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Rent Roll for François de Saint-André (d. 1571) for properties in Montregard, written by the notaries Michel and Pierre Boutte
In French, document on parchment
France, Paris(?), dated May 1544

Roll constructed from two and a half parchment sheets (sheep?), written in a fine French notarial cursive script in 120 lines, contemporary notes on verso and margins in French cursive script, contemporary sutures joining sheets, tear on left margin of second sheet. Dimensions 1510 x 500 mm., each sheet, (620 x 500 mm., 620 x 500 mm., and 270 x 50 mm.),

A large and impressive roll, almost five feet long, detailing the rents owed to François de Saint-André (d. 1571) from properties owned in Montregard (dep. Haute-Loire). A detailed record of how a French nobleman funded his political career in Paris with properties hundreds of miles away, this document is a superb and elegant example of the cursive hand developed by the French notariat, which reached its peak of beauty and rhythm in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Of interest for their text, rent rolls are equally important today as examples of the continued use of the roll format in the Middle Ages and Renaissance.

PROVENANCE

1. A contemporary hand on the top verso of the first membrane dates this document to May 1544. The document mentions that the properties owing rents are situated in Montregard (dep. Haute-Loire) (*demeurant en Montregard*), but it is likely that the document was drafted in the Châtelet in Paris, the administrative headquarters of the French notariat.
2. Private collection.

TEXT

[Rental agreement for François de Sant-André], incipit, "PAR DEVANT MICHEL BOUTTE ET PIERRE BOUTTE NOTAIRES du roy nostre sire ce depret le dict segnieur ordonez deputez ce establez ... icelle segnieur baill en sante les rentes rabbater ne dyminuer de la ferme susdicte."

Docketed to the back of the roll at the top of the first membrane, another nearly contemporary hand has written, "Bail a loyer de mois de May 1544 / 38 arpens 17 perches ou environ" (Rental lease for the month of May 1544 / 38 arpens and 17 perches [units of land measurement] more or less). The contractual term *bail à loyer* is still used in French property law to this day.

In this Rent Roll, dated to May 1544, two *notaires du roy*, Michel and Pierre Boutte witness and confirm the lease of properties and their rent owed in the region of Montregard belonging to François de Saint-André. François was born in Toulouse to Pierre Saint-André and Claire de Pumisson. He was the first to receive the rank of *Conseiller du roy* (Councilor of the King) in 1514

and continued an illustrious public career under the reigns of Francis I (r. 1515-1547), Henry II (r. 1547-1559), François II (r. 1559-1560), and Charles IX (r. 1560-1574) as the *Président-Clerc* (Presiding Clerk) in the newly created *Chambre des Enquêtes* (Chamber of Investigations, i.e. the office of parliament responsible for judging whether a case should be brought before parliament). (For more information on François, see Blanchard, 1647, pp. 183-84; de La Chesnaye-Desbois, 1873, vol. 13, p. 69; and Maugis, 1916, vol. 3, pp. 150-52).

The text of the rent roll comprises 120 lines. The first sixteen lines form a preamble that names the interested parties, and the terms of the rent expressed in harvests (*despouilles*) gathered at the feast of Saint Martin (*feste Sanct Martin*) on November 11, a common time to collect rents (Buat and Van den Neste, 2011, s.v. "hiver"). At the end of the preamble, there is a *declaration seises* (declaration of properties), which is followed by a paraph and nineteen entries (*item*) listing the properties that will owe rent (lines 16-81). A recurring placename in the entries is Montregard, a small commune in South Central France located in the Haute-Loire. The sizes of the lots are expressed in *arpens* (about a half-hectare) and *quartiers* (a quarter of an *arpens*). In the list of rents in the middle of this roll, one can find Symon Bonvallet and Guillaume Papellart. The final section (lines 81-120) of the roll confirms the terms of the rent and at the bottom appears the signatures of Michel and Pierre Boutte and two other signatures who may be witnesses. Two further signatures reading "Boutte" at the bottom right of the first two membranes are included to keep the document from being fraudulently modified.

The office of *notaire* (notary) had existed in France since the early Middle Ages. We have evidence of *clercs notaires du roi* in the eleventh century and a steady stream of evidence thereafter. By the middle of the sixteenth century, *notaires* were essential functionaries of the king's court. They drafted documents for the transfer, sale, or rent of real property, and, more importantly, their signatures were required to authenticate documents (Sutherland, 1962, 7-10) The *notaires* thus became powerful and necessary agents of public and private business. Besides their signatures, their distinctive cursive script, rife with ligatures and flourishes, became a professional standard and from 1550-1650 reached an "apogee of virtuosity" (Buat and Van den Neste, 2016, p. 47).

Rent rolls are valuable records of local history, since they record many personal and family names of a given region. They record lands owned by nobility that have been leased to local residents. The rents owed to François de Saint-André by the bourgeois of Montregard show how the high nobility of Paris was supported by land holdings far from the capital. Rent rolls were portable and formidable documents that were difficult to fraudulently duplicate and therefore performed their administrative function well, i.e. to authenticate and enforce rents.

Perhaps due to the ubiquitous use of hypertext, there is a renewed interest in present-day scholarship on the forms of the book – scrolls (unrolling horizontally), rolls (unrolling vertically), folded "books" (accordion and otherwise), etc. Not only of interest for their text, rent rolls are equally important today as examples of the continued use of the roll format, favored in antiquity, in the Middle Ages and Renaissance (see especially Roche, 2019). Legal documents in particular were frequently transcribed in the form of rolls (why?), and bio-codicologists have found that sheep was the preferred support for legal documents because it helped prevent fraud since the epidermal layer of sheepskin was such that erasures were visible.

The support used for the present roll has not been tested but it, and other legal rolls, would make a good test case to strengthen the hypothesis.

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