

Master of Philippe de Gueldres (Paris, active c. 1500-1510)

Border with emblems and an initial "A" (overall 330 x 301; border width 60 mm., text block width with border 180 mm.), cutting from the Gradual of Louis XII and Anne of Brittany France (probably Paris), very late fifteenth or early sixteenth century

This fragment with an illuminated border and initial is from a vast and opulent Choir book filled with the devices and initials of Anne of Brittany and the royal arms of France, including the initials "A" (Anne) and "L" (Louis), which dates the manuscript to 1499-1514. It must have been made for one of the royal chapels, such as the Sainte-Chapelle in Paris, or for one of her private chapels at Amboise or Blois. It was cut up by 1840 and is cited in the literature in 1860 by Le Roux de Lincy, who refers to pieces of it in a number of important collections.

Duchess and heiress of Brittany, Anne married three times, twice to kings of France. After a renounced marriage to Maximilian of Austria, she married Charles VII, king of France, in 1491, at the age of 14 and was crowned queen of France in 1492. Widowed and childless, in 1498, at the age of 21, she almost immediately re-married his successor, Louis XII, on 8 January 1499, and became queen of France for a second time. Only two children from her seven pregnancies with Louis XII lived, and she died on 9 January 1514, shortly before her 37th birthday. Anne of Brittany was an important royal art patron (L'Estrange, 2007). Her other commissions included the *Grandes Heures* (Paris, BnF, MS lat. 9474), illuminated by Jean Bourdichon, and the *Petites Heures* (BnF, MS n. a. l. 3027) and, in all probability, the *Hunt of the Unicorn* tapestries in the Cloisters, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

A handful of historiated initials from the Choir Book are known. One of the most significant shows Louis XII and Anne of Brittany kneeling before the Crown of Thorns (which was kept in the Sainte-Chapelle) and is in the Musée Dobrée, Nantes (Paris, Les Enluminures, 1994, no. 28). There are many fragments of borders and initials (De Hamel, 2010-11, no. 83): for example, in Bloomington (Indiana), Paris, Berlin, Tours, and Wellesley (Massachusetts). The leaf in Wellesley College (MS 6) is complete and thus allows us to judge the overall size of the imposing volume. It would have measured 657 by 495 mm. and was written in a majestic, princely script with elegant musical notation.

Literature: De Hamel, 2010, no. 83; L'Estrange, 2007; Le Roux de Lincy 1860-61, II, p. 86.