

Privilegieboek van den Jongen Handboge (Privilege-book of the Young Handbow) of
Antwerp (Guild of St. Sebastian)

In Dutch, illustrated manuscript on parchment

Belgium, Antwerp, 1575 with 17th-century additions

ii (paper) + 108 + ii (paper) folios on parchment (thick, good quality), original foliation in ink in Arabic numerals, 1-92, with modern foliation in pencil, A-F and 93-100, [all cited in this description], at upper fore-edge recto, complete (collation i-xvii⁶ xviii⁴), no catchwords nor signatures, frame-ruled in faint rust-brown ink with no lineation (justification, 215-218 × 135-137 mm), written below top line by three scribes, on ff. 1-60 + 73-90v, the main scribe writing an elegant gothic script with some cursive elements (semi-hybrida) in 22-32 lines, with the first line of each item in an enlarged display script, the second scribe annotating the first in a less formal semi-hybrida currens, in 3-6 lines, and the third scribe working in a gothic script (semi-hybrida) in 15-25 lines, the whole with 29 large and two small initials in black ink, TWO FULL-PAGE DRAWINGS (ff. C, 92) and ONE HALF-PAGE DRAWING (f. 90), a FULL-PAGE DIAGRAM (f. 76^v), and a small drawing (f. B), in black or dark brown ink with an unfinished metalpoint sketch (f. 95) (all described below), some rippling and mild edge-gap at ff. 22 and 29, but otherwise very fine. Bound in 1783 in black leather over beveled boards, spine with eight compartments gilt-tooled with floral motifs between seven raised bands, left and right boards elaborately gilt-tooled with rules, ribbons, and fleurons, with center of left board gilt-tooled "ANNO J575 / PRIVILEGIE EN ACTENS BOECK / RAEKENDE DE GILDE / BINNEN ANTWERPEN / ENDE IN T'BESONDER / DE GENE / VANDEN JONGEN HANDBOGE / VERNIEUWT / ANNO J783", marbled endpapers, gilt edges, light scuffing, but in good condition. Dimensions 273-275 × 187 mm.

Distinguished by its beautiful script, initials, and drawings, this exquisite manuscript, a collection of statutes, ordinances, privileges, and other documents for an early archery guild in Antwerp, is equally important for its text. One of only a small number of extant militia guild privilege-books, this is the sole known example from the *Jongen Handboge* ('Young Handbow'). Signed and dated by the scribe-artist Hans Verrast, it was collated against original records by the late 16th-century notary Seuerinus Rubbens, augmented with further guild records in the 17th-century, and impressively rebound in gilt-tooled boards in 1783.

PROVENANCE

1. Main text copied in Dutch, in Antwerp, in 1575 (ff. A^v, 90, 91, 92) by Hans Verrast (ff. B, 90, 91, 92) for the *Jongen Handboge* ("Young Handbow"). The main hand and illustrations are consistent with this date. Additions through c. 1648 (e.g., f. 62) situate the manuscript in possession of the guild until at least the latter year.

The *Jongen Handboge*, one of four archery guilds in pre-modern Antwerp, was founded c. 1485, likely by the Margrave Sir Janne van Ymmerseele (Prims, 1929, pp. 39-41) (see discussion below).

2. The date of the guild's dissolution is uncertain. Prims, writing in 1929, states that the book was acquired by the van Havre family of Antwerp in the Dutch Era ("den Hollandschen tijd") – i.e., 1814-1830 when the Southern Netherlands were reattached to the Dutch Republic to form the United Kingdom of the Netherlands – likely due to limited space in the city archives and lack of funds to purchase collections offered for sale from private and institutional collections (Prims, 1929, p. 43). It remained in the possession of the van Havre family until at least 1929, when Floris Prims, Archivist of Stadsarchief Antwerpen, accessed it "through the good favour" of the knight Georges van Havre (1871-1934), then Mayor of Wijnehem (Prims, 1929, p. 36).

3. The manuscript contains several brief inscriptions and other marks, including: "<Frederic Kraebles>. 1823" (in black ink in a modern hand at f. A, unidentified, but apparently added while still owned by the van Havre family) and "Gurtram <Haue? Hane? Flaue? Flane?>" (in black ink in a modern hand at final flyleaf, recto), along with two pasted-in heraldic bookplates, currently unidentified: one on the inner left board (74×55 mm) and one, on the recto of the first endpaper (136×80 mm), bearing the legend "Ex Libris / A.v.Billet".

4. Collection of André Gillet. Sold at auction: Rops, Namur, Belgium, 15–16 December 2013, lot 414.

5. Private Collection.

TEXT

f. A^v, incipit, "Doen Deken was Jooseph vander ast present : ... God verleen dit geselschap een salich nieuwe Jaer : / Den Lesten Decembre Anno / 1575";

Seven-line presentation of the finished book to the Jongen Handboge.

f. B, incipit, "Desen boeck Is / begonst ter eeren Gods verheuen ... Van uwen onderd anigen dienaer hans verrast : / O. doot en verrast mÿ niet";

Seven-line verse, plus a one-line motto, naming the scribe, Hans Verrast, and dedicating the book to Saint Sebastian.

ff. D-F, incipit, "Hier begint de Tafel Int corte Van desen tegenwoor / digen boecke ... Int leste den eedt vende cnapen vander gulde / vanden Jongen Hantboge A. folio 91";

Original table of contents for the volume, listing the various statutes, ordinances, privileges, and other documents in the manuscript, covering items on ff. 1-60 and ff. 73-91.

f. F, incipit, "Het testament Van De Dekens deser gulde / ghenamt den Jongen hantboghe 61";

Two-line addition, in a 17th-century hand, indexing the testament of the Deans of the Jongen Handboge.

ff. Mid-17th century additions to the collection: the Testament of the Deans of the guild, dated September 30, 1638 (ff. 60^v-61^v), plus a short entry in the table of contents indexing the

Testament (f. F), along with a memorial list of Deans of the guild, providing ten names with death dates ranging from May 10, 1638 through June 28, 1648 (f. 62).

ff. 60v-61v, *Testament van de Dekens deser Gulde*, incipit, "Op heden alsinen schrf inden Jarer ons heere Jesus 1638 den 30, Dach der maent september ... Worden hebben my dit hier gestelt in onser coustum bouck ter ghedachtenisse ende Eeuighe memory met eendracht Onser Gulde Camer ende Godts glorie";

Testament of the Deans of the Jongen Handboge, added in a new 17th-century hand, dated September 30, 1638.

f. 62, incipit, "De memorye van het ouerlyden de Dekens deser Gulde sedert deser coustume geordonneer die met den Tabart en paluren syn Vereert ... Fraⁿcoos goris , den 19 Juny 1648 Lucas peeters, den 28 Juny 1648"

Memorial list of Deans of the Jongen Handboge, added in a new 17th-century hand, listing the names of ten deans with dates spanning May 10, 1638 through June 28, 1648.

ff. 73-91, incipit, "My ambrosius toncher een Jacob van Berchem Ridderen schepenen van Antwerpen maken condt dat voir ons quamen Heer Jacob Hertssen Riddere ... Wiens aderen Zietmen duer nÿt crimp en saen : Heb Jc yet gefaelgeert zyt v myns nz moeyende : Maer verbeteret vry enlaet v schimpen staen : Anno xv^c: lxxv."

Second part of the original collection of statutes, ordinances, privileges, etc. of the *Jongen Hantboge*, including a members' Oath to God and St Sebastian (f. 90v), plus a colophon naming Hans Verrast as the manuscript's producer and specifying a completion date of 1575 (f. 91).

ILLUSTRATION

The very skillful decoration in this volume is one of its outstanding features. The 29 large ornate decorated initials in black ink and two smaller initials are simply delightful and show off the scribe's skill to full advantage (ff. B, 1, 6, 6^v, 12, 15^v, 23^v, 25^v, 29^v, 32^v, 38, 39^v, 41^v, 42^v, 45, 47^v, 49, 50, 56, 58^v, 60^v, 73, 77, 78^v, 80, 82, 84, 86, 90; smaller initials, f. D). Most are highly flourished cadel initials, with finely drawn figures including birds and animals integrated into the elaborate patterns of interlaced pen-strokes. Several are formed entirely of delicate, classically inspired figure-drawings taking the shapes of letters (e.g., f. 32v, 47v, 50, 60v, 77). There is a faint sketch (in silverpoint(?), possibly a later addition) of a bearded male face (f. 95), along with two *memento mori* images drawn with pen in black or brown ink: a human skull sitting atop a long bone (f. 90), and a small human skull balanced above a banner (f. B).

Two full-page drawings and a diagram:

f. 76v, diagram, a very simple, blueprint-style plan for the guildhall of the *Jongen Handboge*: three thick-walled rooms stacked vertically on the page, with two small rooms (labelled "Inganck vanden hof vander gulder vander jongen / hantboge" (the entrance to the court of the guild of the Young Handbow) and "Poorte om teryen Inden hof vanden / Jonghen hantboge" (the gates to the Hall of the Young Handbow)), flanking the much larger hall ("Dese erue Is groot anderhalf roede" (this yard is one and a half rods large)). Two labels identifying the subject

("den hof vanden Jongen hantboge" (the Hall of the Young Handbow), "den ouden / Hantboge" ('the Old Handbow) run the length of the fore-edge, with mild loss of text due to trimming.

f. C, full-page drawing in black ink, in a simple rectangular frame, signed "·V· Fecit et inuentor," of a bearded Saint Sebastian. An escutcheon hangs from a branch of the tree with the partially tricked arms: *Quarterly, the first and fourth, a Cross coupé, the second and third, Gules a Cross coupé* (unidentified; not in *Wapenboek Beyern*, *Wapenboek Gelre*, nor *Armorial Bellenville*). There is a rhyming couplet below: "Dafionstige wilt hem spoen : te misprysen sommige saken : / Die hy selue niet en sou doen : oft cunnen nagemaken : " (roughly translated, "Dafionstige" wants to strive : to condemn some things: / He himself would not do: and cannot imitate' [the meaning of 'Dafionstige' remains unclear]).

f. 92, full-page drawing in black ink, signed by the artist "H·Verrast. / ·fecit. / ·1575·" of a mature, bearded warrior on horseback, with an arrow in his right hand; his horse rears over a fallen man (perhaps St. George; cf. Crombie, 2016, p. 106).

These drawings evince a high degree of technical skill with precise outlines and sensitive three-dimensional modelling, creating an effect reminiscent of fine engraving. Saint Sebastian was one of several saints associated with archery due to a hagiographical narrative in which he miraculously survived sagittation during the Diocletian persecutions. He became especially popular as a patron of medieval European archery guilds (Serdon-Provost, 2016, sect. 33–34). Verrast depicts a mature, bearded man quite similar to Albrecht Dürer's (1471–1528) c. 1501 engraving, "Saint Sebastian Tied to the Tree." Pairing it with an enigmatic rhyming couplet evokes then-fashionable emblem books, where images were presented with brief explanatory texts. Verrast worked at the end of the Northern Renaissance, and the aesthetics of classical antiquity are equally on display in the second drawing, that shows influence from Roman statuary.

The manuscript is the first, and likely only, privilege-book of the *Jongen Handboge* ("Young Handbow"), one of four archery guilds in premodern Antwerp (the others being *Oude Handboge* (Old Handbow), and *Oude* and *Jonge Voetboge* (Old and Young Footbow). These civic societies overlapped, with members of the "Young" guilds – which, contrary to their names, were not youth groups, but "new guilds of lesser status" (Crombie, 2016, pp. 57-59 at 57) – elected to the "Old" as spaces opened up (Prims, 1929, pp. 38-39, 42). In 1552, Emperor Charles reformed Antwerp's six armed guilds, augmenting their size, handing greater control to municipal authorities, and moving towards compulsory imperial service (Prims, 1929, pp. 42-43). Compiled in 1575, close on the heels of these changes and during a period of escalating political tensions, this book may betray guild concerns to secure existing privileges. Covering documents for 1478-1571 – many known only through this manuscript (Prims, 1929, p. 38) – with later additions, the whole is the work of three scribes, two working c. 1575; the third, in the mid-seventeenth century.

The main scribe and artist, who repeatedly identifies himself and the date of production (December 1575) is Hans Verrast, his surname perhaps a modification of Van der Ast (Prims, 1929, p. 37). A finely-trained draughtsman and masterful calligrapher, Verrast was a Dean of one of Antwerp's three Chambers of Rhetoric ("Deken van de Rederijkerskamer") (Buyse,

2013, p. 51), dramatic societies which staged public theatrical performances, as well as literary and visual arts competitions (Waite, 2000). He copied the original collection of twenty-nine statutes, ordinances, privileges, and other guild documents (ff. 1-60 + 73-90v), including oaths for members (ff. 6, 90v); grants of ordinances and liberties and even municipal subsidies (ff. 25v-29), along with brief dedicatory passages (ff. Av, B), two full-page drawings (ff. C, 92), a table of contents (ff. D-F), and a conclusion (f. 91). Ten items within this main collection (at ff. 12, 15^v, 29^v, 32^v, 41^v, 47^v, 56, 77, 80, 82) open with very brief notes identifying them as copies from the old privilege book. (Despite meeting separately, in their own halls, archery guilds shared a common purpose and thus often legislation, resulting in shared documents (Prims, 1929, p. 39).) Except for five items (at ff. 6, 6^v-11^v, 78^v-79^v, 90^v, 91), every item copied by Verrast ends with a short "Gecollationeert" note asserting that it was collated against originals. These signed statements were added by late sixteenth-century notary Seuerinus Rubbens (in 1578, still in Antwerp, collated an unrelated document with a similar formula; Génard, 1879, pp. 159-162). They reveal a concern for accuracy, suggesting the guild expected to rely upon this book.

During the mid-seventeenth century, a few additions were to the collection: the Testament of the Deans of the guild, dated 30 September 1638 (ff. 60^v-61^v), plus a short entry in the table of contents indexing the Testament (f. F), along with a memorial list of Deans of the guild, providing ten names with death dates ranging from 10 May 1638 through 28 June 1648 (f. 62).

Guilds were fundamental to the social organization of premodern cities in Western Europe. This manuscript stands to augment our knowledge of the history of premodern guilds, including their interactions with civic and imperial authorities and internal functioning. Armed guilds in particular occupied a unique space in the community, since in addition to devotional functions, including maintaining chapels and meeting on feast days, they also played a central role in civic defense and in community life, holding public competitions. The recent study of these guilds in medieval Flanders by Laura Crombie (2016) notes they were akin to "shooting societies" (2016, p. 4), straddling multiple sectors of society, and drawing their members from multiple trades and professions.

LITERATURE

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