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Statutes of the Order of the Golden Fleece  
In French, decorated manuscript on parchment  
Low Countries, c. 1531 (between 1531 and 1555), with later additions

*56 leaves, on parchment, complete despite the irregular collation, the first and last leaves conjoint with the pastedowns (collation: I, i<sup>6</sup>, ii–iv<sup>8</sup>, v<sup>6</sup>, vi<sup>8</sup>, vii<sup>2</sup>, viii<sup>8</sup>, I), written in brown ink in elegant lettre bâtarde, with additions by two later expert scribes, on up to 24 lines, ruled in plummet (justification 155 x 100 mm), traces of leaf signatures in ink, five two- or three-line illuminated initials in shell gold on a field of pink, green, or blue, (ff. 2, 7, 34, 36), two- or three-line ornamental initials alternately red or blue, changing style in the part written by the second scribe (ff. 45v–47), and absent in the part written by the third (ff. 47–49v). Bound in contemporary brown leather sewn on four double thongs, the covers each blind-stamped with an outer border enclosing two panels, each enclosing two stamps depicting a splayed, double-headed, and crowned imperial eagle, within a lozenge, gilt edges, traces of two textile ties at the fore-edge, some scuffing, the upper and lower extremities of the spine missing, the upper joint weakening, but generally in sound condition. Dimensions 260 x 180 mm.*

A fine copy of the document that defined the practices and rules of the Order of the Golden Fleece, the epitome of late medieval aristocratic chivalric ideals. In its original binding, the manuscript is firmly datable to the years following the 1531 Chapter of the Order and may even have been made for Philippe Le Noir, the Order's Chancellor who was elected in that year. Although manuscripts are not especially rare in public collections, the text remains apparently unedited, and copies rarely change hands. **This copy, therefore, emerges as a reliable textual witness to the post-1531 Statutes of the Order.**

## PROVENANCE

1. The latest item written by the original scribe is dated 1531 (f. 45), and the earliest date among the additions is 1555 (f. 45v) so the manuscript must have been written between these dates; it is doubtless one of the fifty copies that the 1531 chapter of the Order ordered to be produced. It would therefore seem likely that the manuscript was written for one of the twenty-four knights (who included Jean III, King of Portugal and James V, King of Scotland) elected to the Order under Charles V at the twentieth Chapter, held at Tournai in 1531. Alternatively it might have been written in preparation for the twenty-first Chapter, at which another twenty-two knights were elected (including Maximilian II of Austria, Holy Roman Emperor, and Cosimo de Medici), held at Utrecht in 1546. The relatively modest decoration of the volume, and the absence of heraldry, plus the wording on the title page ("Liber cancellarii ..."), however, suggests that the book may have been

owned by the Chancellor of the Order, to be passed down to his successors, in which case it could have been written for the last-named Chancellor, Philippe Le Noir, alias Nigri (d. 1563), archdeacon of Théroouanne, seignior of l'Escoire, who was elected Chancellor of the Order in 1531 (Reiffenberg, 1830, p. 384). In this case the binding would post-date Philippe's ownership.

2. An anonymous owner had additions made between 1555 and 1559 on ff. 45v-47; the same owner, or a later one, commissioned the additional post-1559 texts on ff. 47-49v, and presumably personally added to the title page after 1562.
3. Circular booklabel of "Eberhard Horbach, Köln."

## TEXT

f. i, Flyleaf used as a title-page: "Liber cancellarij ordinis velleris aurei," with a list of Chancellors since the Order's foundation, from Jean Germain to Philippe Le Noir: "Nomina cancellariorum ordinis ab eiusdem institutione: Magister Johannes germanus ...." A later hand has added the date of Le Noir's death "obiit mense Januarii anno 1562" and the name of his successor "Viglius de Zuichem, prévost de St Bavon [Ghent]";

f. i<sup>v</sup>-1v, blank;

ff. 2-5v, Table of contents, listing 66 chapters: "*Sensieut la table du present livre des ordanances de l'ordre de la thoison d'or. Et premiers. Le nombre des chevaliers et condicions diceulx. [chapter] i; Comment que nul estant en autre ordre ne peult recevoir icelui ordre sans les delaissier exceptez empereurs, roys et ducz. [chapter] ij. ... Comment chascun chevalier de l'ordre se doit submettre de son bon gré en la volonté des freres et chevaliers diceluz ordre. [chapter] lxxv*";

ff. 6-6v, blank;

ff. 7-7v, *L'Institution de l'Ordre de la Toison d'or*, incipit, "Phelippe par la grace de dieu duc de Bourgoingne, de Lothar, de Brabant et de Luxembourg, conte de Flandres, d'Artois ... le x<sup>me</sup> jour de Janvier, l'an de nostre seigneur mil CCCC vingt et neuf [i.e. 1429] ... en nostre ville de Bruges ...", explicit, "... estre appelée l'ordre de la thoison d'or soubz la forme, condicions, statuz, manieres et articles qui sensieuent";

ff. 7v-31, *Statuts de l'Ordre de la Toison d'or* [66 articles that describe the rights and obligations of the Knights of the Order], incipit, "[chapter] i. Premierement ordonnons que en l'ordre devant dit aura trente ung chevaliers ..."; explicit [chapter lxxvi] "... attendue la volontaire et franche submission juree solempnellement comme dit est";

ff. 31-32v, *Ordanances de l'Ordre de la Toison d'or*, incipit, "Tous lesquelz points, condicions, articles et choses dessus dites ...", explicit, "... Donne en nostre ville de Lille, le xxvij<sup>me</sup> jour de Novembre, l'an de grace mil quatre cens trente ung [i.e. 1431]";

ff. 33-33v, blank;

ff. 34-35, *Table des addicions et alteracions faites aux articles des stauz du tresnoble ordre du thoison d'or puis l'institution dicelui*, table of thirteen numbered additions and alterations, each with a marginal note indicating to which of the original articles it refers (e.g. the first is annotated "Sur le xliij<sup>me</sup> article de statuz"); incipit, "Que advenant ou chapitre de l'ordre la nouvelle du trespaz d'ung des chevaliers l'on procederaa l'election d'autre ..."; explicit, "... et des chevaliers plusavant qu'il n'a accoustume. [number] xiiij";

f. 35, Table of three further unnumbered additions and alterations, added by the second scribe; incipit, "Le grand collyer se doit porter aussi bien aux premieres vespres des festes ...", explicit, "... de leur reception a l'ordre ou selon leur chevallerie d'honneur ou leur age";

ff. 36-45v, Thirteen numbered additions or alterations, as listed in the table above, containing dates ranging from 1456 to 1531, heading, incipit, "*Sensieunt certaines addicions et alteracions que treshault, tresexcellens et trespuissans princes, Monseigneur le bon duc Ph[ilippe] le instituteur et premier chief et souverain du tresnoble ordre du thoison d'or et ses successeurs ...*"; text, incipit, "Mondit seigneur le bon duc Phelippe ou chapitre dudit ordre par luy tenu a la Haye en Hollande ou mois de May l'an mil quatercens et cinquante six [i.e. 1456] ...", explicit, "... Et de leur besoignye feront lecture aux chief et souverain et aux chevaliers en leur chapitres";

ff. 45v-47, Three further additions and alterations, numbered xiiij-xvj, added by the second scribe; incipit, "Treshault tresexcellent et trespuissant prince Phelippe par la grace de dieu Roy de Castille, de Leon, d'Aragon, d'Angelterre, de France, des deux Cecilles, ... en son premier chapitre dudit ordre, tenu et celebre en sa ville d'Anvers au mois de Janvier l'an xv<sup>e</sup> lv [i.e. 1555] ...", explicit, "... inviolablement observer et garder sans aucunement y contrevenir";

ff. 47-49v, Six further additions and alterations, numbered xvij-xxj, added by a third scribe; incipit, "[L]edit treshault tresexcellent et trespuissant prince Phelippe par la grace de dieu Roy de Castille, de Leon,, Arragon, &c. En son chapitre dicelluy ordre tenu en sa ville de Gand le xxix<sup>me</sup> jour de Juillet xv<sup>e</sup> Cinquante neuf [i.e. 1559] ...", explicit, "... Et l'officiers retiendront les leurz comme dez habitz de cramoisi et aultres est dispose ailleurs.";

ff. 50-54v, blank, ruled to receive later additions.

The most renowned of all chivalric orders, the Order of the Golden Fleece was founded in 1430 by Phillip the Good, duke of Burgundy, and it held its first chapter in 1431. It came to be considered the highest order of knighthood. It was instituted as a Burgundian alternative to the influential Order of the Garter, founded in 1348 by Edward III. The Order of the Golden Fleece admitted 30 knights (increased to 51 in 1516, and later to 61) and 4 officers (Chancellor, Treasurer, King of Arms, and Greffier). Upon being inducted as a member, each knight received, in addition to the famous collar from which a gold enameled pendant of the Golden Fleece was suspended, a copy of the Statutes—also referred to as a "quayer de l'ordre"—most often in manuscript form and copied on vellum. The official language of the Order, and therefore of the manuscripts, was the *langue bourguignonne*, but from the sixteenth century some manuscripts were copied in Latin. Following the death of a knight, the copy of the Statutes and the collar were supposed to be returned to the Archives of the Order, but this rule was not rigorously respected and numerous copies of the

Statutes remained in circulation. Numerous copies, differing in dates and illustration, were exhibited in major exhibitions in Bruges in 1907 and 1962.

This manuscript is probably a copy of the Statutes produced in, or shortly after, 1531, after the chapter held in Tournai. During this chapter complaints were voiced concerning the numerous copies of the Statutes in circulation whose content was both erroneous and incomplete. Hence Charles V ordered the *greffier* Laurent de Blioul to have new exemplars copied, some in French, others in Latin, complete with eleven added articles, to be distributed to all knights (see Reiffenberg, 1830, pp. 382-7). Presumably most of the existing knights already owned luxury illuminated copies of the text, which they would not want to discard, so they would have needed relatively plain, practical volumes (such as the present one), with an accurate text, rather than a new lavishly illuminated copy.

The Order has had hundreds of members over the centuries, so copies of the text are not especially rare. This being said, it is surprising to find that the Schoenberg Database records only 10 copies changing hands during the last century and only three since 1989. Each extant manuscript is of great potential interest: it should be possible to connect each copy with an identifiable historical figure of importance on the international stage of politics and diplomacy. Although the text has appeared in print, it has apparently never been edited. Nor is there an accurate up-to-date census of extant copies of the different versions and their dates. The accurate post-1531 copies are therefore the most reliable textual witnesses to the Statutes (with their various amendments and revision) of the Order.

## BINDING

The blind-stamp tool representing the crowned double-headed imperial eagle (or *Reichsadler*) is too common a type to localize definitively the binding, but suggests that the volume was bound within the Holy Roman Empire and perhaps within one of the cities, or for one of the aristocratic families, that used the eagle as the main feature of its heraldry. Numerous variants of the stamp are illustrated in Ilse Schunke, *Die Schwenke-Sammlung gotischer Stempel- und Einbanddurchreibungen: nach Motiven geordnet und nach Werkstätten bestimmt und beschrieben*, 2 vols., Berlin, 1979-1996, I, pls 17-18.

## LITERATURE

[Exhibition, Bruges, 1907]. *Exposition de la Toison d'or à Bruges*, juin-octobre 1907, Bruxelles, Librairie nationale d'art et d'histoire, 1907

[Exhibition, Bruges, 1962]. *La Toison d'or: cinq siècles d'art et d'histoire*. Exposition organisée par le Ministère de l'Education nationale et de la culture et la Ville de Bruges au Musée communal des beaux-arts, Musée Groeninge..., 14 juillet-30 septembre 1962, Bruges, 1962.

Hommel, Luc. *Histoire du noble ordre de la Toison d'Or*, Brussels, 1947.

Reiffenberg, Baron Frédéric Auguste Ferdinand Thomas de, *Histoire de l'Ordre de la Toison d'Or depuis son institution jusqu'à la cessation des chapitres généraux, etc.*, Brussels, 1830.

## ONLINE RESOURCES

Society of the Golden Fleece (with many links, including a listing of members)

<http://www.antiquesatoz.com/sgfleece/>

Chivalric Orders

<http://www.chivalricorders.org/orders/other/goldflee.htm>

A copy of similar date, but written in Italic script and with Flemish Renaissance decoration

[http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/record.asp?](http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/record.asp?MSID=714&CollID=19&NStart=420)

[MSID=714&CollID=19&NStart=420](http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/record.asp?MSID=714&CollID=19&NStart=420)