

**Legal Scroll concerning the Will of Maire Menou  
In Latin and French, document on Parchment  
France, Brittany (Tregor?), 1499**

*Vertical roll constructed from six and a half parchment sheets, written in a small, neat French notarial cursive with headings written in a larger Gothic textualis, near contemporary notes on the verso in a similar French cursive hand, contemporary sutures joining sheets, sutures between first and second parchment sheets partial and loose, some holes at the top of first parchment sheet with minimal loss of text, some fading in the right margin, good condition. Dimensions 3,800 x 310-350mm.*

Original documents, such as this one, help clarify the status of women in the Middle Ages. This long, neatly written legal scroll, detailing a legal dispute in Tréguier (Brittany), offers a rare record of how a powerful woman, Marie Menou, was able to manage her estate effectively through her will and legal representatives. She did so against the protests and legal machinations of her husband. It includes Marie's will in French and the subsequent legal actions in Latin. It further underscores the continuing function the roll format played as a record of administrative history.

## PROVENANCE

1. Internal dating on the scroll gives a range of dates from December 17, 1499, to February 18, 1500. Near contemporary writing on the verso of the scroll contains the name "Coetsauf," likely to be identified with the family name "Jean de Quoictsoaff" (administrator of the goods contested in the document).
2. Later writing on the verso, perhaps sixteenth century, "1499 A.x.i," likely a shelfmark.
3. Sold by Salorges Encheres at Nantes May 13, 2022, Lot 7.

## TEXT

[Dispute over the Will of Marie de Menou], incipit, "ANNO DOMINI MILLESIMO QUADRINGENTESIMO NONAGESIMO NONO mensis uero decembris martis die decimaseptimo Id in nomine domini uenerabilis uir magister Cristoforus Kerandren magister ac executor generalis testamento...constat de cautela somatur(?) effectum et nos de consensu presentium predictorum hinc inde illum testamentum datum ut supra."

The text of this document contains six entries dating from December 17<sup>th</sup>, 1499, to February 13<sup>th</sup>, 1500. All of the entries in this document pertain to a legal contestation over the estate of the recently deceased Marie Menou, a noblewoman from Boysroe. This document was drawn up in at the ecclesiastical court of Tréguier, where Christophe Kerandren served as *magister ac executor*

*generalis testamento* ("master and general executor of the will") for the court. The husband of the deceased, François de Ploesquellec, and his son Olivier Beguignon contested the fitness of Christophe Kerandren to execute Marie's will faithfully and petitioned to have the ecclesiastical court at Dol execute the will instead. Jean de Quoictsoaff, administrator of the goods belonging to Constance and Jeanette Beguignon, daughters of Marie Menou, however, maintained that the court at Tréguier was competent to execute the will. The content of the will, dated June 8, 1499, is then copied in French in the middle of the first long entry, starting with capitals "DU NOM DE LA SAINCTE..." Other parties involved in the contest were Raoul de Kerandren, vicar general and cantor at the church of Tréguier, and Yves de Taulong and Alain le Syet, testamentary executors of Marie. An initial date of January 2, 1500, is given for summons to decide the case. The second and third entries on the scroll, dated January 3 and January 14, 1500, record a postponement of the hearing and decision. The fourth entry dated January 28, 1500, records Jean de Quoictsoeff's request to alter the will in one item, but to execute it according to Marie's wishes otherwise. It is decided that François de Plusquellec and his son must pay the costs of the trial. In the final fifth and sixth entries, dated February 18 and 13, 1500, the will is executed according to Jean de Quoictsoeff's instructions under the direction of the court of Tréguier; François de Plusquellec and Olivier Beguignon consent to the ruling. At the end of each entry in a lighter, brown ink a notary signs "Blanconyer ita fuit actum" (Blanconyer. Thus it was done.) and also leaves the note "Demandato dicti domini vicarii et ex registro Guillelmi en Lannor notarii absentia" (By command of the aforementioned lord vicar and from the register of William in Lannor due to the absence of a notary). This document, then, was probably drawn up by a scribe named Blanconyer in the absence of a more formal royal notary.

At the end of the fifteenth century, Brittany began to be assimilated into the Kingdom of France with the marriage of Anne of Brittany to Charles VIII in 1491. Nevertheless, Brittany retained most of its legal customs, enshrined in the *Très Ancienne Coutume* (The Very Old Custom) well into the sixteenth century. Due to its maritime and mercantile economy, women often managed their families' estates and wealth, while their husbands were abroad, and engaged in trade themselves. Women "could act with full legal capacity within a particular framework". (Dufournaud, 2018, p. 47) In the case presented in this scroll, it is clear that Marie Menou left a sizable fortune to her husband and children. The legal maneuvering of Marie's husband, François de Ploesquellec, likely aimed to secure more of Marie's fortune for himself and his son, rather than Marie's daughters. However, the guardian of Marie's daughters, Jean de Quoictsoeff, who likely fulfilled the role of *tutour* or *curatour* outlined in the *Très Ancienne Coutume* (Planiol, 1896, pp. 126-29), was able to defend Marie's daughters' rights as upheld in the court of Tréguier.

It is not uncommon to find legal decisions written on rolls (cf. for example, Holz, Peltzer, and Shirota, 2019). The impressive dimensions of this roll give the appearance of monumentality and finality. Yet, the lack of seals intended to be attached to ribbons of parchment cut out at the end of each entry could suggest that the legal decisions in the document were never finalized and authenticated (the parchment tabs survive without evidence that the seals were once attached). Surviving legal documents from fifteenth century Brittany are few and those dealing with women's wills and legal power even fewer. Further research into the specifics of this

document will likely reveal much about the status of inheritance law in Brittany during a crucial period of change for the duchy.

## LITERATURE

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## ONLINE RESOURCES

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