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[LOUIS VI DE ROHAN-GUÉMÉNÉ (1562-1589)], *Aveu présenté à Jacques du Bellay, chevalier de l'ordre du roi, par Louis de Rohan, prince de Guéméné, pour la terre de la Moceliere, relevant du Plessis Macé* [Declaration of feudal holdings made to Jacques du Bellay by Louis VI de Rohan-Guéméné for the land of La Mocelière, tied to the fief of Le Plessis Macé]

**In French, illuminated manuscript on parchment  
France, Angers, 2 July 1574**

24 folios, followed by a single parchment blank flyleaf, complete (collation  $i^2$  (4-2, with two first leaves of quire likely canceled,  $ii^6$  iii-vii<sup>4</sup>), written in brown ink in a cursive bookhand on unruled leaves, on up to 18 long lines (justification 220 x 170 mm), large opening initial "D" painted in liquid gold with dolphin-like zoomorphic figures, flowers in the infill, some later marginal annotations, mostly referring to different place names and localities (17<sup>th</sup> or 18<sup>th</sup> century), manuscript unbound [included on loose paper the complete transcription of the document on paper, early 20th c. hand, perhaps that of Chappée's archivist (Abbé Denis?), with the Chappée collector's stamp]. Dimensions 265 x 260 mm.

With its prestigious Chappée-Cogner provenance, its illuminated initial and clear script, the present manuscript constitutes a fine example of a common type of archival document, the "Aveu" (declaration of feudal holding), essential to the recognition of property and the transmission of dues, duties, and rights within a society still entirely regimented by feudal law. Both vassal and lord in the present example enjoyed high social status, no doubt reflected as well in the quality of the manuscript.

## PROVENANCE

1. Louis VI de Rohan-Guéméné (1562-1589) was Prince de Guéméné, comte de Montbazou, Baron de Marigny, Seigneur de Montauban, born at the château de Guéméné in 1540. Although Louis VI de Rohan-Guéméné went blind at the age of five, he remained particularly appreciated by Henry IV: "La nature le dédommagea par les plus heureuses dispositions et par les talents les plus extraordinaires" (La Chesnaye-Desbois, vol. 17, col. 504). Noteworthy is the use of an ink-stamped signature for Loys de Rohan, in lieu of actual signature (f. 23).
2. Julien Chappée (1862-1957) from Le Mans (Sarthe, historic Maine region), his collector's stamp on first folio: "Archives du Cognier. J. Chappée. Le Mans." The important Chartrier du Cognier was a collection of documents (and manuscripts) assembled by Julien Chappée and housed in his property at Le Cognier in Le Mans. At the turn of the century, the Chappée collection of documents of historical and antiquarian interest was ordered and

cataloged with great care by a number of scholars, including l'abbé Denis, following the scheme of classification and cataloging criteria set and preferred by public French institutions such as the Bibliothèque nationale in Paris and the departmental archives of France. A large part of the Chappée archival and manuscript holdings (some 20 000 documents!) were bequeathed to the Bibliothèque nationale in Paris. However, some were not included in this donation and appeared subsequently in public sales and auctions. Most of these documents would certainly have perished if it were not for his solicitude: "Je les ai trouvées dans les greniers, exposées à la dent des rats, dans les coffres ou déjà l'humidité les avait compromises et jusque dans la hotte du chiffonnier."

## TEXT

ff. 1-23, Aveu de Louis de Rohan adressé à Jacques Du Bellay, 2 juillet 1574 [Declaration of feudal holdings made to Jacques du Bellay by LouisVI de Rohan-Guemené for the land of La Moceliere, tied to the fief of Plessis Macé, 2 July 1574], incipit, "De vous hault et puissant seigneur messire Jacques du Bellay, chevalier de l'ordre du roy, conte de Tonnerre, baron des baronnies de Commequiers et de la Forest sur Savyre, seigneur du Bellay, de Gizieux, de Touarcé, de la Haye-Joullain, Grez et du Plessis-Macé..."; explicit, "[...] En tesmoing de ce je vous rends et baille ce present escript pour adveu le quel j'ay scellé du scel et cachet de mes armes et signé de mon seign manuel cy mis le deuxiesme jour de juillet, l'an mil cinq cens soixante et quatorze [signed with a stamped signature] Loys de Rohan [signed in brown ink] Cador, a la requeste dudit seigneur prince [red seal attached, with the Rohan arms]";

f. 23, Added confirmation, presented in the Palais présidial of Angers, 12 June 1565: "Presenté ce present adveu par ledit seigneur Louys de Rohan, en la personne de maistre Ollivier Cador, licencié es droictz, son procureur, et luy avons baillé jour de l'ouyr, lire a la seconde assize dudit Plessis Macé. Donné au Pallays royal d'Angers, par emprunt de territoire, par davant nous René Chacebeuf, licencié es loix, l'ung des anxiens advocatz du siege presidial d'Angers, seneschal du Plessis Macé, le douziesme jour de juing, l'an mil cinq cens soixante et quinze [signed R. Chacebeuf / R. Cochelin / J. Thomas]";

ff. 23v-24, Concession de Louis de Rohan adressé au Seigneur de Brissac, pour la seigneurie de La Saullaye, 30 juillet 1569 [Concession of the land of La Saullaye owned by Louis de Rohan to the Seigneur de Brissac, 30 July 1569], incipit, "Le trentiesme jour de juillet l'an mil cinq cens soixante neuf en nostre court du conté de Duvestal en droict par devant nous present et personnellement estably hault et puissant messire Loys de Rohan..."; explicit, "[...] Ainsi signéz Loys de Rohan, Leonore de Rohan et Hodemon et sellé en queue simple de cire vert [signed] R. Chacebeuf / R. Cochelin ";

ff. 24v-25v, blank.

This is a fine example of a feudal "Aveu" (declaration of feudal holding), which in French feudal law is the notarial document a vassal must submit to his superior lord to ensure the holding of a given estate in land. 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 by both parties or their notarial representatives. The present example contains

the declaration of feudal holdings made to Jacques du Bellay by Louis VI de Rohan-Guéméné concerning the small land of La Moceliere (Maine-et-Loire), still property of the Rohan-Guéméné family in 1614 (see Port, 1978, II, p. 452: "Mocellière (La), fief dépendant de Linière, appartenant en 1614 au Prince de Guéméné (I E 774). Nous n'avons pas pu le situer"). The small land of the La Mocelière is apparently located near the famous château of Plessis-Macé, said to be the most "angevin" of all castles ("le plus angevin de tous"). Within the scheme of classification adopted by Chappée to list and catalog his archival holdings, the present document would have figured in the "Série E" which included all documents that ranked as "titres féodaux."

The vassal in the present Aveu is Louis VI de Rohan (1540-1611, buried in the Church of Coupvray) who was a member of the Guemene branch of this famous family. He married in first instance Eléonore de Rohan-Gié (1539-1583) [La Chesnaye Desbois, vol. 17, col. 504-505]: amongst others, they had a son also named Louis de Rohan-Guemené (1562-1589), who died before his father [La Chesnaye-Desbois, vol. 17, col. 505].

The present Aveu is destined to the higher lord Jacques du Bellay, seigneur du Bellay et Thouarcé, appointed by Henry III as lieutenant général de la Province d'Anjou, and who died in 1580 in Gizeux (La Chesnaye-Desbois, vol. 2, col. 854-855). Jacques du Bellay was a member of the Thouarcé branch 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 (although a different branch), one should quote Guillaume du Bellay (1491-1543), Martin du Bellay (1495-1559), both famous chroniclers during the reign of Francois I<sup>er</sup>; Jean du Bellay (1492-1560), cardinal-statesman and humanist, protector of Francois 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 la Langue Francoyse* (1549) [see 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'il ont possédées et par les services importans qu'ils ont rendus à l'État, mais aussi par son ancienneté"].

Further archival research would no doubt reveal interesting crossovers and comparisons. For example, there is an interesting collection 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...") With its prestigious Chappée-Cogner provenance, its illuminated initial and clear script, the present manuscript constitutes a fine example of a common type of archival document, nonetheless essential to the recognition of property and the transmission of dues, duties and rights within a society still entirely regimented by feudal law. Nicely copied and decorated, the present Aveu sought to reflect the high social status of both parties, be it the vassal Rohan-Guéméné or the higher lord Du Bellay.

## LITERATURE

Chambois, E.-L. *Archives du Cognier (J. Chappée – Le Mans). Armorial et Table des noms contenus dans les tomes I à VI*, Paris, Champion, 1923.

Chappée, J. *Les Archives du Cognier, publiées avec le concours de l'abbé L.-J. Denis, série H, série E, art. 1-144 et 145-262*, Paris, H. Champion, 1903-1907.

Levron, J. *Répertoire numérique des Séries I E et II E. Titres féodaux et titres de familles*, Angers, 1947, p. 15: La Mocellière, inventaire des archives.

La Chesnaye-Desbois, *Dictionnaire de la noblesse...*, Paris, 1863, tome 2; Paris, 1872, tome 17.

Port, C. *Dictionnaire historique, géographique et biographique de Maine-et-Loire et de l'ancienne province de l'Anjou*, Angers, 1978, vol. II.

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

## ONLINE RESOURCES

On the Rohan-Guemene branche:

[http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maison\\_de\\_Rohan](http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maison_de_Rohan)

Château du Plessis-Macé, official site:

<http://www.chateauplessismace.fr/>

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