

Le Louvre des Antiquaires  
2 Place du Palais-Royal  
75001 Paris (France)  
tel. +33 (0)1 42 60 15 58 • fax. +33 (0)1 40 15 00 25  
info@lesenluminures.com

2970 North Lake Shore Drive  
Chicago, IL 60657 (USA)  
tel. +773 929 5986  
fax. +773 528 3976  
chicago@lesenluminures.com

**Statutes of the Order of the Golden Fleece**  
**In French, illuminated manuscript on parchment**  
**Low Countries, c. 1531 (before 1545)**

*i (parchment) + 46 + i folios on parchment, modern foliation in pencil top outer corner recto, complete, (collation, i<sup>s</sup> [blank f. 1, now glued to front flyleaf] ii-v<sup>s</sup> vi<sup>o</sup>), no catchwords or signatures, ruled very lightly in ink, with the top and bottom horizontal rules full across and with single full-length vertical bounding lines (justification, 150-148 x 105-98 mm.), written below the top line by one scribe in an elegant lettre bâtarde in twenty-four long lines, 159 two-line brushed gold initials on rectangular grounds of red, blue, green, or violet, usually divided diagonally with a darker shade in the top quadrant, three similar three-line initials (ff. 34 and 35), one five-line brushed gold initial, f. 6, the initial constructed of curling acanthus and bare logs, on a deep blue rectangular ground with a gold frame, slight soiling, especially at the beginning and end, but many leaves pristine, cockled, text block slightly cracking, overall in very good condition. Bound in its ORIGINAL brown leather over pasteboard blind-stamped with four sets of triple fillets forming an outer border of diamond-shaped floral stamps, and a similar border surrounding a tall rectangular center panel with three large stamps of a splayed, double-headed and crowned imperial eagle within a lozenge (see below), sewn on four double thongs, spine with four raised bands, both covers worn, especially at the edges, with a crack in the lower cover, spine partially repaired now coming loose, and extensively damaged at the top and bottom. Dimensions 245 x 175 mm.*

This is 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 probably one of fifty copies made at the order of the 1531 chapter (as few as ten of these fifty manuscripts may have survived). Although copies of the statutes are not rare in public collections, they rarely change hands.

**PROVENANCE**

1. The latest text included here is dated 1531 (f. 43v), and it therefore seems very likely that this was one of the fifty copies produced at the order of the 1531 (also discussed below). The manuscript can be dated before 1545, since it includes the traditional 66 articles, rather than the 68 enacted at the Utrecht chapter in that year. The script and style of decoration support an origin in the Low Countries (the 1531 chapter was held at Tournai).

Like the copy recently sold here (TM 342), this example, although adorned with gold initials throughout, was copied without heraldry; the exact identity of its original owner is therefore a question for further research. J. Lemaire records only two unillustrated and undecorated fifteenth-century copies (Brussels, BR, MS II 6288 and a Dutch version The Hague, KB 133 M

100) (see Lemaire in Cockshaw and Van den Bergen-Pantens, 1996, p. 35).

2. Back pastedown, in black ink, "Mansfelt"; Albert, Earl of Mansfelt was an ambassador to Spain under Charles V in 1526; he was not a Knight of the Golden Fleece, however, and the identification is in doubt. Moreover, based on the script, the inscription is likely later.

3. Inside front cover, heraldic bookplate of dated 1724 of Alexander Hume-Campbell, second Earl of Marchmont (1675-1740), a Scottish nobleman, politician and judge, and himself a Knight of the Most Noble Order of the Thistle.

4. Purchased by Walter Ferris in 1937; his complete transcription of the manuscript is included; his gift to Dr. C. W. Camalier.

## TEXT

f. 1rv, blank (glued to front parchment flyleaf);

ff. 2-5v, Table of contents, listing 66 chapters, *La table des ordonnances de lordre du thoison dor*. Incipit, "Et premiers. Le nombre des chevaliers et condicions diceulx. chapitre i; Comment que nul estans en autre ordre ne peult recevoir icelui ordre sans les delaisser exceptez empereurs roys et ducz. [chapter] ij. ... Comment chascun chevalier de lordre se doit submettre de son bon gre en la voulunte des freres et chevaliers diceluiz ordre. [chapter] lxxvj" [ends top f. 5v, remainder blank];

f. 6rv, [Institution of the Order of the Golden Fleece] incipit, "Phelippe par la grace de dieu duc de Bourgoingne de Lothri de Brabant et de Luxembourg conte de Flandres ... estre appelee lordre de la thoison dor soubz la forme condicions status manieres et articles qui sensieuent";

ff. 6v-31v, [Statutes of the Order of the Gold Fleece; sixty-six articles that describe the rights and obligations of the Knights of the Order], incipit, "[chapter] i. Premierement ordonnons que en lordre devant dit aura trente ung chevaliers ... [chapter lxxvi] ... attendue la volluntaire et franche submission juree solemnellement comme dit est";

ff. 31v-33v, [Ordinances of the Order of the Golden Fleece] incipit, "Tous lesquelz points, condicions, articles et choses dessuss dites ... 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]" [ends top f. 33v; remainder blank] ;

f. 34rv, *Table des addicions et alteracions des statuz de lordre du thoison dor puis linstitucion dicelui* [table of thirteen numbered additions and alterations] incipit, "Que venant la nouvelle du trespaz dancun chevaliers de lordre on tamps de chapitre sera procede a election dautre ... et des chevaliers et a lordonnance du souverain en f[ait]e lecture en chapitre [number] xiiij";

ff. 35-43v, 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 Pble[Philippe]instituteur et premier chief et souverain du tresnoble ordre du thoison dor et ses successeurs ...*"; incipit, "Mondit seigneur le bon duc Phelippe ou chapitre dudit ordre par luy tenu a la Haye en Hollande en mois de May lan mil quatre cens et cinquante six

[i.e. 1456] ... [Chapitre xiii] ... chapitre de tournay en lan xv xxxi [1531] ... Et de leur besoignye feront lecture aux chief et souverain et aux chevaliers en leur chapitres." [ff. 44-46v, blank but ruled].

Like most surviving copies of the Statutes of the Order of the Golden Fleece, this manuscript contains the short version of the statutes revised in 1446 (see Korteweg in Cockshaw and Van den Bergen-Pantens, 1996, p. 42), with additions updating the text, the most recent dating from 1531. The text was printed by De Bloul, 1922 (not widely available); facsimile of Vienna, ÖNB MS 2606 in Gerstinger, 1934; and also printed in Cologne, 1689; studies of the statutes and the surviving manuscripts, Dogaer, 1963, and Lemaire and Korteweg in Cockshaw and Van den Bergen-Pantens, 1996. Although there is no comprehensive study of the surviving manuscripts, Korteweg estimates that about thirty-eight survive from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (p. 43); Lemaire suggests there are about twenty fifteenth-century copies (p. 31).

The most renowned of all chivalric orders, the Order of the Golden Fleece was founded in 1430 by Phillip the Good, duke of Burgundy (1396-1467) "out of respect for God and for the advancement of the Christian Faith." It was instituted as a Burgundian alternative to the influential Order of the Garter, founded in 1348 by Edward III, and designed to strengthen the allegiance of Phillip's vassals and friendly foreign states to his realm.

The Order of the Golden Fleece, whose first chapter was held in 1431, came to be considered the highest order of knighthood. It originally included twenty-four knights; the 1431 statutes fixed the number admitted to 31 (later increased to 51 by Charles V in 1516, and then to sixty-two by Philip IV) and four 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.

This manuscript is a copy of the Statutes enacted in 1531 after the chapter held in Tournai; it includes the thirteen additions made to the statutes up to that year. The manuscript was certainly copied before 1545, the year of the chapter held in Utrecht where a new draft of the Statutes was instituted with 68 articles rather than the traditional 66. During the chapter of 1531, complaints were voiced concerning the numerous copies of the Statutes in circulation whose content was both erroneous and incomplete. Hence the *greffier* Laurent de Blioul was ordered by Charles V (1500-1558) to have 50 new exemplars copied, some in French, others in Latin, complete with thirteen added articles, to be distributed to all the knights (Reiffenberg, 1830, p. 382-7, and de Lannoy, 2000, p. 38). Payment for sixteen copies was recorded in October, 1532 (Korteweg in Cockshaw and Van den Bergen-Pantens, 1966, p. 43, note 48). The present manuscript is probably one of these "revised" copies (Korteweg, in Cockshaw and Van den Bergen-Pantens, 1966, p. 43, note 50 lists nine additional copies in public collections). 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.

It is surprising to find that the Schoenberg Database records only eleven 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.

As Lemaire's study of fifteenth-century copies of the Statutes has discussed, manuscripts of the Statutes are of special interest because of their close family resemblance to one another. His survey could be extended to include the sixteenth-century copies of the text. The manuscript studied here is remarkably similar in format, text and decoration (although this volume has more painted initials), and even the decoration of the binding, to the copy previously sold here (Textmanuscripts.com, TM 342).

## BINDING

The blind-stamp tool representing the crowned double-headed imperial eagle (or *Reichsadler*) is too common a type to allow for a definitive localization of the binding; numerous variants of the stamp are illustrated in Schunke, 1979 and 1996, I, pls 17-18.

## LITERATURE

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*La Toison d'or ou Recueil des statuts et ordonnances du noble de la toison d'or, leurs confirmations, changemens, additions, cérémonies, immunités, exemptions, prééminences, honneurs et Bulles papales depuis l'institution jusques à présent. Avec les remarques sur le contenu desdits statuts et ordonnances*, Cologne, Pierre Sweitzer, 1689.

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## 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>

100 highlights of the Koninklijke Bibliotheek, no. 16, manuscript of the Statutes of the Golden Fleece, Southern Netherlands, 1468 or shortly after:

<http://www.kb.nl/galerie/100hoogtepunten/016-en.html>

[A copy of similar date to the manuscript described here, but written in Italic script and with Flemish Renaissance decoration](http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/record.asp?MSID=714&CollID=19&NStart=420)

<http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/record.asp?MSID=714&CollID=19&NStart=420>

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