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**Lives of Saints Nicholas, Vitalis, Agatha, and Agnes
In Latin, illuminated manuscript on parchment
France, c. 1788**

i (parchment) + 28 + i (parchment) folios on parchment, complete (collation i-iv⁶ v⁴), no catchwords or signatures, ruled very lightly in lead (justification 90 x 56-53 mm.), written in a mannered gothic bookhand by one scribe in fifteen long lines, red rubrics, two- to one-line red or blue initials with yellowish-green or red pen decoration respectively, one three-line red initial with yellowish-green and red pen decoration, one six-line modelled blue initial with elaborate red penwork, TWENTY-FOUR ILLUMINATED INITIALS, six- to four-line, with extensions up to ten lines, initials are white-patterned blue, pink, lavender, or orange on gold grounds, often chased, or gold initials on colored grounds, with a variety of different pen and painted decorations extending from the initials, ONE FIVE-LINE HISTORIATED INITIAL of St. Nicholas, a few leaves darkened (likely original color of the parchment), and slightly bowed, initials ff. 1 (possibly touched up), 4, 5, 8 with slight wear, but overall in excellent condition. Bound in brown pigskin, likely in the nineteenth century, coat of arms of La Tour d'Auvergne painted in full color on the front cover, covers bowed, slightly rubbed, but in excellent condition. Dimensions 138 x 106 mm.

A very pretty small volume, suitable in every way as a gift for a princess. The fidelity to the techniques of the medieval manuscript evident in this book, which was made in the late eighteenth century, is remarkable, and somewhat surprising at this date. This volume poses interesting questions about attitudes towards the Middle Ages just before the French Revolution; moreover, the source of its texts, identify of the calligrapher and artist, and its context, all merit further study.

PROVENANCE

1. A note in gold ink on the black flyleaf states that this was made for Louise-Henriette-Gabrielle de Lorraine (1718-1788), Princess of Turenne and Duchess of Bouillon: "Ce liure a été fait pour Princesse Louise Henriette Gabrielle, Duchesse de Lor[aine] à l'occasion de son soixante dixième anniversaire."

Louise-Henriette-Gabrielle of Lorraine (December 30, 1718-September 5, 1788) was the only surviving daughter of Charles-Louis de Lorraine, count of Marsan, prince of Pons (1696-1755) and Elizabeth of Roquelaure (1696-1752), by marriage Duchess of Bouillon and Princess of Turenne. She was named a lay canoness of the illustrious Abbey of Remiremont in 1733. In 1743, the princess married Godefroy de La Tour d'Auvergne, sovereign duke of Bouillon, prince of Turenne, and grand chamberlain of France. They had four children, only two of whom survived infancy. Today she is remembered chiefly through her portrait by Jean-Marc Nattier (1746), now at Versailles in the Musée national des châteaux de Versailles et de Trianon. (Her husband's life was more eventful, or at least is better documented; see "Duchy of Bouillon," Online Resources). Louise died in 1788, three months and a few weeks before her seventieth birthday. The note on the back flyleaf (cited above), states that this book was made for

her as a gift for her seventieth birthday; one hopes that she received this volume as an early birthday gift. (One slight anomaly is that this inscription calls her the "Duchesse de Lor[raine]"; she was actually Duchess of Bouillon, by marriage, and Princess of Lorraine by birth).

2. Engraved book plate of Louise-Henriette-Gabrielle of Lorraine, showing the coats of arms of her husband and father, with the inscription (engraved), "La princesse de Turenne née Princesse de Lorraine," inside the front cover; since the binding appears to be nineteenth century, this was apparently added to the volume after the lifetime of the princess (perhaps from the volume's original binding)?
3. Inside back cover, in pencil, "Ev[or W?]lls, 10518."

TEXT

ff. 1-10v, *In nomine domini nostri ihesu christi incipit uita S. Nicolai episcopi*, incipit, "Nicolaus itaque ex illustri prosapia ortus . . . Nicolaum huius rei indicaret auctorem. Tu autem lector prosiciscere [sic] etiam tu age similiter;"

Life of St. Nicholas by John the Deacon (Iohannes diaconus neapolitanus), BHL 6104-6113; related but not identical to the text printed in Mai, ed., 1840, vol. 4, pp. 324-339, see pp. 325-328; the scribe was likely copying the text from a shorter and abbreviated version of the life; here divided oddly into eleven lessons (liturgically eleven lessons are impossible, but presumably twelve were meant), that do not correspond with the initials.

ff. 11-13, *In sancti vitalis martiris oratio*, incipit, "Presta quesumus ominipotens deus ut intercedente beato vitale . . .; *lectio 1*, incipit, "Apud rauennam natale sancti vitalis . . . Que infra biduum migravit ad dominum";

Life of saints Vitalis and Valeria (Vita sanctorum vitalis et Valerie martirum); Lippomano, 1551, pp. 164-165; only the first lesson is noted with a rubric.

ff. 13v-19v, *Lectiones de passione sancti agathe*, *lectio 1*, incipit, "Natale sancta agathe uirginis et martyris in scyilia ciuitate . . . in sepulchro novo. Tu et";

Passion of St. Agatha; Lippomano, 1551, pp. 156-157.

ff. 19v-28v, *De passione beate uirginis agnes*, *lectio 1*, incipit, "Diem festum sacratissime uirginis celebremus . . .; Decimo tertio etatis sue anno mortem . . . et glorificando nomen tuum in eternum. Tu."

Passion of St. Agnes; the source text is unidentified, but there are parallels in the readings for her feast in many Breviaries.

ILLUSTRATION

The initials, which are exceptionally well-executed, are inspired by initials from fifteenth-century Italian and German manuscripts but are not exact copies. To choose some examples: the historiated initial of St. Nicholas on f. 1, shows the Bishop half-length, wearing episcopal

robes and hat, and holding a staff; it is Italian in inspiration, with greenish-skin tones, adorned with acanthus and gold rayed disks. On f. 2, the body of the initial with the feathery white highlights is more German in inspiration, but the black ink sprays with acanthus could be northern Italian. The artist allowed his or her imagination more latitude in designing the initial on f. 5, which is gold, filled with orange with a lattice pattern and blue details at each intersection; this initial, the pattern of its infilling, and the very wavy ink sprays and large gold balls and leaves are only vaguely "medieval." Most striking of all is the 'I' on f. 14v, which is unrecognizable as a letter, but very compelling as a design.

The contents of the volume, lives of the very popular St. Nicholas of Myra, the early Christian bishop and miracle worker—provider of gifts for children everywhere (and the prototype for Santa Claus), and the important early Christian martyrs, St. Vitalis, St. Agatha, and St. Agnes, show signs of being copied from either a liturgical source, or a collection of saints lives for devotional reading. They are divided (imperfectly) into lessons, as readings in a Breviary would be, but they also include the repeated injunction to the reader to follow the example of the life of the saint (in some cases abbreviated simply as "Tu"), "Tu autem lector proficiscere etiam tu age similer" (Let you, reader, go forth and act similarly).

The contents suggest that the creator of this manuscript wished to make a small devotional volume that would be a suitable gift for Louise-Henriette-Gabrielle, Duchess of Bouillon. Its fidelity to the techniques of the medieval book—from the carefully prepared parchment (somewhat thicker than most medieval parchment, but well made), to the gothic script, which is also identifiably modern, but is quite close to fifteenth-century script, to the illuminated initials—seems unusual at this date. But this exquisite little book is a reminder that as early as the eighteenth century, certainly by 1750, antiquarians, historians, and also artists and collectors, were actively interested in the Middle Ages, and indeed, looked to the medieval past as a repository of lost social and religious ideals. This book is a product of attitudes shaped by scholars such as Jean Mabillon (1632-1707), the father of paleography, and Bernard de Montfaucon (1655-1741), author of *Les monuments de la monarchie française*, Jean-Baptiste de La Curne de Sainte-Palaye (1697-1781), who embarked on cataloguing the medieval manuscripts in the Bibliothèque nationale, and Jean-Joseph-Rive (1730-1791), a bibliophile and bibliographer who made important contributions to the study of medieval illumination (see in particular Hindman, et. al., 2001, pp. 5-16).

LITERATURE

Bibliotheca hagiographica latina antiquae et mediae aetatis, ed. the Bollandists, Brussels, 1900-1901 (BHL)

Hindman, Sandra, Michael Camille, Nina Rowe, Rowan Watson. *Manuscript Illumination in the Modern age: Recovery and Reconstruction*, eds. Sandra Hindman and Nina Rowe, Evanston, Illinois, 2001.

Lippomano, Luigi, ed. *Sanctorum priscorum patrum vitae numero centum sexagintatres, per grauissimos et probatissimos auctores conscriptae. Et nuper per R.P.D. Aloysium Lipomanum ... in unum volumen redactae, cum scholijs eiusdem ..*, vol. 4, *Vitarum sanctorum antiquorum patrum numero ducentarum septuaginta, quae per probatissimos grauissimosque. Authores descriptae. Nouissime in vnum volumen ad totius Ecclesiae utilitatem per R.P.D. Aloysium Lipomanum ... redactae sunt ...*, Venice, 1551.

Mai, Angelo, ed. *Spilegium romanum*, vol. 4, Rome, 1840

Munby, A. N. L. *Connoisseurs and medieval miniatures, 1750-1850*. Oxford, 1972.

ONLINE RESOURCES

"The Duchy of Bouillon"

<https://www.heraldica.org/topics/france/bouillon.htm>

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