

Rondeaux by JEAN MAROT, JEAN D'AUTON, PIERRE GRINGORE, OCTOVIE DE SAINT-GELAIS, JEAN PICART, and MARTIN DE HOUSSE
In French, illuminated manuscript on parchment
France (Paris?), c. 1500-1515(?)

i (modern paper) + *ii* (parchment) + 61 + *ii* (parchment) + 1 (modern paper) folios on parchment, modern foliation in pencil, upper outer rectos, 1-61, complete (collation i-vii⁸ viii⁵ [structure uncertain]), ruled in crayon with full-length horizontal and vertical bounding lines, prickings visible in outer and lower margins (justification 113-116 x 78-81 mm.), written in hybrid script by at least three hands on sixteen long lines: (1) ff. 1rv, 3-6v, 8-9v, 11-13v 16-27v, 30-31, 32-38v, 42rv, 45rv, 50-51v, 54-55v, in a compact script with some humanist forms, (2) ff. 2rv, 7rv, 10rv, 14-15v, 28-29v, 39-41v, 43-44v, 46-47v, 48-49v, 52-53v, 56rv, 60-61v, in an elegantly flourished script with decorative hairlines and some bâtarde and humanist forms, (3) ff. 14, 31v, 57-59v, in a script with dramatically flourished descenders and some humanist forms, capitals highlighted in yellow, one-line paraphs painted in gold on blue or red grounds, one-line initials painted in gold on blue or red grounds at the beginning of each rondeau (with additional one-line initials used in the rondeaux on ff. 57-59v), ff. 1, 21v, and 61v slightly rubbed and soiled, some small holes in f. 1, but with no loss of text, otherwise in excellent condition. Bound by Chambolle-Duru in late nineteenth-century brown morocco, gilt along the edges, spine with five bands and gilt inscription, "RECUEIL / DE / RONDEAUX," marbled paper pastedowns and flyleaves, bookmark of red, yellow, and green striped ribbon, outer edges gilt. Dimensions 170 x 107 mm.

This small and intimate volume of courtly love poetry was almost certainly made for a member of the French royal court in the time of King Louis XII and Anne of Brittany. It brings together the work of several well-known Renaissance poets, one of whom may have supervised its production. Two poems in the collection are unpublished and unrecorded. Each page is written in handsome, calligraphic script and shines with initials in gold and vivid color. Collections such as this one are not common (only three similar manuscripts have sold in the last century).

PROVENANCE

1. Script and decoration indicate that this book of poems was produced in France, almost certainly Paris, in the early sixteenth century, c. 1500-1515. Its contents were written for circulation among rarefied aristocratic circles at the French royal court, and this volume was very likely produced at the court of Louis XII (reigned 1498-1515) and Anne of Brittany, to which many of the poets whose work appears here belonged. With its handsome script and painted initials, this manuscript was made for an aristocratic reader at court, and was perhaps presented by one of these poets. The painted initials found throughout are quite similar in style to those found in London, British Library, Cotton Vespasian MS B.ii, a presentation copy of Pierre Gringore's pageant for the Entry of Mary Tudor into Paris, produced in Paris in 1514. Gringore probably played an active role in this book's production (see Brown, 1997, p. 149). It would make sense for the present manuscript to have been produced around the same time with similar supervision by one or more of the poets whose work appears in the volume.
2. Belonged to the Vicomte family of Normandy; their blind-stamp on the second and third flyleaves bearing the family arms and motto "LE VISCONTE E L'ENOR."

3. Belonged to Jean A. Bonna (b. 1945), Geneva, banker, collector, bibliophile, and philanthropist, whose important collection focuses on French literature; his gilt monogram bookplate, "JAB," on the verso of the first flyleaf. Sold in his 2015 Christie's, London sale; lot 12 in *Important Books and Manuscripts from the Library of Jean A. Bonna*, 16 June 2015.

TEXT

ff. 1-61v, incipit, "Da depuis le departement / De celle en qui mon pensement ..."; f. 1v, incipit, "Tant quil souffit dune ie me contente / Et nay desir vouloir ne autre atente ..."; f. 61, incipit, "Je le say bien dont grant dueil ie recoy / Que tu aymes vne autre plus que moy ..."; f. 61v, incipit, "De revenir as tu plus desesperance / Mandez le moy sans tenir en souffrance ... Helas amy croys moy et si tauence / De reuenir."

A collection of 122 *rondeaux*, likely all composed in the late fifteenth to early sixteenth century, with each *rondeau* copied to fill a single page. Though works of several important poets appear within the book, no rubrics provide identifying information here. Of these 122 *rondeaux*, 104 have been edited in Françon (1938), and these 104 (with two duplications bringing the number to 106) correspond to numbers 370, 315, 317, 267, 277, 280, 363, 10, 256, 324, 316, 15 (albeit with a substantial number of variant lines), 302, 5 (appearing twice, on ff. 9 and 34), 86, 458, 470, 266, 90, 421, 301, 293, 87, 313, 323, 250, 295, 300, 249, 3, 296, 263, 264, 13, 297, 242, 92, 17, 265, 260, 355, 254, 9, 7, 268, 371, 2, 461, 472, 467, 468, 42, 244, 61, 262, 11, 247, 298 (appearing twice, on ff. 33v and 34v), 4, 246, 243, 299, 83, 279, 282, 6, 240, 314, 327, 325, 37, 270, 320, 304, 239, 259, 312 (with some notable variation), 91, 368, 276, 513, 367, 292, 318, 303, 322, 329, 369, 469, 521, 96, 258, 261, 8, 294, 437 (with some notable variation), 439, 480, 436, 588, 466, 305, 450, and 465 in Françon's edition. He based this numeration on the sequence of 601 *rondeaux* in Lille, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 402, which provided the base text for his edition (see Françon, 1938, vol. 1, pp. 30-31); he consulted ten other manuscripts as well (1938, vol. 1, p. 32).

Of the sixteen remaining *rondeaux*, two appear to be completely unrecorded: "Je pers mon temps dont point ne me contente" (f. 31) and "Si ie le di ce que vers vous me meine" (f. 36v). Of the other fourteen, one (f. 57v) was edited by Defaux and Mantovani (1999), one (f. 48) can be found in Lawton (1906), eight (ff. 1, 4v, 5, 21, 44v, 49, 51v, and 56v) were printed in *Cent quarante cinq rondeaux d'amours* (1875), and four (ff. 15, 15v, 17v, and 41v) can only be found printed in *Le jardin de plaisance et fleur de rhétorique*, Paris, Antoine Verard, c. 1501 (see Droz and Piaget, eds., 1910), an early print anthology of French poetry.

Of the approximately twenty extant collections of *rondeau*, most are in European institutions. Only three comparable manuscripts have been on the market in the last century, one of which is substantially shorter. Compared to the most recent of these (London, Sotheby's, 22 June 2004, lot 63), the present manuscript stands out as a particularly fine specimen, with larger pages, and thus more widely spaced script and more illumination on each page.

The *rondeau* was a popular poetic form in late medieval and Renaissance France, one of several fixed French verse forms that could be set to music. By the later Middle Ages, however, writers of *rondeaux* tended to celebrate the music inherent in their language rather than writing them

expressly to be turned into songs. The *rondeaux* here were almost certainly written to be read, not sung; by the middle of the fifteenth century, what were formerly scribal abbreviations of refrains to be restated in full had become *rentrements*, one- or two-word non rhyming lines. Most of the *rondeaux* are written out in a fifteen-line format with the rhyme scheme AABBA – AAB – *rentrement* – AABBA – *rentrement*. Two (see f. 15rv) are examples of the “*rondeau prime*” form, with only twelve lines written out with the rhyme scheme ABBA – AB – *rentrement* – ABBA – *rentrement*.

Courtly love animates these *rondeaux*. They run an emotional gamut from hope to adulation to despair as they range in their subject matter from the pursuit of the beloved – poems of courtship and flirtation – to the celebration of her virtues – poems of adoration and obsession – to the loss of love – poems of lamentation and recrimination. Some address the beloved directly – eg. “En vous voyant ce mest plaisir a lheure” (f. 16), while others describe the lover’s plight – eg. “Pour accomplir le vouloir de mon cuer” (f. 9) – or, more generally, address the conditions governing love affairs – eg. “Contre fortune chascun pert son effort” (f. 12v).

In fifteenth- and sixteenth-century France, it was common for short poems like these to circulate in collections bringing together the works of different poets. Many of these anthologies focus on works produced within small coteries, circle of poets engaging in dialogue with each other through their work (see Taylor, 2007), while others, like Lille MS 402 or the printed *Jardin de plaisance* (see above) bring together massive collections of poetry, in some cases organized around a narrative trajectory (say, from the beginning of a love affair to its end). The arrangement of the poems in this manuscript should reward careful study, shedding light on how these poems were being read and what intentions might have shaped this particular collection.

These poems would have been written to be shared at the French royal court. Indeed, many can be linked to particular poets affiliated with the courts of Charles VIII (reigned 1483-1498) and, to a greater extent, Louis XII (reigned 1498-1515), whose court was “marked by much of the splendour that we associate with Renaissance monarchs” (Britnell, 2009, p. 43). These poets were part of a circle known as the *Grands Rhétoriciens*, specifically a subset of this poetic circle that wrote with the patronage of the king and other members of the court. Their poetry is known for its rich word play and experimentation with sound.

One of the best known among the *Rhétoriciens* is the court poet Jean Marot (1457-1526), born near Caen, in Normandy. Marot became secretary to Anne of Brittany (1477-1514) during her second reign as queen consort of France (1499-1514) in 1506 and later became official poet of both Louis XII and Francis I (reigned 1515-1547). In addition to longer poetic works like *Le voyage de Gênes*, composed in praise of Louis XII’s 1507 expedition to recover Genoa, he wrote at least fifty *rondeaux*. The poems on ff. 28v, 29, 55, 57, 57v, 58, 59, 59v, and 61v have been attributed to him (see Françon, 1938, vol. 1, pp. 35-36 and Defaux and Mantovani, eds., 1999).

Another *rhétoricien* working in the royal court at the same time, Jean d’Auton (1466/67-1528), served as the official historiographer to Louis XII. He is best known for his *Chroniques de Louis XII*. The *rondeau* on f. 35 has been attributed to him (see Françon, 1938, vol. 1, p. 38).

The popular French poet, playwright, and publisher Pierre Gringore (c. 1475 –c.1538) was born in Normandy. While working as a playwright and actor in Paris, he became a favorite of Louis XII. He is best known for the satirical plays he wrote in Paris, many of which poked fun at the

papacy, and for the *Vie de monseigneur Saint Louis* (c. 1513?), a mystery play he wrote about Louis IX of France. The *rondeau* on f. 48 has been attributed to him (see Lawton, ed., 1906, p. 12).

The poet and translator Octovien de Saint-Gelais (1468-1502) was active slightly earlier. He was born in Cognac, Charente, and became a member of the court of Charles VIII. Through the favor of that king he was appointed bishop of Angoulême in 1495. He is known for his translations of Vergil's *Aeneid* and Ovid's *Heroides* into French verse, and he also produced his own poetic compositions, like the three *rondeaux* on ff. 11, 24v, and 26v, elsewhere attributed to him (see Françon, 1938, vol. 1, p. 40 and Lemaire, 1977, pp. 48-49).

Less is known about the remaining two poets. Jean Picart, to whom the *rondeaux* on ff. 13, 14, 19, 21v, 32, 51, and 56 have been attributed (see Françon, 1938, vol. 1, p. 37), has been identified in other manuscripts variously as the bailiff of Estelan and viscount of Falaise, in Normandy. He does appear to have associated with the French court poets. One *rondeau* here (f. 5v) has been attributed to one Martin de Housse (see Françon, 1938, vol. 2, no. 363), but nothing appears to be known of him.

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