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[MARTIN DU BELLAY (1570-1637)], Aveu à Louis XIII pour la châtellenie d'Avrillé
[Declaration of feudal holdings made to Louis XIII, king of France for the land of Avrillé]
In French, illuminated manuscript on parchment
France, Touraine [Château de Gizeux], 25-27 October 1610

39 ff., preceded and followed by a single parchment flyleaf, complete (collation: i-iv^s, v⁷ [8-1, last leaf of quire cancelled], written in brown ink in a cursive bookhand on unruled leaves, on up to 22 long lines (justification: 225 x 155 mm), first opening words in liquid gold epigraphic Roman capitals as well as the name of the King "Loys" 5 lines below, large opening initial "D" painted in liquid gold with the illuminated crowned coat of arms of France and Navarre in the infill.

Contemporary rose velvet over pasteboard, gilt edges (pile worn away, split at joints, ties wanting, but preserved in its original state). Dimensions 294 x 227 mm.

Unpublished and unedited, the present manuscript of local and family history is an example of a "deluxe" copy of a common type of archival document, an "aveu," a statement made by a vassal (or feudatory) to his lord of feudal holdings. Illuminated copies such as this one are rare, because the transcription normally served a simple and practical purpose, but here the feudatory chose the lavish format no doubt because of the very special nature of his lord, none other than the king of France.

PROVENANCE

1. Martin du Bellay (1570-1637), who signs next to his legal representative and witnesses: "M. du Bellay" (fol. 39v). Document likely copied and illuminated for presentation to the King of France Louis XIII (1610-1643). The King's arms (France and Navarre), crowned initial "L," with arms circled by the collar of the Order of Saint-Michel, are painted in the opening initial, suggesting the present copy was likely a dedication copy to the lord (here Louis XIII, in his quality of Duc de La Flèche [in the Sarthe, located north-east of Angers]) on behalf of the feudatory or vassal (here Martin du Bellay). On f. 39v, the document contains an added note beneath the official declaration or "aveu," indicating that it was presented in La Flèche to the King's legal representative, here Charles Le Thiellier.
2. Edouard Loriol de Barny, lawyer and mayor of Angers in 1877, as indicated by pencil inscription on first flydown: "Acheté 140 francs à la vente Loriolle de Barny en février 1891." This sale took place in Angers, A. Hogue, 11 February 1891.

TEXT

ff. 1-39v, Martin du Bellay, [Aveu à Louis XIII], Dedication, "De vous treshault tresgrand tresmagnanime invincible tresvictorieux trespuissant et tousiours auguste prince Loys par la grace de dieu roy de France et de Navarre, duc de la Fleche, mon tresredoubté et souverain seigneur, j'ay, Martin du Bellay chevalier de voz ordres capitaine de cinquante hommes d'armes des ordonnances de vostre majesté conseiller en voz conseilz d'estat et privé prince d'Yvetot marquis de Touarcé baron de Comquiere, de la Forest-sur-Sevre et de la Haye-Joullain seigneur dudict lieu du Belay, Gizieux et de la chastelenie d'Avrillé confesse estre vostre homme de foy ligé au regard de vostre chastel seigneurie et duché de la flesche..."; incipit, "Premier s'ensuict la declaration des choses que je tiens en mon domaine de vostre maiesté..."; explicit, "[...] Faict et passé en mon chastel de Gizieux paroisse dudict Gizieux le vingt et cinquiesme jour d'octobre mil six cens dix presens maitre Berard et Eustache Rebassin (?) praticien... audict Gizieux"; [fol. 39v, supplementary note, added by a different hand] "Aujourduy vingt septiesme jour d'octobre mil six cens dix [1610] ledict du Bellay chevalier comparant en la personne de maistre Maurice Gaillard procureur fiscal de la chastelenye d'Aprillé... Donné à La Fleche par davant nous Charles Le Thiellier conseiller du roy juge magistrat en la senechaussée et siege presidial dudict lieu pour l'absence de messieurs les lieutenant general et particulier le vingt septiesme jour d'octobre mil six cens dix." [ends with signatures of legal representative and witnesses].

This manuscript contains the declaration of feudal holdings (in French, "Aveu") made to the King of France Louis XIII, as duc de la Flèche, by Martin du Bellay (1570-1637) concerning the estate at Avrillé-les-Ponceaux (Indre-et-Loire), located between Tours and Angers, just north of Langeais, the main fiefdom of this branch of the Du Bellay family. Such statements, made by a vassal (or feudatory) to his lord, were required in feudal law for the assumption of any fief: property, income, tenants, livestock dues, duties and rights were listed and approved.

Martin du Bellay was a member of the illustrious angevin and tourangeau Du Bellay family, whose members included in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries important political and literary figures. Amongst the famous representatives of this family, one should quote Guillaume du Bellay (1491-1543); Martin du Bellay (1495-1559), both famous chroniclers during the reign of François I^{er}; Jean du Bellay (1492-1560), cardinal-statesman and humanist, protector of François Rabelais; Joachim du Bellay (c. 1522/1525-1560), famous poet and critic, member of the Pléiade and author of the important *Deffence et Illustration de le Langue Françoise* (1549), which set the groundwork for French as a language of literature and poetry (see entries "Du Bellay" in *Dictionnaire des lettres françaises. Le XVIe siècle*, 2001, pp. 382-407; see also C. Port, 1876, p. 66 and sq.; La Chesnaye-Desbois, 1863, vol. 2, col. 854: "Bellay. Maison éteinte, originaire d'Anjou, qui a été considérable, non seulement par les grands hommes qu'elle a produits, par les dignités qu'ils ont possédées & par les services importants qu'ils ont rendus à l'Etat, mais aussi par son ancienneté"). The present Martin II du Bellay was in fact the grandson of Martin I du Bellay, the important chronicler: fittingly, an engraving--depicting Martin I du Bellay receiving the Order of Saint-Michel in 1555--is included in the present manuscript, perhaps placed there by his grandson.

The feudatory Martin du Bellay was a member of the second branch of the Du Bellay family, the "seigneurs du Bellay et de Thouarcé," whose last representative was Charles, marquis du Bellay, prince d'Yvetot who married in 1622 (see Moréri, 1759, II, p. 319). Raised at the court of the King

of France Henri III, Martin II du Bellay, prince of Yvetot, marquis de Thouarcé, baron de Commequiers, de la Foret-sur-Sèvre, de La Haye-Joullain, was "lieutenant-général," first in Normandy and then in Anjou, captain of fifty militia and "maréchal des camps et armées du roi" (see C. Port, 1876, pp. 69-70). Martin Du Bellay died in Gizeux (a small town in Indre-et-Loire, between Anjou and Touraine) in 1637. The present "Aveu" lists all his rights and possessions at Avrillé, including his woods, lakes, villains and the calendar of his feudal dues with the names of his vassals. Such a document is certainly interesting for local history, but also as a source for ancestral rural and feudal practices, with its rich vocabulary and onomastics. Avrillé, known today as Avrillé-les-Ponceaux (Indre-et-Loire), is near the very elegant and important castle of Gizeux where Martin du Bellay resided and ultimately deceased.

Further archival research would no doubt reveal interesting crossovers and comparisons. For example there is an interesting series of "aveux féodaux" in the Archives départementales de Maine-et-Loire (centralized in Angers) (Série E 1429-1445; see C. Port, *Inventaire sommaire...*, Paris, 1863: "Cette collection provient du cabinet Grille acheté par le département en 1851..."). Let us quote a number of "titres de famille" concerning the Du Bellay family (Arch. départementales Maine-et-Loire, Série E 2300), or another "Aveu par Martin du Bellay. Seigneurie de Benais, relevant de Chinon", dated 1611 (Paris, Arch. nationales, Série Q¹ 383). The present manuscript is an example of a "deluxe" copy of a common type of archival document, essential to the transmission of dues, duties and rights within a society still largely regimented by feudal law. This copy is illuminated, which in itself is not common, as such documents are most often quite simple and practical, without any particular decoration. It is probable that the feudatory chose to have such a practical--albeit solemn--document nicely copied and decorated because of the very special nature of his lord, none other than the king of France.

LITERATURE

La Chesnaye-Desbois. *Dictionnaire de la noblesse...*, Paris, 1863, tome 2, col. 854-855.

Moréri, L. *Le grand dictionnaire historique...*, Paris, 1759 [reprint, Genève, 1995], tome II, p. 318-319.

Port, C. *Dictionnaire historique, géographique et biographique de Maine-et-Loire*, Paris et Angers, 1876, tome 2, pp. 69-70.

Port, C. *Inventaire sommaire des archives départementales antérieures à 1790. Maine-et-Loire*, Paris, 1863.

Dictionnaire des lettres françaises. Le XVIe siècle, Paris, Fayard, 2001 [DLF].

ONLINE RESOURCES

On the Du Bellay Family

<http://www.renaissance-france.org/rabelais/pages/dubellay.html>

The Château de Gizeux, former property of Martin Du Bellay

http://www.chateaudegizeux.com/accueil_fr.php?id=2

<http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gizeux>