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[MAISON ROYALE DE SAINT-LOUIS - SAINT-CYR]. *Preuves de la noblesse de D[amois]elle Élisabét Méhée d'Anqueville, présentée pour être ressuë dans la Comunità des filles demoizelles du monastère de St-Loüis, fondé par le Roy, à St-Cyr, dans le parc de Versailles* [Proof of nobility for Elisabeth Méhée d'Anqueville required for admittance to St.-Cyr]

In French, illuminated manuscript on paper  
France, Paris, dated 23 May 1694

7 ff., preceded and followed by a single paper flyleaf, complete (collation: i<sup>1</sup>, ii<sup>3</sup> [4-1, with last leaf of quire likely canceled]) on paper (watermark composed of letters, some visible letters DARI or DARY, that of the papermaker, perhaps Jean Villedary, Angoumois papermaker, active 1668-1758, see Churchill, 1935, p. 21), written in a Roman script in black ink, text set off to the right and copied in a column, illustration set off to the left and equally disposed in a column running parallel to the text, illustration composed of a continuous symbolic tree trunk with leafy branches painted in watercolor, genealogical tree with medallions hung on trunk with inscribed kinship and painted family coat of arms suspended on branches to the left of medallions, text and illustration set in frames traced in ink on each page. Contemporary (late 17<sup>th</sup> c.) French gilt red morocco over pasteboard, bound for the Méhée d'Anqueville, covers with their arms gilt [*de gueules a trois aigles d'argent béqués et membres de sable posés 2 et 1*, not in OHR] enclosed by gilt triple fillet borders with four repeated displayed eagles at inner corners, back sewn on five thongs, spine gilt in compartments, marbled endleaves, gilt edges (staining to front cover, a few scuffs, extremities a bit worn, some offsetting of painted arms in manuscript, stitching of leaves a bit loose, but overall in good contemporary condition). Manuscript placed in a modern part leatherbound and part marbled paper slipcase, back gilt in compartments with title gilt in second compartment and with faulty date indicated at the bottom of spine. Dimensions 220 x 137 mm.

Copied with care, decorated with elegance, and bound in contemporary gilt red morocco, the present small manuscript is a rare (possibly unique) "private" family copy intended to establish the young girl's right to enter the newly founded School of St.-Cyr. Established for impoverished girls of noble lineage, Madame Maintenon's experimental school was the first state-run educational institution strictly for girls and entirely free of charge. It well-educated, worldly graduates were expected to save the realm from immorality.

## PROVENANCE

1. Elisabeth Méhée d'Anqueville, born 6 February 1685, daughter of René Méhée, chevalier and seigneur d'Anqueville [who had fittingly abjured his Protestant faith in 1682] and of Anne le Meunier [or Le Musnier]. Elisabeth Méhée d'Anqueville was admitted at Saint-Cyr in 1694 (thus at the age of 9 years old) after having proved that

she descended from Louis Méhée, seigneur d'Estray, alive in 1450 (according to La Chesnaye-Desbois, 1725, vol. 10, p. 11). But her claims to ancient and noble ancestry apparently go back further to 1340 in the person of an earlier Louis Méhée, married in 1340 (see fol. 6). Elisabeth died in 1745: she never married. Her sister Anne Rose Méhée d'Anqueville was also admitted to Saint-Cyr in 1694, and died in 1762 (see complete list of "pensionnaires certaines" in C. Grell and A. Ramière de Fortanier, ed., 2004, p. 200; see also Exhibition Catalog, 1999, "Liste par département d'origine" under "Charente" [modern-day Angoumois], both sisters listed p. 270; on the Méhée d'Anqueville sisters, see Tricoire, 1890, pp. 45-47, who mentions both sisters lived together till the death of Elisabeth, who helped raise Anne-Rose's offspring). The present copy is bound in a contemporary binding of full dark red morocco that bears the Méhée d'Anqueville family arms: *de gueules a trois aigles d'argent béqués et membrés de sable posés 2 et 1*. It is quite reasonable to suggest that the present copy was made for the young girl herself or someone in her immediate family, such as her parents.

2. By descent to M. Henri Pierre Méhée de l'Etang, as indicated in a note pasted in on fol. 6v: "Nous genealogiste des armes et des blazons de France sertifions a tous ceux qu'il appartiendra que la presente copie qui nous est presente par messire Harry Pierre Méhée ecuyer chevalier seigneur de l'Etang officier au regiment de Rohan Rochefort infanterie, est conforme et veritable aux origineaux de sette famille qui sont deposee dans notre bureaux a Paris le 24 de janvier 1756 [signed] D'Hozier."
3. A note on the recto of the back flyleaf reads: "Carte généalogique de la famille des Méhée de L'Etang remise a M. Juriaud Florimon en échange d'une meme généalogie sur mesme carte, par M. Méhée de l'Etang P. [...] le onze decembre 1815."
4. Harry and Virginia Walton Collection, Covington, Virginia, USA.

## TEXT

f. 1, Title-page: "Preuves de la noblesse de D[amoi]s]elle Élizabét Méhée d'Anqueville, prezentée pour être ressuë dans la Comunauté des filles demoizelles du monastère de St-Louïs, fondé par le Roy, à St-Cir, dans le parc de Versailles";

ff. 2-6, Preuves de la noblesse de Damoiselle Elizabeth Méhée d'Anqueville [Proof of nobility for Damoiselle Elizabeth Méhée d'Anqueville], incipit, "Elizabet Méhée d'Anqueville, 1685. Extrait du régitre [sic] des batemes de la paroisse de St André d'Angouleme portant que D[amoi]s]elle Elizabet née le 6e fevrier de l'an 1785 [sic "1685"] du mariage de Messire René Méhée, chevalier, seigneur d'Anqueville et de Dame Anne le Meunier [Le Musnier] son épouze, fut batizée le 9e suyvant du même mois. Cet extrait signé Dreuille vicair de l'Eglise de St André d'Angouleme délivré le 17e de janvier de l'an 1693 et légalizé"; explicit, "[...] XIe et XIIe d[egré]. 10e et 11e ayeul. Louis Méhée I, seigneur d'Estrai, fils de Messire Jean Méhée chevalier et de Dame Jeanne de la Roche son épouze; François du Chesne sa feme 1340. Testament de Jean Méhée chevalier d'Estrai, fait le 31 de decembre de l'an 1344 par lequel il ordonne que son corps soir enterré dans l'Eglise des Cordeliers de St-Jean d'Angeli, il instituë son heritier universel Louis Méhée son fils, et de Jeanne de la Roche, sa premiere fame et il ordonne qu'aussitôt qu'il sera en age son mariage

s'accomplisse avec Damoiselle Françoise du Chesne, il donne a Filipe Brécholelors sa fame, et mere de Françoise du Chesne le tiers de ses biens, et il la nome tuteurée de ses enfans”;

f. 7, Confirmation by the royal genealogist Charles d’Hozier of proof of nobility necessary for admittance to Saint-Cyr: “Nous Charles d’Hozier conseiller du roy genealogiste de la sa Maison, Jug[e] général des armes et des blazons de France et chevalier de la Religion et des Ordres militaires de St-Maurice et de St-Lazare de Savoie; Certifions au Roy que Damoiselle Elizabet Mée-d’Anqueville a la noblesse necessaire pour etre ressee dans la Comunauté des Filles Demoizelles que sa Majesté fait elever dans la Maizon Royale de St-Louis, fondée a St-Cir dans le parc de Versailles, suyvant qu’il est justifié par les aetes qui sont enoncés dans cette preuve laquelle nous avons vérifiée et dressée a Paris, le 23e de may de l’an mile six cent quatre vingt quatorze [1694]” [Preuves de noblesse, published in Tricoire, 1890, pp. 387-393: “Tableau original collé sur toile, et signé de la main de Charles d’Hozier];

ff. 6v and 7, Added eighteenth-century confirmations: “Nous genealogiste des armes et des blazons de France, sertifions a tous ceux qu’il appartiendra que la presente copie qui nous est presenté par messire Hanry Pierre Mée ecuyer chevalier seigneur de l’Etang, officier au regiment de Rohan Rochefort infanterie, est conforme et veritable aux Origineaux de sette famille qui sont déposée [sic] dans notre bureaux [sic] a Paris le 24 de janvier 1756 [signed] D’Hozier” (f. 6v); Added signature: “Verifié du 4 mars 1755 [signed] D’Hozier, general de France] (f. 7); Added: “Designé et ecrite par Hanri chevalier de Mée de l’Etang a Paris le 24 janvier 1755 pensionere de l’abé de la Grive geographe de la ville de Paris” (f. 7);

This manuscript contains a copy of Proof of nobility for Damoiselle Elizabeth Mée d’Anqueville, as required for her admittance to the Maison Royale de Saint-Louis, more commonly called Saint-Cyr. St-Cyr was an elite educational institutional for poor girls of noble extraction, founded by Mme de Maintenon in 1686. Amongst the strict access conditions, the maidens were required to count four degrees of nobility on the paternal side. The present copy of Proof of nobility is contemporary with the admittance of the young girl to Saint-Cyr in 1694, and is most likely the girl’s personal copy or that of her parents. With her eleven degrees of nobility and proof of ancient ancestry, Elizabeth Mée d’Anqueville was an ideal candidate for the vast and noble planned school, where she would be fed, tutored, and modeled until twenty years of age to become the sort of exemplary woman Mme de Maintenon and the king Louis XIV hoped would save the realm from the immorality and factions that plagued the French Court at Versailles.

Established in the château d’Ardenne (near Angoulême), the Mée d’Anqueville family was no doubt quite poor. Elizabeth’s mother, Anne Le Musnier was a determined woman, who had given birth to six children, of which Elisabeth was the eldest. Anne Le Musnier formulated a “placet” (plea) to the king to obtain a pension to maintain her family: “...les deux filles a Saint-Cyr. Mais il y a trois autres cadets, qui manquent absolument d’éducation et de toute chose au village, d’où on ne peut les tirer” (Tricoire, 1890, p. 49). Anne Le Musnier adds: “J’ay l’honneur d’estre connue de madame de Maintenon...” (Tricoire, 1890, p. 51).

This copy of Elizabeth Mehee d’Anqueville’s *Preuves de noblesse* had its official counterpart recorded and deposited before the Revolution in the “Cabinet des Titres” by the genealogists of the king

("Juge d'armes de la noblesse de France"), a position trusted by the influent D'Hozier family and transmitted from father to son. The main source remains the 19 volumes of "Preuves de noblesse des filles demoiselles recuës dans la Maison de St-Louis, fondée a Saint-Cir, par le Roi, au mois de juin 1686 et formé par les soins et par la conduite de Mme de Maintenon, dressées par Charles et Louis Pierre D'Hozier (1685-1766)" (Paris, BnF, MS fr. 32118-32126). These proofs and titles were copied from the Registers kept at Saint-Cyr, destroyed during the Revolution. The original titles and proofs of Elizabeth Méhée d'Anqueville are found in Paris, BnF MS fr. 32120, Cabinet des titres, vol. 295, no. 78. Compare the dossier entitled "Preuves de noblesse de Marguerite-Charlotte D'Hozier..." (Exh. Cat., 1999, pp. 58-59; cat. 223 and 222): the entry numbered cat. 223 is a transcription copied in the 18<sup>th</sup> c. of the "Preuves de noblesse" for Marguerite-Charlotte D'Hozier, with a symbolic representation of a tree, both physical and genealogical, running through the document, much like the present document; the entry numbered cat. 222 is the original 1690 register preserved in the BnF, MS fr. 32120, recorded and deposited for future reference and in case of dispute. We have not located similar "personal" or private copies of the necessary Proofs of nobility, bound with the family arms: further research would no doubt reveal similar documents cherished by the maiden's family and herself, since such a manuscript guaranteed access to Saint-Cyr for the future female members within a given family.

The school of Saint-Cyr was marked by the central figure of Françoise d'Aubigné, marquise de Maintenon (1635-1719), granddaughter of the celebrated Protestant writer Agrippa d'Aubigné. After having been married to the poet Scarron, she was appointed governess of the illegitimate children Mme de Montespan bore Louis XIV. She gained considerable influence with the king, was nicknamed "Mme de Maintenant" [Mme Right Now] by courtiers, and the king himself said of her: "We address popes as 'Your Holiness', kings as 'Your Majesty': of you we must speak of 'Your Firmness' [Votre solidité]." Secretly, Mme de Maintenon was wedded to the king of France in 1684: she was to play a prominent role in French politics and religious affairs for the remaining thirty years of Louis XIV's reign. Upon the death of Louis XIV in 1715, she retired to Saint-Cyr, where she died in 1719.

Mme de Maintenon's great glory remains her work in the cause of education, particularly that of female education. In 1686, with the blessing and participation of the king Louis XIV, she took upon herself the founding of a school at Saint-Cyr, near Versailles, by Royal Letters Patent dated 18 June 1686 [Archives départementales des Yvelines, Inv. Serie D 93]. The Maison Royale de Saint-Louis (known simply as Saint-Cyr) or "Institut de Saint-Louis" was an institution for the education of the impoverished young girls of the nobility. Admittance conditions were very strict: the school was intended to receive up to 250 young ladies who had to be poor and were required to prove four degrees of nobility on their father's side. In addition, the ladies' father or grandfather had to justify past service in the French Army's troops. The boarders were admitted between the ages of seven and twelve. On leaving this house at the age of twenty, each young lady received a dowry of 3000 crowns. The Jesuit La Chaise said of Saint-Cyr: "The object of Saint-Cyr is not to multiply convents, which increase rapidly of their own accord, but to give the State well-educated women. There are plenty of good nuns, and not a sufficient number of good mothers of families..." [quoted in Lavallée, *Histoire de la Maison royale de St-Cyr*, 1856, p. 40]. To wit, of the 1121 ladies who passed through Saint-Cyr from 1686 to 1773, only 398 became nuns. Many important literary and artistic figures were associated with the educational program of Saint-Cyr, including

Racine (who wrote and had performed by the young students before the king such plays as *Esther* and *Athalie*), Boileau, Fénelon and Lulli. Besides such basics as reading and writing, the girls were prepared for their later worldly existence. The Maison royale de Saint-Louis was the first state-run educational institution strictly for girls, entirely free of charge.

## LITERATURE

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Vindry, F. *Les Demoiselles de Saint-Cyr (1686-1793)*, Paris, Champion, 1908.

## ONLINE RESOURCES

"Comment faire entrer à Saint-Cyr demoiselle Méhée d'Anqueville":

<http://www.histoirepassion.eu/spip.php?article404>

On the Méhée family:

<http://pagesperso-orange.fr/jm.ouvrard/armor/fami/m/mehee.htm>

On the Le Musnier family:

<http://pagesperso-orange.fr/jm.ouvrard/armor/fami/m/meunier.htm>

Complete list of maidens admitted to Saint-Cyr:

<http://www.histoirepassion.eu/spip.php?article663>

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