

JEAN BODIN, *C'est la declaraci'on des choses heritaux* (Declaration of feudal holdings, or "aveu et dénombrements")

In French, manuscript on parchment

Western France (La Pignonnière, near Angers), dated March 30, 1511

i (modern paper) + ii (parchment) + 50 + ii (parchment) + i (modern paper) folios on parchment, modern foliation in pencil, 1-50, complete (collation i-v¹⁰), written in brown ink in a cursive notarial hand on unruled leaves on up to 45 long lines (justification 173 x 116 mm), opening initial 'C' decorated with strapwork extending into the margin (cadel initial), typical of notarial hands, a small tear in f. 15, otherwise in excellent condition. Bound in nineteenth-century quarter calf, worn spine with title in gilt, "ANJOU / LA / PIGNONNIÈRE / AVEU / 1511." Dimensions 217 x 160 mm.

An unpublished manuscript that provides a rare insight into the feudal holdings of the Royal Abbey of Fontevraud. This document is a declaration of the fiefs held by the vassals of one of the principal dependencies of the Abbey, the fiefdom of Pignonnière, in Saint Barthélémy d'Anjou, now a suburb of Angers. Feudal inventories from France are rarely studied, and few have been edited. This manuscript thus offers previously unknown material for exploring late medieval society in Anjou.

PROVENANCE

1. This feudal document, known in French as an *aveu*, was drafted by Jean Bodin, a jurist living in Angers. Bodin signed the document with two other notaries and gave his name, profession, and the date of completion, March 30, 1511, in the explicit (f. 50). Another date in the document, February 21 (f. 49v), informs us that the work took the notaries at least 38 days to complete. Its compilation would have followed a ceremony of homage in which all the vassals of the fiefdom of Pignonnière pledged submission to their liege lord, King Louis XII, and the abbess, who governed the fiefdom. The present document, confirming the homage, is the written declaration that vassals in medieval France were obliged to provide within 40 days following the ceremony. Abbess Renée de Bourbon engaged a professional jurist to compile the document for the king's use. Further research may reveal whether Louis XII expressly ordered the inventory of this *seigneurie*, possibly coinciding with a campaign to collect revenue.

The compiler of the document, the jurist Jean Bodin, was most likely the same man who wrote an alphabetical index to the first edition of the *Coutume d'Anjou*, printed in 1509. His celebrated namesake, the Angevin jurist and philosopher, Jean Bodin (1529-1596), was apparently not his son, despite earlier claims (Pasquier, 1933).

2. Notarial and archival inscriptions in four hands on f. 1: in the upper left corner, two different groups of initials (*paraphes*), the lower in brown ink belonging to Jean Bodin; below the *paraphes*, "n° 92 Pieces..."; written vertically in the margin "... six cent cinq[uan]te"; in the lower margin, "ij JB(?)" initials (*paraphe*) possibly of Jean Bodin (16th, 17th and 18th c.).

3. On the recto of the first front parchment flyleaf, which may have formed part of the original binding, a brown paper label is pasted inscribed in a nineteenth-century hand, "511 La pignonniere dependante de l'abbaye de fontevraud 30 mars 1511".

TEXT

ff. 1-50, incipit, "C'est la declarac[i]on des choses heritaux, en doumaine, Cens, Rentes et Revenuz que tiennent et advouent a tenir du Roy n[ot]re sire au Regard de son duchie d'anjou, Nobles dames les Religieuses abbesse et convent de fontevraud dames du fief, terres et appartena[n]ces de la peigno[n]ni[e]re ... En premiere lieu declarant les choses heritaux qu'elles tiennent en leur doumaine que sont les maisons, pressoirs, grange, court et Jardins diceluy lieu de la pignonniere ... P[resen]tee ceste p[rese]nte declaration par led[it] maistre Jehan Bodin Licensie es loix procur[eur] especial quant ad ce des[sus] d[ites] Religieuses abbesse et convent comme nous est apparu p[ar] les Lettres de p[ro]curation cy dessus escripte ... Le penultime Jour de mars L'an mil cinq cens unze avant pasques." [Signed on f. 49v by three notaries (rather than the usual two), two of whom are named Bodin (the signatures are distinct and therefore only one of them is the author) and the third, Proust.]

Jean Bodin, Declaration of feudal holdings, or "aveu et dénombremens", the manuscript inventories the possessions of the Fontevraud Abbey in the fiefdom of Pignonnière. A fiefdom is an estate or domain and includes all the lands allocated to individuals (vassals) in return for service or rent. The phrase "advouent a tenir" (avow to hold), found in the first sentence of the text, identifies the type of document known in French as *aveux et dénombremens*, which in English can be literally translated as "avowals and enumerations." The document lists the vassals of this particular fiefdom (there are over a hundred names) item by item, describing the parcels of land that made up each fief, and indicating the deceased vassals ("feu") and their beneficiaries. The succession is carefully detailed because a vassal often gained possession of a fief through inheritance and the feudal contract between the lord and the vassal had legal significance only during the lifetime of each. The change of either party required the production of a new *aveu*.

The Benedictine abbey of Fontevraud was founded in 1101 by the charismatic preacher Robert of Arbrissel, and became the largest pre-modern Order under female leadership in Europe. Renée de Bourbon, elected abbess in 1491, was the first of five consecutive Bourbon abbesses. The role of Fontevraud in the rise of the Bourbons from counts to kings has been highlighted recently (Müller, 2014), and its economic weight and influence in France was considerable. By 1450 the abbey supervised 78 priories and over 100 dominions, including forests, bridges, mills, and fiefdoms, stretching from Picardy to the Pyrenees. The abbey of Fontevraud was a wealthy landlord bringing considerable sums to the royal purse. The present manuscript may be considered in light of the efforts of Renée de Bourbon to restructure the financial resources of the dependencies, as she began the transformation of Fontevraud into a strictly hierarchical institution with a centralized government. The majority of its archives are in the Archives départementales de Maine-et-Loire (101 H-241 H).

Feudal inventories like this one are rarely studied, except in Germany and Austria, mainly because very few have been edited (Nieuw, 2012, pp. 125-6). The present manuscript thus offers previously unknown material for exploring late medieval society in Anjou. The entries include relatively detailed descriptions of the composition of the fiefs and their location. The inventory is organized topographically, beginning with the "belle chappelle et cymittiere, Letout enclout

et circuit a murailles," and naming the living and deceased feudal tenants. There is an earlier inventory of the fiefdom of Pignonnière in the Bibliothèque nationale de France, compiled by Jean Violin in 1464 (NAF 10671).

The present manuscript not only offers insight into how feudal estates worked, how they were managed, and the kind of archives they kept, it also provides new material for writing the later history of the Fontevraud Abbey, which, beyond its beginnings in the twelfth century, has been largely ignored. Apart from the recent thesis by A. Müller (2014), there are no studies of this important royal abbey in the later Middle Ages.

LITERATURE

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