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MARTIN DE BRION, *Tres ample description de toute la Terre Saincte et choses memorables faictes en plusieurs villes et lieux d'icelle, extraicte de la Bible et livres saint Hierosme par Martin de Brion parisien*

In French, illuminated manuscript, on parchment  
[France, Paris, c. 1540]

*100 folios, on parchment, complete (collation impracticable), written in brown ink in an elegant minuscule calligraphic script, in a semi-gothic secretarial hand, with citations in a humanist cursive and Roman capitals for the titles, on 25 long lines, ruled in red ink (justification 165 x 90 mm.), with an ILLUMINATED ARMORIAL FRONTISPIECE, bearing the arms of the Admiral Philippe de Chabot (fol. 1v), the text leaves framed in gold terminating in the angles with a red bull-head or chub fish (a chabot), in excellent clean, fresh condition. CONTEMPORARY ROSE VELVET BINDING (restored along the spine), edges gilt, ties lacking. Dimensions, c. 245 x 155 mm.*

One of only three manuscript copies known, all from the royal circle of King Francis I, of an unusual historical geography of the Kingdom of Jerusalem. Beautifully written by a professional calligrapher in the royal circle, the present manuscript is in a period velvet binding. Made for the Admiral of the French navy, the copy is cleverly personalized with the arms of the admiral of France and his emblem, the chub, a sort of catfish (*chabot*), in the four corners of every page.

## PROVENANCE

1. Philippe de Chabot, seigneur of Brion and Admiral of France (1492-1543). His arms are placed in a double frame of red and gold, ornamented in each angle with a chub fish (a *chabot*) and between the lines of the frame, 1 gold stars with sixteen rays, a fleur-de-lis, an anchor, and three fish. One of King Francis I's closest friends, Philippe de Chabot is credited with the idea behind the discovery of Canada. Having heard of Jacques Cartier's navigational skills, the Admiral of the French Navy approached him to head an expedition to America in search of a northwest passage to the Orient. Between 1516 and 1543, Philippe de Chabot served as the Grand Master of the international Order of the Templars. His magnificent tomb, designed by Jean Cousin, is in the Louvre. (See Hoefler, vol. 5, cols. 531-32).
2. Claude Bernard Rousseau, *auditeur des comptes*, 1709, his bookplate, front pastedown (also owned BnF, MSS fr. 10138, 12435, and n.a.f. 2085).

## TEXT

f. 2r, incipit, "Arbee est une petite ville assise en la terre de Juda disant de Bethleem ...";

f. 100r, explicit, "... Lors quelle estoit aux ... il y avoit siege Archiepiscopal. Finis."

The work is organized in the form of a dictionary. Each entry—Arabie, Bethleem, Chabul, Gaza, Gomorra, Judea, Moab, Rabath, Syria, etc.-- includes geographical, historical, and scriptural details. For each of the cities or regions, classified in alphabetical order, the author specifies the geographic location and explains the name or sometimes the different names. He recalls what was said in the Scriptures about the particular site, and he identifies those that were bishoprics or archbishoprics during the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem. The version made for Francis I contains 19 lines describing the city of Ziph not found in the present copy. However, the present version, ending with the entry on "Tirus," is clearly complete in itself, because the scribe has written "Finis" at the end of the last entry.

The author, Martin de Brion, was a relative of Philippe de Chabot, seigneur of Brion and Admiral of France (1492-1543). Philippe de Chabot was raised at the Chateau d'Amboise with Francis I, Anne of Monmorency, and other members of the nobility. He served his military career under King Francis I, fighting in Marseille, Pavia, and elsewhere. He remained throughout his lifetime a powerful figure in the royal realm. Therefore, it is not surprising that the author paid homage to him in this rich manuscript, whose content would have had special interest for the commander of the French fleet. King Francis I, among other Valois kings, dreamed of organizing a conquest of the Kingdom of Jerusalem, whose historical interest is memorialized in Martin de Brion's text.

No printed edition of the French text exists. However, a Latin translation was published in Paris in 1540 by Guillaume de Bossozel: *Martinus Brionaeus, Totius Terrae Sanctae urbiumque et quicquid in eis memoria dignum actum gestumve fuit, secundum Bibliacos libros ac divum Hyeronimum ...* (see Boucher de la Richarderie, vol. 4, p. 403).

The rare text evidently circulated almost exclusively in the elite circle of the royal court of Francis I. Only two other copies of the text are known—for the King of France and the King of England-- and it was never edited. The first was made for King Francis I himself (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, MS fr. 5638). It is no longer in its original binding, having been rebound in eighteenth-century red morocco. The second was made for King Henry VIII (now London, British Library, Royal MS 20 A. IV). It preserves an embroidered period binding (see *Livres en broderie*, no. 9, p. 54). The present manuscript was written and painted by the same person(s) who made the copy for King Francis I. The royal exemplar for King Francis I repeats the decorative program employed in the present version, only it substitutes the fleur-de-lis for the chub fish in the four corners.

## LITERATURE

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Online Resources:

On BL, Royal MS 20 A. IV

<http://molcat.bl.uk/msscat/HITS0001.ASP?VPath=c!/inetpub/wwwroot/mss/data/msscat/html/39789.htm&Search=20+A.+IV&Highlight=F>