

An extraordinary calligraphic and artistic portfolio by Jean Midolle

Jean Midolle, *Album Historique et Religieux*. Geneva, 1837–1838. 19 1/8 inches x 12 5/8 (486 x 321 mm), 28 leaves.

Jean Midolle was a calligrapher, writer, and miniaturist working during the mid nineteenth century. He taught calligraphy in Geneva, Switzerland, beginning in 1830 until at least 1837 when this album was created. His work was published in several lavish chromolithographed albums of colored plates including *Spécimen des écritures modernes: comprenant les romaines, fleuronées, gothiques, nouvelles, fractures, françaises, anglaise, italienne et allemande* (1834–35), *Album du moyen-âge* (1836), *Traité complet d'écritures en tous genres et d'ornements moyen-âge* (1840), culminating with *Grand Album Historique des Écritures de Tous les Ages* (1877), issued in both France and England.

Though the first piece in this portfolio is a title page reading “Album du Moyen Age” it exists simply as an original work of art, either for a patron or as a demonstration of his skills. The large range of Midolle’s artistry is apparent in this album, where swathes of heavily laid silver and gold highlight every type of large to near-microscopic calligraphy and paintings, borders, and portraits. In addition to the prayers and religious themes that the binding title suggests, are historic scenes of Joan of Arc, Lady Jane Gray, Cardinal Richelieu, and kings of England and France, all with multicolored calligraphed quotations in a variety of scripts arranged on the pages in fantastic compositions.

As with his lettering, Midolle often used historic and contemporary works of art as models for the paintings on the album leaves. For instance, “la Chaste Susanne au Bain,” the seventeenth piece in this album, is replicated from the illustration of Bathsheba bathing in a Book of Hours printed by Hardouyn in Paris in 1520. Midolle’s smaller painting of “les Enfants d’Edouard” (the Princes in the Tower), the nineteenth piece, is from a painting by Paul Delaroche that was on exhibition in 1831.

The portfolio binding is contemporary full burgundy-colored morocco with brass corners and a large brass clasp with key. The portfolio title, *Album Historique et Religieux* is stamped in gold gothic lettering surrounded by an elaborately ornamented border in the center of the front cover. The binding is signed on the front cover by Brand of Geneva. The portfolio album is in the Warnock Library.

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