

Richard III's Books: IX. The *Grandes chroniques de France*: A Footnote.

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The detailed research by Richard and Mary Rouse into the world of the Paris stationers and all men and women in the book trade of that city has resulted in the discovery of how Richard of Gloucester probably acquired his copy of a volume of the *Grandes chroniques de France*, which was in France written *circa* 1380-1400 and illustrated there *circa* 1400-10 and in which he put his signature, BL MS Royal 20 C vii, folio 134.¹ The detail is buried in the documents relating to the trial for treason of Jean Fusoris, Canon of Notre-Dame, Paris, in 1415-16. Fusoris (Le Fondeur), first suspected of passing information to the English at the time Henry V was besieging Harfleur, was a learned man, expert in geometry, astrology and medicine, who hoped that a marriage between Henry V and Katherine, the king of France's daughter, would prevent war. He met Henry personally and described him as looking more like a priest than a soldier. In 1414 he had become friendly with Richard Courtenay, Bishop of Norwich, and other English ambassadors staying in Paris.

The documents of Fusoris' trial contain fascinating pictures of the cultural and commercial comings and goings at the Hotel de Bourbon, near the Louvre palace, where the ambassadors were besieged daily by a host of booksellers/stationers, goldsmiths, illuminators, *mercierr*, and doctors, all trying to sell their wares. Not only Fusoris was successful in gaining the bishop of Norwich's attention. From Regnault du Montet, *libraire*, Courtenay bought several romances: a *Tristan*, at 151 *écus*, and a book by Froissart and an Ovid for *circa* 80 *écus*. Regnault also tried to sell the bishop a Boethius, but this fell through

¹ Richard H. Rouse and Mary A Rouse, *Manuscripts and their Makers. Commercial Books in Medieval Paris 1200-1500*, 2 volumes, Harvey Miller Publishers, an imprint of Brepols Publishers, Turnhout, Belgium, 2000. ISBN 1872501419, vol. 1, pp. 258-88, vol. 2, pp. 123-25 (biography), ill. 176. See also L. Mirot, 'Le procès de Maître Jean Fusoris, chanoine de Notre-Dame de Paris (1415-1416). Episode des négociations franco-anglaises durant la Guerre de Cent Ans' *Mémoires de la Société d'Histoire de Paris et de l'Ile-de-France*, vol. 27 (1900), pp. 137-287, esp. 148, 186-87; A.F. Sutton and L. Visser-Fuchs, with Lynda Dennison, 'Richard III's books: IX. The *Grandes chroniques de France*', *The Ricardian*, vol. 8 (1988-90), pp. 494-514; and the same, *Richard III's Books. Ideals and Reality in the Life and Library of a Medieval Prince*, Stroud 1997, chapter 7, 'History: Its Reading and Making'.

because they were unable to agree on the price, the bishop offering four *écus* and the bookseller asking six.

Regnault had been born *circa* 1375. His adult career coincided with one of the unhappiest periods in the history of his city, subject to the dangers and deprivations of civil war, war against the English and then the English occupation. He worked at the sign of the *Etoile* in the rue des Ecrivains (rue de la Parcheminerie) on the Left Bank and frequently sold books to the duke of Berry and valued the duke's books at his death in 1416. Because of his commercial contact with the English ambassadors he became one of the witnesses at Fusoris' trial. He was imprisoned in the Petit Châtelet and then released on bail. When questioned, the first thing Regnault had to admit to the court was that he had been to England once, 'when King Richard was alive'. He had travelled, without safe-conduct, to visit the *comte de Rothelain* – Edward, Earl of Rutland, later duke of York – to receive 60 *écus* for *un livre des Croniques de France* which he had sold to the earl. From Paris Regnault went to Calais, thence to England, where he stayed six days, no more; the crossing cost him one *écu*. His expenses were paid for by the earl in the shape of *un drap d'ostade*, a cloth of worsted. Presumably he was paid the sum owing as well. When Rutland bought the book is not said, nor whether he acquired any other books from Regnault, but the 60 *écus* appear to refer to this 'a book of the Chronicles of France' only; whether this means one volume or a complete set is not explained, but one volume seems likely. In view of the prices that the bishop of Norwich paid for other books the chronicles were not very expensive.

We know that Rutland had been an emissary to France on several occasions between 1395 and 97 and given the scene at the ambassadors' lodgings in Paris in 1414 it is likely his purchase took place in similar circumstances in the 1390s. The books Regnault sold to the bishop of Norwich in 1414 were all 'second-hand' – their original owners are mentioned by name in his deposition, one was a squire, the other a scholar. Regnault was merely the middle man, receiving six *écus* and two *sous* for his trouble. Though no previous owner is mentioned for the *Grandes croniques*, it is possible that Rutland, too, acquired a book that had been begun for someone else; its curious unfinished state alone led Richard and Mary Rouse to this conclusion. A member of the house of Anjou has been put forward as a possible intended first owner and in view of Regnault's connection with the duke of Berry, it is also possible that he played a similar part some time after Berry's brother, Louis I, Duke of Anjou and titular King of Naples, died in 1384, acquiring some of the deceased's books. His son, Louis II, may have been in need of money for his campaign to obtain the Provence and other lands. Such ownership would explain the sumptuousness and perhaps the unfinished state of the manuscript, though it would require a slightly earlier date of production. It may have been essential for Regnault to get the money from the English earl because it was owed to someone else,

though if that were true it is curious he did not mention his royal patron at the trial.

None of the book's owners was apparently worried by its incompleteness; its text, the richness of its surviving decoration and its unusual sequence of miniatures illustrating the visit of the Emperor Charles IV to Paris in January 1378 made it a very worthwhile acquisition. Rutland's cousin, Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, later owned the preceding volume, covering the history of France up to 1270. For Richard of Gloucester it neatly completed his series of history books and we can assume that it belonged to his father, Richard of York, before it came to him and adds one more title to York's small but interesting collection.