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An Unpublished Document Concerning Leonardo da Vinci’s Sojourn at the Court of Francis I

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THE SECOND account book of the royal treasurer and receiver-general Jean Sapin (Archives Nationales, KK 289), comprising the king's receipts and expenses for the period from 1 October 1517 to 31 December 1518, contains amongst its 795 folios a wealth of data of interest to the art historian. In 1894 Joseph de Croÿ drew attention to this source, while citing several of its entries, notably two pension payments, one to Leonardo da Vinci and the other to Francesco Melzi (fol. 352v), as well as special remuneration for Leonardo's servant Salaì¹. These citations were in fact rather inaccurate paraphrases of the relevant entries, but came to be relied upon by generations of scholars after being included by Luca Beltrami in his oft-cited compendium of texts relating to Leonardo, published in 1919². Eight decades later Bertrand Jestaz, having consulted Jean Sapin' original account book at the Archives nationales, corrected the record by publishing a full transcription³. The entries related to Leonardo and Melzi appear under the heading “*Pensions, gaiges et entretenemens par vertu du roole du Roy*” (fol. 296r *et seq.*), whereas the one-time payment to Salaì is under the heading “*Autres dons et recompenses payes par ordonnance et ammandement verbal du Roy*” (fol. 391r *et seq.*). Jestaz further cited a pension payment of 225 *livres tournois* to the Florentine painter Andrea del Sarto for the first half of his French sojourn and one of 200 *livres*

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Codice Atlantico
f. 476r [174v-c]

¹ De Croÿ, Joseph, *Nouveaux documents pour histoire de la création des résidences royales des bords de la Loire*, Paris: Alph. Picard et fils, 1894, p. 18, note 1.

² Beltrami, Luca, *Documenti e memorie riguardanti la vita e le opere di Leonardo da Vinci*, Milano: Fratelli Treves Editori, 1919, pp. 150–151.

³ Jestaz, Bertrand, “François I^{er}, Salaì et les tableaux de Léonard.” *Revue de l'Art*, n° 126 (1999), pp. 70–72, notes 12–14.

tournois to Andrea's fellow countryman, the sculptor and ceramist Girolamo della Robbia (fol. 356)⁴. The entries referred to by Jestaz, however, constitute only a small sample of the rich trove of data contained in Jean Sapin's account book⁵. These include payments to the painter Jean Bourdichon "pour le recom- penser de plusieurs sumptueulx et riches ouvrages de paincture en façon distoires et autres choses" (fol. 389r), to the Neapolitan landscape architect Pacello da Mercogliano "pour l'entretenement du jardin du château de Blois" (fol. 343r) and to the tapestry weaver Bricet du Pre for a large tapestry "en laquelle est pourtract et tissue l'histoire de Hercule" (fol. 532r). Two payment records include tantalising details about the evening banquet held by King Francis at Leonardo's residence of Cloux on 17 January 1518 (fol. 416v and 537v)⁶. Of two other entries relating to Andrea del Sarto, the first records a payment of 200 écus d'or au soleil to compensate the artist for expenses he had incurred in coming from Florence to King Francis' court (fol. 397v), while the second concerns compensation paid to a Florentine merchant named Giovanni de' Bardi, a resident of Tours, for providing room and board

in his house to Andrea and to the artist's *garzone* for a period of nine months (fol. 537r-v)⁷. Among the entries that have thus far escaped the attention of historians is one referring to Francesco Melzi and Leonardo da Vinci, found on folio 398v, among the records of extraordinary payments disbursed on the king's verbal instructions. It reads as follows:

A Jehan Francisque de Melce, ou nom et comme procureur de messire Leon- nard de Vince peintre du Roy, ou nom et comme executeur du testament et ordon- nance de derreniere voulenté de feu Lau- rent Boudry*, en son vivant aussi peintre dudit seigneur, souffisamment fondé de lettres de procuracion, ainsi qu'il appert par la quittance de ce faisant mencion, la somme de seize livres treze solz quatre deniers tournois, à luy ordonnee par iceluy seigneur de sondit roole pour semblable somme qui estoit deue audit defunct pour sa pension et entretenement durant le mois de janvier MVc et dix sept ; pour ce cy par ledict roole et quittance cy rendue, ladite somme de : XVI £ XIII s. et IIII d. t.

*[Plutôt que V, mais légèrement incertain.]⁸

⁴ As noted by Jestaz, this entry had been published, along with two other records from the same source concerning Girolamo della Robbia (fols. 184v and 393v), by Lesueur, Pierre, "Arrivée de Girolamo della Robbia en France." *Bulletin de la Société d'histoire de l'art français*, LXIII (1937), pp. 198–199.

⁵ Numerous entries from Jean Sapin's account book are summarised in *Catalogue des Actes de François I^r*, Paris: Imprimerie nationale, vol. I, 1887 and vol. V, 1892. In 2015, a selection of 26 entries, transcribed by Faustine Migeon and Lucie Gaugain, was made available online as part of a website set up by Université de Tours under the direction of Pascal Brioist to commemorate the quincentennial of the Battle of Marignan (<https://marignan2015.univ-tours.fr/sources>). Three of the entries are cited in Brioist, Pascal, *Les audaces de Léonard de Vinci*, Paris: Stock, 2019, pp. 434, 446, 448 and pp. 460–462, notes 18, 58 and 64.

⁶ Sammer, Jan, "Royal Festivity at Cloux." In *Léonard de Vinci, invention et innovation*, Pascal Brioist et Laure Fa- gnart (eds.), Turnhout: Brepols, 2022 (in press).

⁷ Andrea del Sarto's landlord was presumably the Florentine merchant, referred to as Johannes Franciscus de Bardis, who was party to a legal dispute before the Camera Apostolica in Rome, which was decided in de' Bardi's favour by Pope Leo X on 16 October 1516. See Archivio Salviati, Scuola Superiore Normale di Pisa, sez. Diplo- matico, no. 343 (not. Tranquillus de Romanlis). In the *Libri dei Morti* at the Archivio Storico dell'Opera di Santa Croce, the date of Giovan Francesco de' Bardi's burial is given as 17 August 1542.

⁸ The transcription has been kindly provided by Marc H. Smith, Professor at l'École nationale des chartes (pri- vate communication dated 14 March 2021).

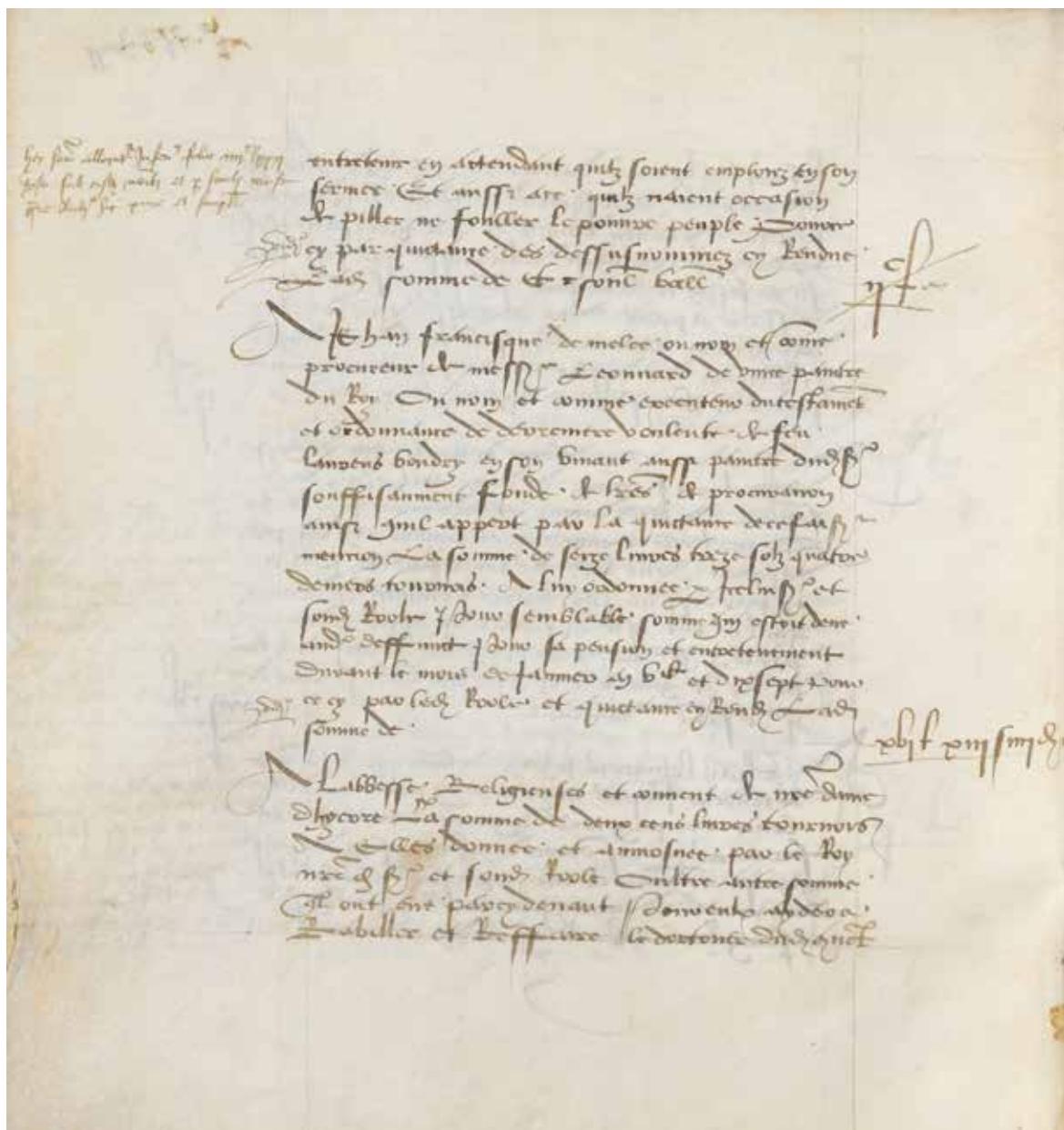


Fig. 1 - Paris, Archives Nationales, KK 289, fol. 398v.

The document bears no date, but can be assigned on the basis of internal evidence to the spring or summer of 1518. It records the payment of the sum of 16 livres, 13 sols and 4 deniers to Giovanni Francesco Melzi, to whom the royal painter Leonardo da Vinci had issued a procuration for the purpose of receiving the said payment on his behalf. The money paid

to Melzi was the equivalent of a month's pension of a recently deceased royal painter named Laurent Boudry, whose existence is not otherwise documented. In his last will and testament, Boudry had appointed Francesco Melzi to be the executor of his estate and had designated Leonardo da Vinci as his heir, at least with respect to the balance of his pen-

sion that might remain unpaid at the time of his death. A similar provision had been made by Leonardo in his own testament, dated 26 April 1519, in favour of Francesco Melzi:

Item epso Testatore dona et concede al dicto messer Francesco Melce presente et acceptante il resto della sua pension et summa de' denari qual a lui sono debiti del passato fino al dì della sua morte per il recevoir ovvero Tesaurario general M. Johan Sapin, et tutte et ciaschaduna summa de' denari che ha receputo dal p.o Sapin de la dicta sua pensione.

The wording of Boudry's testament was no doubt similar, given the fact that such documents were drawn up by public notaries. Since the record specifies that the given sum was equivalent to the deceased painter's pension for the month of January 1518, it follows that Boudry died in the course of following

month⁹. Most pensions were paid retrospectively on a yearly basis. Since only the amount due to him for January remained unpaid at the time of his death, the record implies that Boudry had received his yearly pension at the end of December of the previous year. On an annual basis, the unpaid amount for January 1518 comes to 200 *livres tournois*¹⁰, that is, an amount equivalent to half of Melzi's pension, and a tenth of Leonardo's.

The present document implies that Laurent Boudry had developed a close personal relationship with both Melzi and Leonardo. In a more general sense, it shows that Leonardo and his pupils were by no means recluses at Clos Lucé, but maintained close links with other local artists, a fact confirmed by Antonio de Beatis, the secretary of Cardinal Luigi d'Aragona, who remarked that Leonardo, despite being paralysed in his right arm, was still able to draw and to instruct others.

⁹ In France the civil year 1517 began on Easter Monday, 12 April 1517 and ended on the following Easter Sunday, 4 April 1518.

¹⁰ The *livre tournois* comprised 20 *sols*, and the *sol* 12 *deniers*.