Geoffrey Turnovsky, "Chroniques des Chroniques du samedi : l'invention d'un manuscrit"


When Louis Belmont discussed the bound collection of manuscript letters and verse known as the "Chroniques du samedi," he described it as a “luxurious specimen,” whose lavish (in his view) material forms – “good paper,” gilded edges, and blue velvet binding – echoed the refined sphere that its texts, a “register” of the activities of Madeleine de Scudéry's Saturday salon, evoked. He called it “le livre bleu de la préciosité.” Yet the history of the "Chroniques" as a document is more complex. This article explores some of the contexts through which the manuscript may have passed in its trajectory from the Scudéry group in the 1650s to the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal today, and which may have shaped the book. I highlight two specifically: the world of 19th-century autograph collecting typified by Feuillet des Conches, collector and forger, who owned the manuscript and signed his name on its endsheets, and the political, religious, and secretarial framework of the early 18th century, when Pellisson's papers were administered (published, archived) for posterity.

These contexts are obscure and to a degree, unknowable. But they have left discernible traces on the bound manuscript that, despite or because of the uncertainties encountered, may help us view it in a new light: created over time, invested in distinct and often contradictory ways, and materially altered for a variety of purposes.

Translated by Cécile Soudan.