

Statutes and Ordinances of the Order of St. Michel
In French, illuminated manuscript on parchment
France (probably Paris), c. 1500-1530 (perhaps c. 1523-1528)

i (nineteenth-century added parchment flyleaf) + 40 folios on parchment (collation i^s [-8, possibly an illuminated frontispiece, no loss of text] ii-iv^s v^s vi^s [-4, cancelled with no loss of text]), no catchwords, a few leaves with leaf and quire signatures with letters designating the quires and roman numerals the leaf, ruled in red ink with the top and bottom rules full across and with full-length single vertical bounding lines, (justification 180 x 125 mm.), copied in an elegant batârde script in twenty-seven long lines, added nineteenth-century flyleaf carefully copied in roman letter in black, red, and blue (possibly using stencils), red rubrics, two- to one-line initials in liquid gold on burgundy and blue grounds heightened with scrolling foliage, dots and floral sprigs in liquid gold, f. 33, six-line blue initial infilled and on a burgundy ground, both heightened with liquid gold scrolls, some spots to first few leaves and small stains to upper edges, ff. 25-38, cockled, else excellent condition with wide and clean margins. Bound in nineteenth-century elaborately gilt-tooled black leather over pasteboards incorporating earlier purple velvet binding as center panels on the front and back covers, gilt-tooled spine with five raised bands, purple silk doublures, in very good condition apart from small splits to spine and scuffs to velvet. Dimensions 265 x 185 mm.

Chivalric orders were an important part of political life in many European countries in the late Middle Ages, often continuing into the modern era. This is a fine copy of the document that defined the practices and rules of the royal Order of St. Michel (the French counterpart to the Burgundian order of the Golden Fleece). Written in an elegant script and adorned with illuminated initials, this example was probably copied at the Renaissance court of King Francis I. Although copies are not rare in public collections, they seldom come on the market.

PROVENANCE

1. The layout, script and decoration, support an origin in France, most likely in Paris, in the opening decades of the sixteenth century, c. 1500-1530. The similarity of this manuscript in terms of layout, script, and decoration, to a copy of the statutes now at UCLA (sold on this site as TM 49), and to London, British Library, Harley, MS 4485, suggests that it may have been one of the manuscripts documented as having been ordered by the court of Francis I, king of France (1515-47), for distribution to knights of the Order, dated in documentary sources between 1523-1528. These manuscripts were illustrated by a Parisian artist named Etienne Collaud; the manuscript described here no longer includes an illuminated frontispiece, and therefore its connection to this group of manuscripts, although likely, is not certain. The present copy contains the statutes for the office of the prevost, master of ceremonies of the Order (f. 33), and therefore must date after 1476.

The text was corrected at an early date when the statutes were numbered; on ff. 36v-37v, six provisions were copied, each beginning with an illuminated initial; the note in the margin indicates that each of these should be considered as one article, and they are numbered as such (no. 81).

2. Rebound in the nineteenth-century, re-using original purple velvet as panels on the front and back covers, as recorded on the carefully lettered front flyleaf, that also notes that "at the time of the troubles" this manuscript was despoiled and "types authographes" and four "grandes vignettes" were removed – perhaps a coat-of-arms of the original owner, and illuminated pages. Despite this note it seems unlikely that four illuminated pages were ever included here. Other copies of the statutes from this date, including the copy now at UCLA (formerly our TM 49), and British Museum, Harley, MS 4485, both include full-page frontispieces following the table of chapters, and it is almost certain that the leaf missing at the end of the first quire of the manuscript described here was a similar full-page miniature. The collation of this manuscript does not, however, suggest that additional leaves were removed.

3. From the library of the Barons Monson in Burton; their MS CLXVII; probably acquired by William John Monson, 6th Baron Monson (1796-1862) and by descent.

TEXT

f. i r-v, [added flyleaf] incipit, "Statuts de l'Ordre de Saint-Michel. Manuscrit qui a été la propriété de Louis XI, fondateur de l'ordre. Pendant les troubles cet ouvrage a été spolié et dépouillé de ses types authographes et de quatre grandes Vignettes représentant les différentes cérémonies de l'ordre qui s'y trouvaient indiquées. En faisant rétablir ce livre on n'a pu conserver que les parties de Velours pourpre qui formaient la couverture ancienne"; f. i v, [brief account of events in the order's history] incipit, "Louis XI institua dans son château d'Amboise en Touraine L'Ordre de Saint-Michel";

ff. 1-7v, *La table des chappitres du livre de lordre du tres crestien roy de France Loys XIe a lonneur de saint michiel, Et premierement*, incipit, "I. Du nombre des chevaliers de l'ordre et qui sera le chief et souuerain"; f. 5v, *Autres lectres dudit seu Roy Loys vi^e de ladiunction aux ordonnances ... et de la creation de l'office de preuost maistre des cerimonies dudit ordre*, lxxvii, incipit, "Item les lectres du roy de ladiunction status ...; xcii. Item comme le roy veult et ordonne ... de l'instituion dudem ordre";

Numbered list of 92 chapters.

ff. 8-32v, *Le premier iour du moys daoust. Lan grace mil quatre cens soixante neuf. Et de nostre regne le ix^e. En nostre chastel damboise auons constituee creee et ordonne. Et par ces presentes constituons creons ...*, incipit, "i. Premierement auons ordonne et ordonnons que en ce present ordre y aura trente six chevaliers ...; ... lxxvi. Item tous les quelz ponitz conditions articles ordonnances ... Donne en nostre chastel damboise le premier iour daoust. Lan de grace mil quatre cens soixante neuf. Et de nostre regne le neufiesme";

The original sixty-six statutes, dating from the foundation of the Order in 1469.

ff. 33-40v, *Les lectres du roy de ladiunction status ordonnances constitutions et institutions de l'office de preuost maistre des cerimoines ...*, incipit, "lxxvii. Loys par la grace de dieu roy de france. Scavoir faisons a tous presens ...; lxxviii. Premierement pour le bien ... vng officier intitule preuost maistre des cerimonies ...; xcii. Item vullons et ordonnons sesdem articles et institutions ... Donne au plessis du parc les tours. Le xxii^e iour de decembre. Lan de grace mil quatre cens soixante et seize. Et de nostre regne le seiziesme."

Additions to the Statutes dating from 1476, many related to the creation of the office of prevost, master of ceremonies of the Order.

Chivalric orders of lay knights like the Order of St.-Michel (the most famous of which are the Orders of the Garter and the Golden Fleece) were founded at some time between 1325 and 1470 in almost every kingdom of Western Christendom. Modelled either directly or indirectly on the fictional society of the Round Table, they incorporated varying numbers of elements borrowed from the older religious orders of knighthood and from contemporary institutions. Once seen by historians as ornate but artificial and largely meaningless re-creations inspired by earlier feudal institutions, the orders are understood now by more recent historians to have had real political importance (see especially Boulton, 1987, and Fauconpret, 2007). Monarchical orders or royal orders in particular were created to assure the loyalty of the knights to the king by serving as an ingenious supplement to (or replacement for) the feudo-vassalic ties that once bound the leading members of the nobility to their sovereign. In addition, they were long important as expressions of the secular ideals of chivalry that were at the heart of the international court culture during the late Middle Ages and Renaissance.

The Order of St.-Michel was founded by King Louis XI of France in 1469 “pour la très spéciale et singulière amour que nous avons au noble ordre et état de chevalerie, pour la défense de notre sainte mère l’église et la prospérité de la chose publique” (for the very special and singular love that we have for the noble order and state of chivalry, for the defence of our holy mother church and the prosperity of the commonwealth), and more pragmatically, to serve as the French equivalent of the Order of the Golden Fleece founded in 1430 by Philip the Good, duke of Burgundy (1396-1467). The statutes for the new order were closely modelled on the statutes of the Order of the Golden Fleece, and its goal was to confirm the loyalty of its knights to the king. Originally, there were thirty-six knights; fifteen were appointed personally by the king in 1469. The first knights were among the most powerful men in France, including close relatives of the king and a few from other royal houses in Europe. By the sixteenth century the Order was less selective. Although in 1565 the formal number was increased to fifty, there may have been as many as seven hundred knights under Henry III in 1574, a symptom of its decline in the later years of the sixteenth century. The Order was reformed in 1665, and continued until 1790, when it was abolished by Louis XVI. In the nineteenth century it was revived between 1815 and 1830.

A copy of the statutes would have been owned by each member. The original statutes included sixty-six articles; the present manuscript follows the text of the version from 1476, which added articles sixty-seven to ninety-two, including the new office of the provost. The chapters of the statutes evoke the chivalric life of its members, specifying the number of knights at any one time, the qualifications for membership, the prohibition of knights of the Order to go to war or travel abroad without the king’s permission, what would happen if knights found themselves at war against each other, ceremonies to be performed when the knights assembled in the king’s presence, officers of the order, festivals celebrated, elections, oaths, and so on. To reflect the fact that the order was named after the saint to whom it is dedicated, the Archangel Michael (or St. Michel), every member was also presented with a gold badge of the image of the saint standing on a rock (Mont-Saint-Michel) in combat with the serpent. The badge or pendant was suspended from an elaborate gold collar made of cockleshells (the badge of pilgrims to holy places) and tied together with double knots.

There is no complete census of the surviving manuscripts of the statutes; Jean Luc Deuffic (Online Resources) lists thirty-seven, with all but a handful in French public collections, and an additional six listed in sales catalogues or in private collections, a surprisingly small number given the numbers that must have been copied. Very few copies have changed hands since the

nineteenth century; the Schoenberg Database records fewer than ten manuscripts sold in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (some in multiple transactions) – and only two manuscripts sold since 1960. There are five copies in the United States, one of which may be a fragment (at UCLA, the Morgan Library, the Lilly Library at the University of Indiana, University of Pennsylvania, and the Folger Shakespeare Library).

Amongst the copies that date from Francois I's reign (Durrieu, 1911, p. 31), nine are in public institutions: Paris, BnF, MSS fr. 14361; fr. 14365; fr. 19815; fr. 19816; fr. 19818; St-Germain-en-Laye, BM, MS 4 [actually Henry II]; London, BL, Harley MS 4485; Milano, Trivulziana, ms. 1394 (lost in a fire in 1904). The present location of the two manuscripts listed by Durrieu as in the Phillipps Collection is unknown (Cheltenham, Library of Sir Thomas Phillipps, ms. 1323, later Kraus, 1953 cat., no. 87, and 4314, Sotheby's, 15-18 June 1980, lot 490).

As pointed out in Lemaire's 1996 codicological study of the fifteenth-century copies of the Statutes of the Order of the Golden Fleece, many copies of those Statutes are of special interest because of their close family resemblance to one another. A similar modern codicological study of the surviving statutes of St.-Michel, building on the pioneering study by Durrieu in 1911, and the updated list by Deuffic (Online resources), would certainly be of scholarly interest.

LITERATURE

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ONLINE RESOURCES

Jean Luc Deuffic, "Les statuts de l'Ordre et aimable compagnie de monsieur saint Michel"

Extensive article, including a list of extant manuscripts and bibliography

<http://blog.pecia.fr/post/2010/09/17/Les-Statuts-de-l-Ordre-de-Saint-Michel>

Chivalric Orders site, mostly written and maintained by Guy Stair Sainty

<http://www.chivalricorders.org/orders/french/michel.htm>

Digital reproduction of Paris, BnF, MS fr. 19819, with Fouquet's illuminated frontispiece

<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8427226q/f12.image>

Description and images of London, British Library, Harley MS 4485

<http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/record.asp?MSID=6575&CollID=8&NStart=4485>

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