dammartin*], in 12 chapters; chapter 1, incipit, "[...] lui fut tel conseil donné pour deux causes la premiere poursuivre paix entre les deux freres..." (ff. 12-15v, wanting beginning); chapter 2, incipit, "[...] dit par ung pelerin venant de romme que son pere faisoit assieger la cite..." (ff. 16-19v, wanting beginning and ending); chapter 3, incipit, "[...] alloient a romme pour delivrer les prisonniers assaillant conte de dampmartin..." (ff. 20-23v, wanting beginning); chapter 4, incipit, "[...] alors estoit possesseur de l'enpire de constantinnoble..." (ff. 24-27, wanting beginning); chapter 5, incipit, "Quant le roi asseres aperceut la trahison faicte par lambert..." (ff. 27v-29v, wanting ending); chapter 6, incipit, "[...] auquel lieu le pape lui bailla grant nombre de clerics bien instruitz..." (ff. 30-32v, wanting beginning and ending); chapter 7, incipit, "[...] fut retourné audit lieu de constantinoble asseres de antioche..." (ff. 33-35v, wanting beginning and ending); chapter 8, incipit, "[...] d'armes theseus empereur de romme iusques au pays de grece..." (ff. 36-39, wanting beginning); chapter 9, incipit, "Ung chevalier du party de geffroy roy de frise nommé geffroy de vermandois..." (ff. 39v-43v, complete); chapter 10, incipit, "Quant geffroy roy de frise se fut retiré a saint denis..." (ff. 44-46v, complete); chapter 11, incipit, "Long temps apres la mort de geffroy roy de frise..." (ff. 47-51v, complete); chapter 12, heading, *Des causes pour quoy le roy loys fist decouvrir l'eglise de monseigneur saint denis laquelle estoit couverte d'argent. Chappitre .xii.*; incipit, "Quant Loys roy de france se vit totalement pacifique..." (ff. 51v-55v, complete); explicit, "[...] et confundirent les mescreans en exaltant tousiours la loy de nostre seigneur."

This manuscript is the presentation copy of a work presented to Jean de Chabannes, comte de Dammartin (1448-1503) by Nicolas de Houssemaine, called *Gestes des premiers comtes de Dammartin*, although this title is not found per se in the present manuscript, and is retained here based on other codices. It could also be called *Histoire de Dagobert et de son fils Louis et faits et gestes de Assaillant, conte de Dammartin et de son fils Guérard* as found in the other known copy of this version in Paris, BnF, MS fr. 4962. The present codex is however the only copy that provides confirmation of authorship (see f. 2v: "Toutesvoyaes, ie Nicolle Houssemayne...et que vous mon tres honnoré seigneur Jehan de Chabannes, comte de dampmartin...aymés l'estude et estes extrait de lignee royale..."), thus clearly identifying in the opening miniature the author presenting his work to his patron Jean de Chabannes.

The author, Nicolas de Houssemaine [or d'Ouchemayne] (c.1475-1523), originally from Alençon, was a doctor, who graduated in medicine at Paris in 1500 and was licensed there in 1502. In 1506, he was doctor in the Medicine Faculty of Angers. He describes himself as "treshumble serviteur et medecin" to Jean de Chabannes, to whom he wants to offer "service agreable en recongnissance selon mon pouvoir des grans benefices que m'avez faiz et faictes de jour en jour" (f. 8v). Despite Houssemaine's professional attentions, Jean de Chabannes died in 1503, and Houssemaine settled in Angers. Houssemaine was clearly successful and prosperous, since he and his wife had built a chapel, dedicated to St Nicolas, and he was buried in the church of Ste.-Croix in Angers, where the couple appeared in a stained glass window along with the greatest doctors of antiquity (see, Wickersheimer, II, pp. 571-2; also Port, II, p. 369). Houssemaine is otherwise known as an author only from a treatise on the plague he authored, entitled *Régime singulier contre la peste*, probably first published c. 1514 in Angers (see copy in Rouen, BM, 0 504) and subsequently often published after Jean Goeurot's work, for instance in the following edition: *Summaire très singulier de toute médecine et chirurgie,... composé et approuvé par maistre Jehan Goeurot,... Item ung régime singulier contre la peste, composé par maistre Nicolas de Houssemaine*, Paris, 1530 (copy Paris, BnF, RES- TE17- 28 (A)).

There is apparently only one other copy of this particular version of the *Gestes des premiers comtes de Dammartin*, included in a miscellany that contains other works copied for Dammartin, catalogued as "Histoire de Dagobert et de son fils Louis et faits et gestes de Assailant, conte de Dammartin et de son fils Guérard, en 12 chapitres" (Paris, BnF, MS fr. 4962; *Catalogue des manuscrits français*, tome IV (1895), pp. 452-453). Containing the same text as the present dedication copy, the Paris manuscript omits Houssemaine's prologue and thus the record of his authorship. The Paris codex bears the arms of Jean de Chabannes's daughter, Avoye (from his second marriage to Suzanne de Bourbon), and her first husband, Edmond de Prie, to whom she was married from 1504 until his death in 1511. It therefore must have been copied a short time after the present dedicatory manuscript was commissioned or offered to her father Jean de Chabannes, but clearly after her father's death in 1503, since Avoye married in 1504. Most interesting is the fact that there are two contemporary copies extant of this work, one made and commissioned by the father Jean de Chabannes, the other, slightly later, made for the married couple Avoye de Chabannes (daughter to Jean de Chabannes) and her newly-wed husband Edmond de Prie. According to a preliminary paleographical analysis, the same scribe copied both codices (compare for instance the table of contents in the present dedicatory manuscript and that of Paris MS fr. 4962). The Paris manuscript is also interesting insofar as it contains a complete cycle of twelve miniatures, one for each chapter (there are twelve planned chapters in this work). Given the fact that the dedicatory prologue is missing in Paris MS fr. 4962, the codex omits the dedication scene miniature, present in our manuscript and placed before the table of chapters. Because Paris MS fr. 4962 contains the full cycle of twelve miniatures, it allows for interesting iconographic comparisons with the present dedicatory manuscript.

According to his prologue, Nicolas Houssemaine found his material on the early history of the counts of Dammartin in various manuscripts, including one in verse: "[...] ay extrait ce petit livre de plusieurs croniques tant de romme que de allemaine...et me ont esté communiquees segretement par aucun de mes amis..." (ff. 8v-9). He continues and states that he also used as a source "ung viel livre en francoys rymé lequel a nagueres este mis en prose le quel extrait a l'onneur de vostre seigneurie ay translaté sur la langue francoyse..." (f. 9). One can suppose that the source

text could be the rhymed *chanson de geste*, *Theseus of Cologne* and its fifteenth-century prose adaptation, *Le Roman de Theseus de Cologne et de Gadifer*. Jean de Chabannes owned a copy of this work also made to emphasize the counts of Dammartin, which was luxuriously and profusely illustrated with various heraldic elements all pointing to the Dammartin clan (Paris, BnF, MS fr. 1473, *Catalogue des manuscrits français*, I, 1868, p. 234). The Paris manuscript includes some passages similar to the present "abridged" version, and, for example, the same explicit as the dedication copy. However, it contains a far more developed version of the work, introduced by a miniature with a dedication scene, with the author (also Nicolas de Houssemaine?) or adapter kneeling in front of Jean de Chabannes. The present, much abbreviated version focuses solely on Assailant, the first count of Dammartin, and his adventures with Louis, son of King Dagobert, and Theseus, King of Cologne, in Europe and the East and then on Assailant's son, Guerard, the second count, who rescues Queen Baudour from Geoffroy, King of the Frisians.

The Paris manuscript containing the prose adaptation of *Theseus of Cologne* is roughly contemporary with the present manuscript and was presumably made for Jean de Chabannes, as was another version of intermediate length, also bearing the arms of Chabannes-Dammartin (Paris, BnF, MS fr. 15096, *Catalogue des manuscrits français*, VIII, p. 313: "Histoire d'Assailant, premier comte de Dammartin, et de Gerard, son fils, traduite en français des *Croniques des roys de Coulongne*"). This middle-sized version has a prologue in which the translator claims to have translated the work from Latin: "[...] et pour ce que tous ceulx qui volentiers scauroient et desirent scavoir et entendre aucune chose de gestes ou hystoires francoises ay entrepris d'en reciter et mettre au moins mal que je pourray ung hystoire d'un vaillant conte nomme assailant conte jadis de la conte de dampmartin..." (Paris, BnF, MS fr. 15096, ff. 5v-6). This manuscript was copied, however, in the fifteenth century and presents a very different aesthetic from the other early sixteenth-century manuscripts (Paris MSS fr. 1473, fr. 4962, and the present dedication copy). It is possible that Paris MS fr. 15096 is the work referred to in our prologue as having been translated from the Latin by Nicolas Houssemaine, hence the passage in our dedicatory prologue: "[...] "ung viel livre en francoys rymé lequel a nagueres este mis en prose lequel extraict a l'onneur de vostre seigneurie ay translaté sur la langue francoyse..." (f. 9).

In sum, in the present state of research, it is not clear whether Houssemaine was responsible for all three versions (i.e. (1) the long fleshed-out version of Paris fr. 1473; (2) the intermediate but preceding fifteenth-century (1480s) translation from a Latin source; (3) the shorter abridged version made-to-order for members of the Dammartin family found in the present dedicatory copy and Paris MS fr. 4962) or only for the version found in the present manuscript, the only one to provide specifics about authorship. This presentation copy, and Houssemaine's authorship of at least one of the three Dammartin adaptations, was not known to R. Bossuat for his analysis "*Théséus de Cologne*," in *Le Moyen Age*, LXV, 1959, pp. 97-133, 293-320 and 539-72.

Owning at least three versions of the same history glorifying the founders of his line is entirely consonant with Jean de Chabannes's patronage. The Dammartin were proud to be called "cousins" by the king of France because of their associations with the house of Bourbon and spent considerable effort underscoring their royal lineage: "[...] aymés l'estude et estes extraict de lignee royalle de par ma dame vostre mere..." (f. 3). About the same time, in 1502-3, Jean commissioned a series of portraits of the kings of France and of the counts and countesses of Dammartin,

accompanied by a verse genealogy, and followed by an account of his successful legal battle over the will of his daughter, Anne (Chantilly, Musée Condé, MS 866, see P. Stirnemann et al., in Chantilly, 2001, no. 4, pp. 19-21). He clearly liked illustrated books about himself and his family, as shown by *Les Marguerites hystorielles* (Paris, BnF, MS fr. 955), written in 1497 and titled for his mother and first wife, and his specially adapted version of the *Chronique scandaleuse* (Paris, BnF, MS Clairambault 481; see Avril and Reynaud, 1993, p. 276).

ILLUSTRATION

The subjects of the six extant miniatures are as follows:

f. 1, Nicolas de Houssemaine, in his academic robes, presents his work to Jean de Chabannes, count of Dammartin (the rubbing fortunately avoiding the principal faces);

f. 28, King Asseres of Antioch learns of the treason of Lambert;

f. 39v, Guerard de Dammartin defeats Geffroy de Vermandois and secures the release of Queen Baudour;

f. 44, The château of Dammartin besieged by Geffroy, King of Frisia, who is killed in single combat by Guerard de Dammartin;

f. 47, Regnier, King of Antioch, presents a traitor's head to Louis, King of France;

f. 52, King Louis of France has the silver stripped from the roof of St Denis.

The six extant miniatures are the product of the collaboration of two artists, as suggested by Isabelle Delaunay. The first artist, the Master of the Paris Entries, was likely responsible for most of the miniatures; and the second artist, the Master of Etienne Poncher, was responsible for the border decoration and perhaps for the dedicatory miniature, in which the face of Jean de Chabannes was added by the Master of the Paris Entries.

Extremely prolific between 1490 or 1495 in Paris until the 1520s and likely head of a large atelier, the Master of the Paris Entries takes his name from two manuscripts: the *Entrée de Marie Tudor* (1514), the sister of Henry VIII of England and wife of Louis XII (London, British Library, Cotton MS Vespasian B II) and the *Sacre, couronnement, triomphe et entrée de la reine et duchesse Madame Claude de France* (1517), wife of King Francis I (Paris, BnF, MS fr. 5750). For the best recent summation of his style, see Delaunay, 2008, pp. 52-61. She considers him a kind of emulator of Jean Pichore, with whom he even collaborated on several occasions. She further notes that the large number of portraits that he painted, many with family arms, suggests that he may have exercised the profession of stationer (*libraire*), which would have afforded him access to a wide variety of clients for special orders (see 2008, p. 55, note 5; and also Delaunay, 2001, pp. 249-270). Exercising the role of stationer would also have enabled him to produce manuscripts "in series," such as he did for the books on the entries, which exist in at least five copies each.

Stylistic characteristics include his vivid palette with purple, azure, gray, mauve, and orange, blue skies with striations going from blue marine to light blue, and faces with relatively small eyes and slightly puckered red lips. His narrative scenes convey a great deal of animation, which may have made him a good choice for clients who wanted historical works such as chronicles.

The Master of Etienne Poncher is named after two manuscripts made for the prelate, Etienne Poncher, who was Bishop of Paris from 1502 to 1519: his Pontifical for the use of Paris (Paris, BnF, MS lat. 956) and a work titled *Les empereurs de Rome et d'Allemagne, les Papes et les roys de France* (Sale, Mensing, Amsterdam, 1929, lot 45, location unknown) (see Delaunay, 2000, vol. 1, p. 290). The lavish architectural frames are executed with an exuberant economy, with statues of convincing three-dimensionality created by just a few lines

A full study of the interrelationships between the three manuscripts owned by Jean de Chabannes of his *Gestes* would include identification of the artists of the other two versions (MSS fr. 4962 and 1473). It would appear that the Master of the Paris Entries was responsible for the daughter's manuscript (MS fr. 4962), but it is interesting that the miniatures are not replicas of those in the present manuscripts, although the subjects are often the same. The identity of the artist of MS fr. 1473 must be sought in the same circle of Parisian painters. Here, then, is another case that merits further study of manuscripts made "in series" by the Master of the Paris Entries.

BINDING

Of the utmost rarity is the original bi-color velvet binding over wooden boards, the velvet disposed in alternate bands of two colors, purple and gold. Surely the binding was made to order for Jean de Chabannes, as it recalls the heraldic colors of the arms of the Dammartin (*d'argent à trois fasces d'azur*), which occur in each illuminated border. We are grateful to Marie-Pierre Lafitte for sharing information with us from the inventory of Blois on velvet bindings in several colors (inv. nos. 104, 1453, 1501, 1597, 1770, 1803, 1852). The latter inventory number 1852 corresponds to BnF MS fr. 5729, on the entry of the Emperor Charles V. This is the only other velvet binding of this type that has come down to us, and its colors, red and yellow, are those of King Louis XII. Recalling the Dammartin family arms, the sumptuous bands of velvet thus provide a fitting complement to a manuscript entirely devoted to the memory and history of the Dammartin clan and destined to rival both in content and appearance royal productions.

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