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Sotheby's To Offer the Rochefoucauld Grail:

- One of the Principal Witnesses to the Legends of King Arthur, Merlin, the Knights of the Round Table, Lancelot and the Holy Grail
- One of the Finest Medieval Manuscripts Remaining in Private Hands



SOTHEBY'S LONDON 10 NOVEMBER 2010 --- It is the greatest romance of chivalry produced in the Middle Ages, and its themes of friendship, treachery, ambition, achievement and star-crossed tragic lovers form the foundations of much of our modern literature. The stories of the quest for the Holy Grail, of the Lady of the Lake, of King Arthur and his court at Camelot, and of Sir Lancelot and Queen Guinevere, captured the imaginations of generations to come, and have inspired some of the best-selling novels of our time. The Rochefoucauld Grail is from the 14th century, and on a scale which is as impressive as the text: some 200 cows would have been needed to produce the vellum sheets that make up the three monumental volumes, the whole

embellished with some 107 jewel-like illuminated illustrations – each one a work of art in its own right.

Dr Timothy Bolton, specialist in charge of the sale at Sotheby's, said: *"This is one of the principal manuscripts of the first significant medieval work of secular literature. It is a grand book, in a monumental format, with 107 miniatures, each a dazzling jewel of early gothic illumination. The subjects are almost entirely secular – a breathtakingly unusual thing at the time – with scenes of jousts, tournaments and battles, noble adventures and daring tests of strength and courage. The scenes often have a riotous energy, and often stretch beyond the boundaries of the picture frames, with lofty towers poking through the borders at the top, and figures tumbling out of the miniatures onto the blank page as they fall or scramble to escape their enemies."*

Estimated to sell for between £1.5 and £2 million* when it is offered in Sotheby's sale of Western Manuscripts and Miniatures on **Tuesday, 7th December 2010**, the work has an illustrious provenance. Written and illuminated in Flanders or Artois in the early-14th century (circa 1315-23), it was probably produced for Guy VII, Baron de Rochefoucauld, head of one of the leading aristocratic families of medieval France, and representative of King Philip V of France in Flanders. The volumes appeared on the market in the early-18th century and passed to Sir Thomas Phillipps (d.1872), possibly the greatest modern collector of medieval manuscripts. Since then, the work has changed hands just twice, passing through the hands of the most eminent dealer of the 20th century to one of the greatest collectors of our day. The Rochefoucauld Grail ranks among the finest medieval manuscripts in private hands.

The text was extremely popular in its time (there are myriad translations into other European languages), because it offered a model of spiritual chivalric behaviour, a guidebook for a Christian courtly society, through which the whole gamut of human emotions could be experienced. It shows friendship and love as well as lust, treachery and sin, while the characters struggle with ambition, achievement and crushing failure. These are the emotions and challenges that give life to stories such as those of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table, the Lady of the Lake, Sir Lancelot's tragic infatuation with Arthur's wife, Guinevere, and the tales of the wizard Merlin.

The work is being sold by Mr J. R. Ritman for the benefit of the Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica, Amsterdam.

The Stories and the Miniatures that Illustrate them:

Right: the Lady of the Lake carries Sir Lancelot as a baby down to her underwater castle. In the legend, Lancelot's mother turns from the side of her dying husband to see her child being carried away by the mystical Lady of the Lake. Lancelot then grows up in an underwater world, to emerge later as the greatest knight of his day.



Left: Queen Guinevere and her maid-servants lead a wounded Lancelot to safety. Married to King Arthur, Guinevere's infatuation with Lancelot was mutual. This tragic love both inspired him to become the greatest knight, and ultimately bought about both their downfalls.

Right: Lancelot, having heard the false reports that Guinevere is dead, falls into suicidal despair and attempts to take his own life. Here, the other Knights of the Round Table who are meant to be watching over him, have fallen asleep, all except one who leaps up to stop him from fatally wounding himself.



Left: Joseph of Arimathea brings the Holy Grail to Britain, having walked across water to do so, the image, left, shows his supporters walking across his cloak on the water's surface, while the non-believers are left to drown.

Right: Knights Lancelot and Gawain in a cart entering a walled town as the townspeople pelt them with filth.



Left: King Arthur fighting the Saxon army - the fear he engenders is so great that his enemies jump out of the picture.

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IMAGES AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

*Estimates do not include buyer's premium