

JEAN MIDOLLE, *Album*; and *Recueil ou Alphabet de lettres initiales historiques avec bordures et fleurons d'après le 14 et 15 siècles*

Two volumes: Illuminated manuscript on paper; and Chromolithography on paper
Switzerland, 1840; Belgium, Ghent, 1846

[Volume I] *Album*: 12 illuminated pages on paper, mounted on blue card, each prefaced with a thin white sheet of paper, written in a gothic scrip in black, red and blue, ranging in size from large initials to nearly microscopic lettering, illuminations in pen and watercolor all signed and most dated 1840, gold leaf used throughout with loss in a number of places. Original brown leather binding, stamped in gold "J. MIDOLLE" at center. Dimensions, 365 x 285 mm. [Volume II] *Recueil ou Alphabet . . .*: in-folio, 25 folios on glossy paper, title page and 24 color plates with gothic style initials, lettering, foliate and border decoration, most signed Midolle and Kinsbergen (the lithographer), in excellent condition with vibrant colors. Bound in original eggplant colored embossed demi-chagrin. Dimensions 476 x 317 mm.

The calligrapher and artist Jean Midolle (birth and death dates unknown) is most well-known for his alphabets, such as *Specimens des écritures modernes* (1836) and *Album du Moyen Age* (1840). These two volumes are good examples of his work. The first, an untitled manuscript from 1840 includes a miscellany of prayers, souvenirs, and portrait vignettes, with small monochromatic landscapes at the bottom of the page. Midolle's distinctive use of micrography is noteworthy. The second, dated 1846, *Recueil ou Alphabets . . . historiques* is a calligraphic tour de force of the rulers of Europe from A (Anne de Bretagne) to Z (Zuintibold de Lorraine). Not a single identifiable manuscript source emerges for any of the letters. Surely, this helps explain why the Surrealists revived the talented Midolle a half millennium later, when André Breton and Paul Eluard used his letter forms in their *Dictionnaire abrégé du surréalisme*.

PROVENANCE

1. [Volume 1] Perhaps Jean Midolle's personal album, dated 1840; [Volume 2] published by G. Jacqmain in Ghent, Belgium in 1846.
2. [Volume 2] A. Van Loock, Brussels.

TEXT AND ILLUSTRATION

Volume I:

f. 1, Prayers, headed, "Veni Creator mundi"; illuminated display panel with blue background and gold and silver foliate design supporting chrysography, left border of gold scroll and foliate design with orange flowers;

f. 2, Psalm 3; colorful decorative illumination with flowers, fleur-de-lis, a gothic church spire topped with a gold cross, and small landscape in brown wash on the bottom right;

f. 3, Marie-Thérèse of Austria and Marie Antoinette, her daughter, with a portrait bust of Marie-Thérèse, short biographies of the two women, and a funeral urn dated 1793;

f. 4, *Hommage à la Bienfaisance*, incipit, "La joie de faire bien . . ."; at the bottom a landscape shown in a gilded picture frame;

- f. 5, *Prière*, incipit, "Je vous adore à mon Dieu! ..."; with a Crucifix, tomb and church spire in the distance;
- f. 6, incipit, "Solut o Divine Esperance ..."; beginning with a grand decorated 'S';
- f. 7, *Le Cid*, incipit, "Pret à partir pour la rive Africaine ...";
- f. 8, Anne Boleyn, with a portrait of Anne;
- f. 9, The Pater noster (Lord's Prayer), surmounted by a gold cross, with the prayers to the Virgin Mary at the top;
- f. 10, *Le tombeau d'Emma*, incipit, "Uinci d'Emma la tombe solitaire ..."; with pen work in blue and grisaille, flowers, and a blue cross;
- f. 11, incipit, "Le Duc de Guise avait une intrepidité ..."; with a portrait of the duke;
- f. 12, incipit, "Henri IV n'aimait point ..."; with a short text surrounded by elaborate pen flourishes, and with a landscape in color at the bottom.

Volume II:

- pl. 1, [Title page] *Recueil ou Alfababet de Lettres Initiales historiques...*; decoration includes books, coins, arms, heraldry and two scenes in sepia grisailles;
- pl. 2, Anne de Bretagne; substantial foliate and floral decoration with one red dragon and a grey bird;
- pl. 3, Biron, Duc et Maréchal de France; large initial 'B' with entwined dragons, bracket borders include arms, a severed head, birds, and a dog
- pl. 4, Charles VII, Rois de France; gothic windows and a leopard confronting a dragon are notable elements in the illustration of this plate;
- pl. 5, Dunois, Jean comte d'Oréans;
- pl. 6, Edouard, Roi de Angleterre; this plate is characterized by simpler designs set in rectangular fields;
- pl. 7, François 1er; overlapping tapestry-like designs and a solider at the bottom right define the decoration;
- pl. 8, Gustave Adolphe, King of Sweden; the bottom border includes a medallion, a church niche with a saint, and a dog confronting a serpent bird;
- pl. 9, Henri IV, Roi de France; framed by a large initial 'H' with bracket borders at the top left and bottom right; a plain white ground sets the scene for a light interplay of flowers;
- pl. 10, Jean 1er, Duc de Bretagne; the decoration features a Romanesque style border on the left, a red lion at the top, and a sword framing the right side;
- pl. 11, Kinnatel, Roi d'écosse; beautifully decorated gold initial 'K' with soft red, pink, blue, green and yellow foliate and disk designs;

- pl. 12, Louis XIV; fairly simple foliate borders with large, gold initial 'L';
- pl. 13, Marie de Medicis; this plate is remarkable for its bottom frame inhabited by colorful, bellicose monsters; the initial 'M' is somewhat Italianate in design and is also inhabited by grotesques;
- pl. 14, Nantilde, Reine de France; an open book is the main feature of the bottom border;
- pl. 15, Olivier de Glisson; an Insular style defines the decoration of this page including the initial 'O' followed by rainbow-colored letters and a winged Celtic monster carrying a standard at the right border;
- pl. 16, Philippe Auguste; red, blue, a touch of green and silvery grisaille acanthus and grotesques for the initial 'P';
- pl. 17, Quintin (Quentin Metsys, the Flemish painter); initial 'Q' sits in an octagonal frame;
- pl. 18, Richard Coeur de Lion; a large, crowned lion is featured at the bottom border, other fantastic animals fill the floral borders;
- pl. 19, Sully, minister to Henry IV; the borders of this page are formed of separate decorated cells;
- pl. 20, Turenne, Maréchal de France under Louis XIV; patchwork-style border;
- pl. 21, Ugolin Comte de Pisa (Ugolinio della Gherardesca); another patchwork-style border in the left and bottom is countered with a border in the form of a column on the right;
- pl. 22, Vanceslas (Wenceslaus I of Bohemia); the bottom border is notable for a dark grotesque who spears the large reptile biting its leg;
- pl. 23, Ximenes, archbishop of Toledo; the bottom border features a Gothic arcade of four cells each set with a religious scene in sepia grisaille;
- pl. 24, Yliaz "célèbre Indien"; deep colors and a bottom border with egg-shaped cells decorate this page dedicated to a court juggler from India;
- pl. 25, Zuintibold, Roi de Lorraine; a striking red initial 'Z' set against a green background with gold foliate design tops the odd left side border designed like a chess board set with pink, gold, red and yellow hearts.

The publisher of this volume, Gustave Jacqmain was a Belgian lithographer from Ghent. His collection of "Letters and Historical Initials" was displayed at the Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations (also known as "The great Exhibition") in London 1851. The lithographer, Isidore van Kinsbergen (1821-1905) started his career as an engraver and worked in both Bruges and Ghent during the time this book was produced. Jacqmain was a witness at Kinsbergen's wedding and likely his employer. Kinsbergen continued his interest in preserving the past and went on to become a famous archaeological photographer, notably of Dutch territories Java and the East Indies. A second engraver, who signed his name, "Joos," also worked on this book; further research may establish his full identity.

Although roughly contemporary with Léon Curmer and Auguste Bastard d'Estang, Jean Midolle (birth and death dates unknown) is utterly different from them in his approach to the Middle

Ages. Born in Strasbourg, he also lived in Geneva, where he taught calligraphy, and he published his volumes throughout Europe – in Strasbourg, St.-Gall, and Ghent. These volumes consisted mostly of alphabets, such as *Specimens des écritures modernes* (1836) and *Album du Moyen Age* (1840), and they relied extensively on chromolithography at a remarkably early phase in the history of the technique. But whereas Curmer and Bastard were unrelenting in their attempts to reproduce the Middle Ages, Midolle used manuscripts as an inspiration to create a highly individualistic fantasy of the period.

These two volumes are good examples. The first, an untitled manuscript, signed and dated on most pages 1840, includes a miscellany of prayers, souvenirs, and portrait vignettes, each sheet mounted on blue card tipped into a folio volume. Expressing the Romanticism of his day and tipping his hat to the new medium of photography, he included small monochromatic landscapes at the bottom of the page. Midolle's distinctive use of micrography is also unusual. The second, dated 1846, *Alphabets ... historiques* (17 copies recorded in worldcat.org), is a calligraphic tour de force of the rulers of Europe from A (Anne de Bretagne) to Z (Zuintibold de Lorraine). Not a single identifiable manuscript source emerges for any of the letters. Surely, this helps explain why the Surrealists revived the talented Midolle a half millennium later, when André Breton and Paul Eluard used his letter forms in their *Dictionnaire abrégé du surréalisme*.

LITERATURE

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