

Les roys de la tres crestienne maison de France (The Kings of the Very Christian House of France)

In French, illuminated manuscript on parchment

Northern France (Paris?), c. 1500-1525 (after 1497/98)

i (parchment) + 23 folios on parchment, modern foliation in pencil top outer corner recto, complete (collation *i-ii⁸ iii⁸[8, pastedown]*), vertical catchwords (partially trimmed), ruled in very pale red ink with the top and bottom two rules full across and with full-length single vertical bounding lines (justification 140-135 x 84-80 mm.), written in a skilled cursive gothic bookhand in twenty-four long lines, red rubrics, three-line brushed gold initials with gold highlights on alternately red or blue grounds, overall in excellent condition, a few leaves are wrinkled. Bound in early, possibly ORIGINAL, red velvet over pasteboard, sewn on four bands, spine now bare, lacks head and tail bands, holes top, bottom, and outer edge from fastenings, now missing, back board now attached mainly by the pastedown, some wear to hinges and corners, but overall in good condition. Dimensions 211 x 145 mm.

One of only two known copies of a vernacular history of the kings of France that is apparently unedited and unstudied in recent scholarly literature. Everything about this manuscript suggests it was copied for someone of wealth and status, perhaps even someone connected with the French royal family - its beautiful, accomplished script, carefully painted decorative initials, original red velvet binding, and the subject matter. Secular histories are rare on the market, and secular histories in French even more so.

PROVENANCE

1. Copied in Northern France, likely in Paris, at the end of the fifteenth or early in the sixteenth century. The last king mentioned in the text is Louis XII (1462-1515), who succeeded his cousin Charles VIII as king in 1498 (here given as 1497). The text must have been composed shortly after his succession to the throne (his entry consists only of a heading, suggesting it was written at the very beginning of his reign), and evidence of script and decoration suggests that this copy dates not long after the date of the text. There is one other copy of this text known, Paris, BnF, MS NAF 11119, which ends exactly as this one does except it specifically states that Louis d'Orleans was then the king (our copy omits the phrase, "et regne a present").

NAF 11119 does not include a name or a dedication, but the presence of the arms of France on f. v, and the "elegance of its execution" suggested to Omont that it was made for a prince or princess "de la maison de France" (Omont, 1912). Our copy is not illuminated, but it is also a high-quality manuscript and its accomplished script, careful decorated initials, and velvet binding, all suggest that it was made for someone of wealth and status, possibly from the French royal family.

2. Inside front cover, note by a seventeenth-century(?) owner in French, "Ce livre a partien a m<adame?> <...?>," with contemporary or possibly earlier pen-trials in a different hand (also on the facing front flyleaf); lower margin, f. 1, "28," in ink.
3. Belonged to Roger Watson Barrett (1915-2010) (De Ricci, 1935-1940, vol. 1, p. 678, no. 36). Roger W. Barrett, a lawyer renowned for his participation as a prosecutor at the Nuremberg trials, was an American collector from Illinois, member (and president) of

the Caxton Club. Following in the footsteps of his father, Oliver Rogers Barrett (1873-1950), he collected material on Lincoln and also collected more broadly. He owned a Gutenberg Bible, two Books of Hours, and other medieval manuscripts and documents. This manuscript was sold Parke Bernet, January 8, 1952, lot 197, according to Davis and Conway, p. 35 (Online resources; see also Liebson, 2013).

4. Modern notes by owners and dealers include a scrap of a paper label, inside front cover, and "Mss of 1490," in pencil; price codes in pencil, inside back cover; f. 23v, bottom inside corner, in ink (upside down), "2-8/ 8-12/ 2-8."

TEXT

ff. 1-21v, *Les noms des Roys de la tres crestienne maison de france*, incipit, "Pharamon Clodio ... Charles VIII Loys dorleans"; [f. 1v, text], *Pharamon filz de Marchormires duc et seigneur des francoys fut esleu roy de france lan iiiii^{cc} xix et decedera payen comme son pere le vi^e an de son regne lan iiiii^{cc} trente*, incipit, "Le roy pharamon fut preux et vaillant en armes ... [f. 21v], *Loys dorleans filz de charles duc dorleans descendu de pere au filz du roy charles le quint fut roy lan mil iiij^e iiiii^{cc} xvij* [ends mid f. 21v; remainder and ff. 22-23v, blank but ruled].

This text in this manuscript is a brief history of the kings of France in French that is known in just one other copy, Paris, BnF, NAF 11119; selections of the text from that copy were printed by Omont, 1912.

Most of the entries range from a half- to one page in length. They all begin with a red rubric giving the name of the king, the name of his father (or his relationship to the previous king), the year he began his reign, and the year he died. This heading is followed by a brief account of events of each king's reign, usually emphasizing role of the monarchy in supporting the Church. For example, Dagobert I is remembered for his donations to the royal Abbey of St. Denis, Charlemagne, "le bras droit de l'Eglise" (the right-hand of the Church), and Louis IX, as the builder of Sainte-Chapelle for the relics of the Passion of Christ, and for his defense of the Holy Land.

It begins, as was customary in French histories dating back to the eighth-century *Liber historiae Francorum*, with the legendary king Pharamon (Pharamond, or Faramund), first king, and founder of the Salic law. The last king is Louis XII (1462-1515), as mentioned above (Provenance), evidence that this history was written not long after his succession to the throne in 1497/8.

The sources of this text, and its relationship to other histories (Omont mentions two manuscripts with similar, but different texts: a brief French chronicle of the kings of France, BnF, NAF 4517 by Regnauld Havart addressed to Anne de France, Duchesse of Bourbon, fifteenth century; and a Latin text, BnF, MS Lat10909, by Johannes Candida, from the end of the fifteenth century) are questions of interest for scholars. We are unaware of a discussion of this text in recent scholarship. The questions of the identity of the original recipient of the BnF copy, quite likely a member of the royal family, as well as the identity of the original owner of our copy, are also matters for further research.

The link between the French royal family and vernacular histories was an important one. Around 1250, King Louis IX of France (reigned 1226-1270), commissioned a French history of the kings

of France from Primat, a monk at Saint-Denis, the burial place of the French kings, based on the Latin chronicles of the kings written at that abbey. The king requested that the history be in French, "roman langue vulgaire parlée par les laïques, langue du plaisir et de la recreation" (the common romance language spoken by the laity, language of pleasure and recreation). Primat's work, the *Roman des Rois* (later called the *Grandes chroniques de France*), tells the story of the French kings - the Merovingians, Carolingians, and then Capetians – with moralizing stories and heroic tales of good and bad kings. This very influential history, copied again and again with additions to bring it up to date, played a role in the consolidation of royal power, and it is interesting that the chosen vehicle was a prose history in the vernacular. Our much briefer history follows in that tradition.

LITERATURE

Liebson, Philip. "The Barretts of Abbotsford Road ...and Nuremberg," *Journal of the Caxton Club* 21, no. 9 (2013), pp. 1-10.

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ONLINE RESOURCES

Conway, Melissa, and Lisa Fagin Davis, *Directory of Institutions in the United States and Canada with Pre-1600 Manuscript Holdings*
<https://bibsocamer.org/BibSite/Conway-Davis/Pre-1600.Mss.Holdings.pdf>

"Les Grandes Chroniques de France," Fouquet Expositions, BnF
<http://expositions.bnf.fr/fouquet/reperes/34/index34b.htm>

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