

## *Libellus diffinitionum ordinis Cisterciensis* (Book of Cistercian Definitions)

In Latin, manuscript on parchment

Northwestern France (Le Mans, L'Épau Abbey), c. 1257-1270

*i (modern paper) + 63 + i (modern paper) folios on parchment, modern foliation in black ink, 1-63, lacking one quire in the beginning (collation i-vii<sup>8</sup> viii<sup>7</sup> [quire of six leaves and a singleton at the end]), no catchwords or signatures (modern mark "9" (?) in black ink in the middle of the lower margin on the verso of the last leaf of quires, partially cropped), ruled in brown ink at a later date (justification 125 x 92 mm.), written in black ink in Gothic book script (textualis) on 18 lines, rubrics in red, capitals touched in red, important names and phrases highlighted with a horizontal red line through the words, 1- to 2-line initials in red, water stains on the first and last leaves, some other minor stains and signs of use, but in overall excellent condition. In a modern limp vellum binding, orange-red paper pastedowns and flyleaves, modern slip case in orange buckram covered with decorated papers, minor stains, in overall excellent condition. Dimensions 160 x 120 mm.*

A rare manuscript of early Cistercian legislation, one of only ten extant copies of the codification of 1257. Moreover, to the best of our knowledge, it is one of only two surviving manuscripts from the library of the Abbey of l'Épau, founded by the English queen Berengaria of Navarre, wife of Richard I. Its newly discovered provenance makes this manuscript an important source both for the history of this royal foundation and for that of the Cistercian order in France.

### PROVENANCE

1. The manuscript was made at l'Épau Abbey (on the outskirts of the city of Le Mans) c. 1257-1270, as indicated by its contents. The text contains the Cistercian legal codification of 1257. The anniversary feasts celebrated at the abbey where the manuscript was used are listed on ff. 3v-6 and include the English dowager queen Berengaria of Navarre, who founded l'Épau Abbey, and several members of her family (see below). The inclusion of other individuals and saints connected with the abbey, as well as the indulgence granted by Pope Alexander IV (1254-1261) on f. 14v, situate the making of the manuscript in the years immediately following 1257, when the new Cistercian codification was issued.

The Cistercian abbey of l'Épau or La Piété-Dieu was founded in 1229 by the English dowager queen Berengaria of Navarre (c. 1165-1230), the eldest daughter of Sancho VI of Navarre and Sancha of Castile and widow of Richard I of England. After her marriage to King Richard the Lionheart in 1191, she lived in his possessions in France, earning her the sobriquet as the only English queen who was never in England. After Richard's death in 1199, Berengaria eventually settled in Le Mans, where in 1229 she offered land to Citeaux for the construction of Notre-Dame-de-l'Épau. In accordance with her wishes, Queen Berengaria was buried at the abbey.

2. Private collection.

## TEXT

ff. 1-63v, [beginning imperfectly], //Explicit ii. *distinctiones. Incipiunt capitula iii<sup>e</sup> distinctiones. Incipit iii<sup>e</sup> distinctiones que agit de divino officio. primum capitulum, incipit, "De mediocritate servanda in cantu ... illi penam denuntiet a capitulo prefinitam. Hic expliciunt diffinitiones nove. alleluia. alleluia. Qui scripsit scribat et longo tempore vivat. amen."*

*Libellus diffinitionum ordinis Cisterciensis* of 1257, the text contains the distinctions 3-15 (out of 15), lacking distinctions 1-2, which were in the first quire now missing; critical edition in Lucet 1977, pp. 203-357.

Cistercian legislation began soon after the order was founded by Robert de Molesmes in 1098, expanding upon the Rule of Saint Benedict with both constitutional law, that is the founding documents of the Order that organize Cistercian life overall, and non-constitutional laws, statues issued by the General Chapter, or the small executive committee known as the *definitorium*, that govern the everyday lives of all abbeys belonging to the order. After intense juridical activity at the end of the twelfth century, the beginning of the thirteenth century witnessed the first methodical collection of non-constitutional law in 1202, during the abbacy of Arnaud Amaury at Cîteaux. Each year the collection of laws was reviewed at the general chapter, and new official collections were composed in 1220, 1237 and 1257. The new codification of 1257 is contained in our manuscript.

Our manuscript records the important anniversaries honored at the abbey on ff. 3v-4, in the following order: King Philip Augustus of France (d. 1223), King Richard I of England (d. 1199), Blanche de Navarre, sister of Berengaria, Countess of Champagne (d. 1229), Simon de Montfort (d. 1218), the King and Queen of Castile, Philip I, Count of Boulogne (d. 1235), Pope Innocent III (d. 1216), Cardinal Stephen (Langton, archbishop of Canterbury, d. 1228), Joan, Countess of Flanders (d. 1244), William II, Count of Flanders (d. 1251), Ferdinand of Portugal, Count of Flanders, husband of Joan (d. 1233), Pope Honorius III (d. 1227), Queen Berengaria, King Louis VIII of France (d. 1226), and King Richard I of England. Continuing the instructions concerning important feasts, on f. 6 are highlighted the feasts of St. John at the Latin Gate and St. Lambert, St. Dominic, St. Peter Martyr, canonized in 1253, and St. Robert, the first Cistercian abbot. Notable for the dating of the present manuscript is the fact that the indulgences listed on ff. 6v-14v end with one issued by Pope Alexander IV (1254-1261), suggesting that the manuscript was written during his papacy or soon after, as no indulgences by his successors are included.

The Abbey of l'Épau was destroyed by fire in 1365 during the Hundred Years War and rebuilt in the fifteenth century; it was secularized during the French Revolution. Only one manuscript from their library is recorded in the catalogue of Cistercian libraries compiled by Anne Bondeelle-Souchier (1991, p. 141), Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, MS 509 (a Cartulary and some other archival sources do survive; see Corriol, 2013).

In 1977 Bernard Lucet listed nine manuscripts containing the 1257 *Libellus*: Poitiers, Bibliothèque Municipale, MS 128; Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale, MS 19051; Pavia, Biblioteca Universitaria, MS Fondo Aldini 470; Dusseldorf, Landes- und Stadt Bibl. MS C 35 a; London, British Library, Add. MS 11294; Frauenfeld, Bibliothèque cantonale, MS Y 38 a; London,

British Library, Harley MS 3898; Laon, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 333, and Stams, Bibliothèque de l'abbaye, MS 38 (cf. Lucet 1977, pp. 41-64). The origins of three of these manuscripts are known: the Frauenfeld manuscript was made for the Salem Abbey in Germany, the London manuscript (Add. MS 11294) for the Abbey of Fontenay in France, and the Poitiers manuscript probably for the Abbey of Étoile in France. The provenance of the other manuscripts is less certain: the Pavia manuscript was made for an unidentified Cistercian abbey in Italy and the Harley manuscript for an unidentified Cistercian manuscript in the diocese of Liège; the provenance of the other four is unknown. They all date from the second half of the thirteenth century, except for the Dusseldorf copy, which was recopied in the seventeenth century. The later codifications are more common: there are more than 28 copies of the 1289 codification and more than 20 copies of the 1316 codification (cf. FAMA, Online Resources); see for instance the fourteenth-century copy from the Abbey of Notre-Dame de Loos (near Lille), which contains both texts (Les Enluminures, TM 494). Manuscripts of the codifications of 1202 (2 mss.), 1220 (4 mss.), 1237 (4 mss.) and 1257 (10 mss. including our copy) are much rarer (cf. Bibale, Online Resources). In this context, our manuscript is especially valuable as it can be precisely localized and dated shortly after the compilation of the new codification in 1257.

## LITERATURE

Auberger, J. B. *L'unanimité cistercienne primitive: mythe ou réalité?*, Achel, 1986.

Bock, C. *Les codifications du droit cistercien*, Westmalle, 1955.

Bondeelle-Souchier, A. *Bibliothèques cisterciennes dans la France médiévale. Répertoire des abbayes d'hommes*, Paris, 1991, p. 141 (not listing our manuscript).

[www.persee.fr/doc/dirht\\_0073-8212\\_1991\\_cat\\_47\\_1](http://www.persee.fr/doc/dirht_0073-8212_1991_cat_47_1)

Corriol, V. "L'abbaye de l'Épau, une fondation plantagenêt?," *Les Plantagenêts et le Maine*, ed. by M. Aurell, G. Baur, V. Corriol and L. Maillat, Rennes, 2022, pp. 268-281.

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Lefèvre, J. and B. Lucet, "Les codifications cisterciennes aux XIIIe et XIIIe siècles d'après les traditions manuscrites," *Analecta sacri ordinis cisterciensis* 15 (1959), pp. 3-22.

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Lucet, B. "L'ère des grandes codifications cisterciennes (1202-1350)," *Études d'histoire du droit canonique dédiées à G. Le Bras*, Paris, 1965, vol. 1, pp. 249-262.

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Mahn, J.-B., *L'ordre cistercien et son gouvernement, des origines au milieu du XIIIe siècle, 1098-1265*, Paris, 1951.

Waddell, C. *Narrative and Legislative Texts from Early Cîteaux*, *Studia et documenta*, vol. 9,

Cîteaux, 1999.

### ONLINE RESOURCES

FAMA (Œuvres latines médiévales à succès), IRHT/CNRS  
<http://fama.irht.cnrs.fr/fr/>

Abbaye de l'Épau (Wikipedia)  
[https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abbaye\\_de\\_l%27%C3%89pau](https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abbaye_de_l%27%C3%89pau)

La Piété de Dieu de l'Épau  
<http://monumentshistoriques.free.fr/abbayes/epau/epau.html>

*Libellus diffinitionum ordinis Cisterciensis* (1202-1257) in Bibale, IRHT/CNRS  
<https://bibale.irht.cnrs.fr/38544>

TM 1258