

# LES ENLUMINURES

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PIERRE MIGNARD(?), Drawing of Marie Anne Christine, Dauphine of France, reproducing in microscopic letters the text of IGNATIO FRANCESCO MULGIN, *Il Trionfo d'applausi, e di glorie figurato di purissime lettere di sua altezza reale Maria Anna Christina Vittoria di Baviera Delfina di Francia, nel quale si contengono li seguenti versi, da leggersi nella figura con il microsopion* (The Triumph of Applause and the Glories of Her Royal Highness Maria Anna Christina Victoria of Bavaria, Dauphine of France, illustrated with perfect letters, which contain the following verses to be read in the image with a microscope); manuscript copy of the same text

In Italian, micrographic drawing and manuscript on paper  
France, c. 1683-84

*Drawing, one large sheet, 630 x 500 mm.; manuscript: 221 folios on paper (with three watermarks, suggesting Auvergne, before 1685: quires i-vii, a crowned cage and the mark of Benoît Colombier, quires viii-ix, a grape and the mark GG, quire x, the arms of the Medici (Gaudriault, 1995, p. 190, and Delaunay, 1997), first leaf is unnumbered, so foliation runs [0]-220, complete (collation i<sup>26</sup>[beginning with the first unnumbered leaf] ii<sup>26</sup> iii-vi<sup>24</sup> vii<sup>16</sup> viii<sup>26</sup> ix<sup>24</sup> x<sup>9</sup> [of 10]), written in a cursive script entirely in the hand of the author, in one column of 18-21 lines (justification 155 x 245 mm.), ruled in pencil (ff. 3-144: 30, 155, 40 x 45, 245, 45 mm.), catchwords, signatures trimmed (except f. 162, "c.8"), in excellent condition, apart from one spot on f. 173. Contemporary binding of red morocco with a tooled double floral frieze gilt, spine decorated and gilt between the bands, edges gilt, attributed to Bernard Bernache (Métivier, 1998), binder to the king from 1684 to 1721. Dimensions 335 x 225 mm.*

A complete book is concealed within this astonishing and very rare micrographic drawing made entirely from microscopic letters. The text when it is copied again in the accompanying manuscript is a lengthy book with 221 folios. This *tour de force* of calligraphy, likely intended as a diplomatic ploy on the part of the papal envoy to influence the king of France, is a witness to the early impact of the microscope. Made within decades of the publication of Robert Hooke's *Micrographia* (1665) and the perfection of the microscope by Anton van Leeuwenhoek (1674), this is a work that illuminates the intersection of art and optics at the end of the seventeenth century.

## PROVENANCE

1. Written at the court of France for Marie Anne Christine of Bavaria (1660-690), wife of Louis de France (1661-1711), who was the only son of King Louis XIV of France and Queen Maria Theresa of Spain. Internal evidence suggests that the manuscript was written in the years 1683-84, not long after the couple's marriage on March 17, 1680, and probably before 1685, when the daughter-in-law of the King began to fall out of royal favor. The manuscript was doubtless written in or near Paris at the royal court, where its author Ignacio Muligin served the Papal Legate.

## TEXT

The text is described according to the divisions of the micrographic drawing, as follows:

ff. 1-2, Table of Contents, *Indice di tutti i versi che sono compresi nella figura di sua Altezza reale*;

f. 3, Title;

ff. 4rv, Dedicatory letter, incipit, "*Altezza Reale. All'immortal grandezza dell'Altezza Vostra Reale gioiscono sempre piu le penne degl'Omeri...*";

ff. 5-78, the Dauphine and the Chariot, [Title] *Sopra la real testa di Sua Altezza Reale Maria Anna Christina Vittoria Delfina di Francia, seguitan li presenti versi, e la sopradetta dedicatoria e incominciata nella testa del piccolo angelo, che porta la croce significando la religione, il scettro, il regno &c. // [Poem] incipit, "Serenatevi, o Cieli, / Rida dirai festivi / Incoronato il sol, piu de l'usato..."*;

ff. 78v-83, the angel who guides the horses, incipit, "*Nell'angelo che seconda i cavalli incomincian li seguenti versi // D'opere gloriose / Diversita concorde a la gran mole...*";

ff. 83v-91, the angel who brings incense to the Dauphine, incipit, "*Nell'angelo che incensa sua Altezza Reale incomincian li seguenti versi // Pria che de moi natali / Il fortunato di giunga alla sera...*";

ff. 91v-147, the horses, incipit, "*Nelli cavalli, che e tiratto il carro trionfale, incomincian li seguenti versi // Sferza i destrieri e per lo ciel stellato / Affretta il corso o desiata notte...*";

ff. 147-173, the angel who wears the crown (head), incipit, "*Sopra la testa dell'angelo, che porta la corona reale e la tromba della fama, seguitan li seguenti versi // Con mantice indefesso / Chimico affumicato / Trabe d'assiduo carbon faville ardenti...*";

ff. 173v-182v, the angel who wears the crown (body), incipit, "*Nell'angelo, che porta la croce, bilancia, scettro, e spada e scritta la sopradette dedicatoria, seguitando pure li seguenti versi : Nato appena era il mondo e non amora / a' gl'obliqui sentier ben'uso il sole / ...*";

ff. 182v-201v, Hercules, incipit, "*Nella figura d'Ercole incomincian li seguenti versi // L'armi cotanto e l'erre che gia sottrasse / Di purpureo licor Italia e Roma/...*";

ff. 201v-208, shield with arms, incipit, "*Nell'armi di sua Altezza Reale Monseigneur il Delfino, e di sua Altezza Reale Madama la Delfina seguitan li presenti versi // Na ne deserti campi / Aspettarono indarno / ...*";

f.f 208-220v, the lion, incipit, "*Nella testa del leone incomincian li seguenti versi // Dabila prescisse / L'ultima meta a le relate antenne / ...-... / Che il mar, la terra, il ciel forme si belle / Uguagliar si rotrian tuite le stelle / Viva, viva, viva / Fine.*"

The text is a long poem in Italian, composed of approximately 6,800 verses, on the glory of the Dauphine, Marie Anne Christine of Bavaria, written in a mannered style characteristic of the virtuosity of Baroque poetry and full of allegories and classical allusions.

The author, Ignatio Francesco Muligin, was a Swede who was in the service of Cardinal Angelo Maria Ranuzzi (1683-89), the apostolic legate at the court of the king of France. Without his signature at the end of the dedication and the testimony of Gilles Ménage (1613-1692), he

would remain unknown. There is no mention of him in the correspondence of the legate (Ranuzzi, 1973 and 1988), or in the extensive Ranuzzi family archives (consisting of more than 600 volumes), preserved today in the Henry Ransom Humanities Research Center of the University of Texas.

## ILLUSTRATION

In a celebration of virtuosity, the artist used the entire text from the book to compose a drawing that illustrates the subject(s) of the manuscript, showing the Dauphine in a chariot drawn by horses with several figures: angels, a lion with the arms of the Dauphine, and Hercules. The figures of the drawing, which are very finely executed, are composed of the microscopic letters of the poem (also transcribed in normal scale in the manuscript that accompanies the drawing). The artist/calligrapher successfully created shaded and blank space by varying the placement of the letters. Although the letters are placed in diverse ways, they can only be read horizontally when observed with a magnifying glass.

Whereas it is certain that Muligin wrote the poem, it is not likely that he designed the accompanying drawing; more likely, he collaborated with a draughtsman at court. The style and composition of the drawing recall work by Pierre Mignard (1610-1695). Official court painter, Mignard was shut out from the Academy and was quite active as a portrait painter. His specialization and his close ties with the court would have made him a likely collaborator with Muligin on the present project.

The table after the figure with the royal crown and of the Renommée indicates that the text of the drawing should be read in the following order: beginning at the head of the Dauphine in her chariot, then continuing at her feet, to the wheels of the chariot, then to the victory that guides the horses, the figure that bears the incense of the Dauphine, the horses, the figure who carries the royal crown and the trumpet of renown (Renommée), the angel that carries the cross, the scales, the scepter and the sword, then Hercules who marvels at seeing the grandeur of her royal highness, the crown and the shield held by the lion, concluding with the head and then the body of the lion. In actual fact, the text begins with the angel, constructed from letters of the dedicatory epistle.

This astonishing portrait of Maria Anna Christina Victoria was doubtless designed as a diplomatic act to influence the Dauphine in the hopes that she would in turn influence the king. The disputes between the French royalty and the papacy were serious and numerous (they involved the Gallican Declaration of 1682, the affair of the Quartiers Francs around the embassies, the nomination of bishoprics, the preparation of the succession of the bishopric of Cologne, and so forth).

A second work by Muligin, a poem on the glory (*la gloire*) of the king with a translation of the life of Alexander the Great by Plutarch, confirms the diplomatic importance of our drawing. This second work, now Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS ital. 496 (published by Mazzatinti, vol. 1), was offered to the king in 1686 and kept in the royal library of Versailles, until it was transferred to the newly constructed royal library in Paris in 1738. Its binding is closely related to the binding of our manuscript (Mazzatinti, p. cxxxiii), and it was also an example of microscopic calligraphy, although it has never been identified as such because its drawing has become separated from the text and appears to be lost. The title, on f. 5, however,

makes this quite clear: *Real figura della Maestà del Gran Rè Ludovico XIII di Francia & Navarra, delineata di purissime lettere, nella quale s'accompara, et distintamente descritta la Vita et Grandezze di Alessandro Magno fatta da Plutarco, con applausi festivi di sonetti fatti alle glorie della Maestà Sua, finita con gran fattiche l'anno 1686 la sopradetta real figura da me sottoscritto. Ignatio Francesco Muligin Inventore.*

The celebrated and erudite man of letters, Gilles Ménage (1613-1692), saw our drawing of the Dauphine, and describes it, along with other similar micrographic drawings:

It seems that the moderns have even surpassed the ancients, because not only do they form capital letters that are imperceptible to the eyes without the aid of a microscope; but they even compose all the traits of the faces and of other figures with the same characters, as was done in the Crucifix which is at Sainte Geneviève du Mont where all the features are composed in strong small characters. The latter form all the Passion of Our Lord according to Saint John. Other examples are an image of the Virgin that is in the same place, another that belongs to M. de Camp named to the bishopric of Pamiers. I have seen still other figures, and portraits drawn from nature and made in the same manner as that of the deceased Madame la Dauphine pulled by a chariot, crowned by a flying Victory. There were also other hieroglyphic figures, which are related to her and to Monseigneur. All this formed a square painting about one and one half feet square; and what seems to have made the traits and the ordinary lines were nothing but small capitals of a delicacy so surprising. No engraving could make the figure and even the very naturalistic face of Madame la Dauphine more lovely. Finally, all the letters make up an Italian poem of thousands of verses in praise of this princess. It was an officer of the legate, Cardinal Ranucci, who was the author. This man was Swedish. He had traveled almost everywhere and knew a very large number of languages (Ménage, pp. 40-42).

This is a remarkable testimony, and one that shows that the practice of using microscopic calligraphy to create large scale drawings, that is micrography, was quite in vogue at the end of the seventeenth century. Nevertheless, surviving examples are extremely rare. (Another example sold in 2001, Paris, Hotel Drouot, 11 June 2001, lot 42, *The Last Supper*.)

Both Gilles Ménage, and Mulgin in his title to this work, emphasize that the letters used are so small that they can only be read with a microscope. They were men of their time, living in a world where "seeing" had been revolutionized by the increasing sophistication of microscopes, revealing, in Robert Hooke's words, "a new visible world." The early timeline of microscope technology spans the period from c. 1590 to c. 1674. In 1590, two Dutch spectacle makers, Hans Janssen and his son Zacharias are claimed, perhaps erroneously, to be the inventors of the compound microscope. Then, in 1609, Galileo developed a compound microscope with a convex and concave lens, and a decade later, in 1619, Contantine Drebbel presented a compound microscope with two convex lenses. In 1665 in London, Robert Hooke published *Micrographia*, a collection of biological micrographs, drawing on his own experiments with different microscopes; finally, in 1674, Anton van Leeuwenhoek, who had made significant advances in manufacturing lenses, perfected the simple microscope.

The impact of Robert Hooke's *Micrographia*, was especially significant, since he not only documented his observations of the world revealed by the microscope, but he accompanied his

text with a series of spectacular copper engravings that showed his readers the microscope's capabilities. Hooke microscopically examined everything from snow and needles, to cork, plants, and numerous insects. His illustration of a louse as seen under a microscope, which folds out into a plate four times as large as his folio-size book, is particularly famous.

Hooke was also aware of contemporary scribes who claimed to be able to write in microscopic script. In the *Micrographia* he used the microscope to examine "certain pieces of exceeding curious writing" where the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, the Ten Commandments, and dozens of Bible verses were written in an area smaller than a two-pence piece. He found the writing ("pitifull bungling scribbles and scrawls") to be unimpressive and barely legible once it was magnified (Spiller, 2004, p. 137). The idea of super-humanly small script has a long history. Pliny, in fact, reported that he had seen the *Iliad* copied in script so small that it could be contained in a walnut shell. In the seventeenth-century, the preceptor of the Dauphin, Pierre-Daniel Huet (1630-1721), took up the challenge, and stated that he demonstrated to the Dauphin and other members of the court that a piece of parchment with the dimensions 27 x 21.5 cm. could in fact hold on its recto and verso around 15,000 verses and thus be inserted into a walnut shell (Lalanne, 1857, pp. 1-8; and Feuillet de Conches, 1862-1868, vol. 1).

Micrographic drawings from the seventeenth century are very rare. The survival of this beautiful drawing, together with the accompanying manuscript copy of the text, is remarkable. It is an important artifact that illustrates for us the wonder and excitement of a world just discovering the amazing capabilities of the microscope.

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