

Dr. Jörn Günther Brings Four Royal Books to TEFAF Maastricht in March

This year at TEFAF Maastricht, Dr. Jörn Günther Rare Books will exhibit four exquisite examples of royal manuscripts made in the 15th and 16th centuries, **including the entire Book of Joshua from the first edition of the Gutenberg Bible, the largest fragment of the 'Book of Books' still on the market.**

The importance of the Gutenberg Bible lies in its revolutionary use of printing with moveable type. This technique was developed around 1455 by the goldsmith John Gensfleisch from Gutenberg, and his discovery changed the world in ways that even Gutenberg's contemporaries (judging from their remarks and statements) hardly comprehended.

The other three notable manuscripts brought to TEFAF by Dr. Jörn Günther Rare Books come from the royal collections of two bibliophile French Kings: Charles VIII (1470-98) and King Louis XII (1462-1515). These books were commissioned at a time when menacing forecasts like disturbing sky phenomena, monstrously malformed animals, and other evil omens strengthened the belief that doomsday was imminent.

The first of these three, ***Life of St. Redgund*** including her Office, Mass, and Miracles and accompanied by dedicatory poems, is **a manuscript in French and Latin, illuminated by the Master of St. Radegund and made for King Charles VIII and his wife Anne de Bretagne.** The manuscript was made in Poitiers, France, presumably between 1496-98.



Illuminated by the Poitevin miniaturist dubbed the Master of Radegund, the manuscript is richly illustrated with eleven large miniatures in a crisp and accurate style recalling the works of the renowned illuminator Robinet Testard. The miniature illustrated above alludes especially to Radegund's charity and humanitarianism. During a profuse banquet the king is served at the table while Radegund stands at the castle gate, feeding the poor and the lepers. Radegund was consecrated as a saint in the 9th century. This manuscript is of prime importance to the history of France.

Heraldry and emblems suggest that **this manuscript was made for Charles VIII and later adjusted for Anne of Brittany**. Shortly before the creation of this book, the heir to the throne, Charles Orlando, died from measles at the age of three. It is in this context that the author expresses the particularly touching wish that the queen might give birth to a "beautiful crown prince".

The next manuscript, from the personal library of Louis XII, is a gorgeous Book of Hours with extraordinary illustrations. Created in France, c. 1500-1505. The royal coat of arms and two monograms with a double *L*, and the roman numbers *X* and *II* point to the royal owner. This book boasts fifteen full-page compositions, with small scenes in the borders marking the most important texts. Fifteen smaller miniatures illustrate the Gospel lectures and the suffrages of the saints. Pictured here is a painting showing the betrayal of Judas. The main scene shows the traitor, who is garbed in bright yellow as a symbol of his evil spirit, receiving the thirty pieces of silver. The outer border depicts him embracing Christ and *the bas-de-page* portrays the soldiers falling down scared and paralysed when Christ answers them: "I am he".

Finally, Dr. Günther Rare Books is delighted to present ***Complaintes de la Foy***, a manuscript written in French, on vellum, by 'Nachier', an otherwise unrecorded poet and

illuminated by the Master of the Entry of François I. Like the *St. Radegonde* manuscript, the text of this beautiful manuscript is very rare

and unusual. In the text, the personification of Faith summons all “good Christians” to take part in a crusade against the Ottomans. Created in Lyon (c. 1504-1506), the manuscript’s one large introductory miniature shows Faith dressed in a black habit like a nun, kneeling and pleading before the apparition of God. In her hands, she holds a chalice with the host. A group of sophisticated and elaborately garbed noblemen observing the scene. King Louis XII is portrayed as the group’s leader, as indicated by his banner and his caparison.

Image: **Jean Bouchet (?), *Life of St. Radegund***, illuminated by the *Master of St. Radegund*. France, Poitiers, presumably made in 1496-98. 260 x 180, vellum, 66 leaves (complete), 1 full-page and 10 almost full-page miniatures.