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Privileges du Vicomte de Turenne

In French and Latin, illuminated manuscript on parchment

France (Paris), February 3, 1523

ii (contemporary paper) + ii (contemporary parchment) + 18 + ii (contemporary paper) folios on parchment, early foliation in brown ink, 1-18, complete (collation i-ii⁶ iii⁴ iv²), no signatures or catchwords, ruled in brown ink (justification 178 x 110 mm.), written in brown ink in Gothic cursive bookhand (*bâtarde*) in single column on 24 lines, a line-filler at the end of the text in red decorated with foliage in liquid gold (f. 18v), on f. 1, 6-line foliage initial in light blue modeled with white penwork on grounds decorated with flowers and the coat of arms of the viscounty of Turenne in colors and liquid gold (*écartelé en 1 et 4 d'azur semé de fleurs de lys d'or et en 2 et 3 coticé en bande d'or et de gueules de 10 pièces*), blue pigment flaked from the coat of arms, some minor stains, in overall very good condition. In its ORIGINAL LIMP VELLUM COVER, spine flat, spine inscribed at the top in brown ink "535" and at the bottom stamped in gold "2 / H/ 2" (originally "2/ H/ 276," the last two numbers effaced, cf. shelfmark inscribed in brown ink on the second front flyleaf on paper), text block detached from the binding, parchment worn and stained, but in overall good condition. Dimensions 238 x 165 mm.

This handsome royal manuscript confirms the privileges of the viscounty of Turenne issued by King Francis I in 1523. It opens with a fine illuminated initial enclosing the coat of arms of the viscounty of Turenne and boasts an illustrious provenance from its first owner, the Viscount François II de La Tour d'Auvergne (1497-1532), to modern bibliophiles Charles Chardin and Sir Thomas Phillipps. The manuscript brings to life the special story of this fascinating viscounty, which existed as an autonomous state within France from c. 768 until 1738 and could be described as a medieval tax haven.

PROVENANCE

1. The manuscript was made by the officers of King Francis I for the viscounts of Turenne on February 3, 1523; the viscount at the time was François II de La Tour d'Auvergne (1497-1532). François II de Turenne was *chevalier de l'ordre du roi*, governor of Ile de France and captain of a hundred *gentilshommes* of the King's household. The manuscript was probably kept by the viscounts of Turenne over the centuries until the viscounty lost its independence in the eighteenth century.
2. Pierre-François-Jean-Baptiste Leblanc, *Livres précieux, manuscrits et imprimés sur peau-vélin, du cabinet M.* **, 1811, no. 192.
3. Belonged to Charles Chardin (1742-1826); sold in the sale of his library on February 7, 1824 by De Bure, *Catalogue des livres rares et précieux, de manuscrits, de livres imprimés sur vélin, etc. de la bibliothèque de M. Chardin*, no. 535. The shelf mark "2 / H/ 276", inscribed in brown ink on the second front flyleaf on paper, and stamped in gold on the spine (here the last two numbers have worn out), may be his.

4. Belonged to Sir Thomas Phillipps (1792-1872), who amassed the largest private collection of books in the world. His stenciled crest of a lion with "Sir T. P. / Middle Hill", and the manuscript number "813" in manuscript below, is found on the first front flyleaf on parchment; "Phillipps ms 813" is inscribed in brown ink in the lower margin on f. 1. Sold in his sale at Sotheby's, April 27, 1903, no. 1147.
5. Maggs Bros., *Catalogue of Fine and Rare Books*, cat. no. 211, 1905, no. 125.

TEXT

ff. 1-17v, *Privileges du Vicomte de Turenne*, incipit, "Francoys par la grace de dieu Roy de France, Savoir faisons a tous presens et avenir, Nous avoir receue l'humble supplication de nostre ame et feal cousin Francoys de la Tour chevalier Viconte de Turenne ... Le troisieme jour de fevrier L'an mil cinq cens vingt et troys. Ainsi signe P du roy vicegerent et I meschin greffier et feellees des feelz royaux des dessusdites bailliages";

f. 17v, [Written in a different hand on 26 April 1524], incipit, "Collatio presentis coppie XVII fol. isto comprehenso continente, facta fuit cum litteris originalibus datis signatis et sigilla prout supra, per nos auditores et procuratorem in camera compotorum Dom. nostri Regis subsignatos vigesima sexta mensis aprillis anno millesimo quingentesimo vigesimo quarto"; [followed by signatures of six King's notaries, Michon, Defontaines, J Leclerc, Machault, Liveron and Molinet; f. 18r-v, blank].

On a paper bifolium, kept with the manuscript, are four pages of text about the manuscript, written in French and Latin in the eighteenth century. The leaves are foliated "19" and "20" and bear the watermark of a shield surrounded by a radiating collar and a pendant cross.

Vicomte (Engl. viscount) is a medieval lordship, a title of nobility, attached to a person who owns a *vicomté* (viscounty). The viscounty of Turenne is an old principality in southwestern France, around the town of Turenne; the first lords of Turenne date from the ninth century. In the fourteenth century the viscounty of Turenne became one of the largest fiefs of France, and in the fifteenth century it counted about 100,000 inhabitants. The viscounty of Turenne was held for more than ten centuries by the viscounts of Turenne, issued from four families. La Tour d'Auvergne family was the last of them, from 1444 until 1738, when Charles-Godefroy de La Tour d'Auvergne sold the viscounty to King Louis XV, to pay off his gambling debts. Our manuscript was made for François II de La Tour d'Auvergne (1497-1532), vicomte de Turenne, on February 3, 1523. A description of his funeral on August 25, 1532 is found in Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS Baluze 205, f. 1 (Online resources).

The privileges of the viscounty of Turenne were respected by Pepin the Short, who conquered the Guyenne (the province from which the viscounty depended) around the year 768, and the viscounty enjoyed complete autonomy from then on until 1738. The privileges meant that the viscounty was an independent principality without feudal obligations. The vicomtes of Turenne and their subjects paid no taxes to the King, but raised their own taxes, troops, minted their money, and ennobled their loyal servants. The viscount owed the king only a tribute of honor and could act as sovereign in his own right, in a state within a state. His subjects met every year to vote subsidies to the viscount.

The privileges of the viscounty of Turenne were expressly confirmed by Philip III of France in 1280, and by his successors in 1332, 1350, 1374, 1380, 1446, 1469, 1484, 1499, 1523, 1528, 1547, 1556, 1564, 1574, 1593, 1609, 1633, and finally, by Louis XIV in 1656; our manuscript adds to this list the year 1523, previously unknown in scholarship (cf. "Privilèges...", p. 544).

Only a small percentage of medieval charters were illuminated (see the project at University of Graz, Online Resources). This elegantly written and illuminated grant of privileges, however, can be studied in the context of much more common illuminated documents such as Spanish *Carta ejecutoria*, Venetian *Ducali*, and diplomas from Italian universities, all of which recorded privileges earned or bestowed, preserved in handsome, formal copies, made to be treasured by the recipient.

LITERATURE

Buisson, Nicolas, du. *La vie du Vicomte de Turenne, maréchal général des camps et armées du roi*, Cologne, 1685.

Available online:

https://books.google.fr/books?id=XW7mlhKHIpUC&printsec=frontcover&hl=fr&source=gb_s_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false

Noirfontaine, F. de. "Privilèges et libertés de la vicomté de Turenne au XVII^e siècle," *Le Limousin au XVII^e siècle: littérature, histoire, histoire religieuse*, Limoges, 1979, pp. 121-130.

"Privilèges de la vicomté de Turenne (Province du Bas-Limousin)," *Archives Parlementaires de 1787 à 1860*, Première série (1787-1799), vol. 3, Etats généraux; Cahiers des sénéchaussées et bailliages, Paris, 1879, pp. 544-545.

Available online:

https://www.persee.fr/doc/arcpa_0000-0000_1879_num_3_1_1992

ONLINE RESOURCES

Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS Baluze 205, f. 1

<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b90015433/f9.item>

Viscounts of Turenne

https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liste_des_vicomtes_de_Turenne

Vicomté de Turenne

https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vicomte%20de_Turenne

University of Graz, Illuminated Charters Project

<https://illuminierte-urkunden.uni-graz.at/en/>

Collection: Illuminierte Urkunden

<https://www.monasterium.net/mom/IlluminierteUrkunden/collection>

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