

The Rule of the Order of Fontevraud

In French, decorated manuscript on parchment

Western France (Maine-et-Loire), Royal Abbey of Fontevraud, or Central France (Orléans),
Priory of the Madeleine, soon after January 1479

i + 149 + i folios on parchment, original foliation in red ink and Roman numerals, "fo p^a, fo z^o, fo 3^o, fo q^ro, fo v^o, fo vii^o ... cxix^o", (followed by 5 unnumbered leaves), "fo ii^o, iii^o ... xxiii", (followed by 5 unnumbered leaves), modern foliation in pencil, 1-149, lacking five leaves (collation i^s [-8, lacking one leaf after f. 7, with loss of text] ii⁶ iii-xi^s xii^s [-1, lacking one leaf after f. 85, with loss of text] xiii-xv^s xvi^s [-2, -8, lacking one leaf after f. 117, with loss of text, and one blank leaf after f. 122] xvii⁶ [-1, lacking one leaf after f. 122, with loss of text] xviii^s xix¹⁰ xx⁴), vertical catchwords, alphanumerical signatures in red ink (mostly cropped), ruled in gray ink (justification c. 110 x 70 mm.), written in brown ink in gothic cursive bookhand on 17-18 long lines, several letters on the last lines have elaborate descenders (e.g. on ff. 5, 57, 62v the descenders develop into large leaves in the lower margins), capitals touched in yellow, important passages underlined in yellow, rubrics in red, line-fillers are foliage, flowers, cartouches drawn in ink and yellow wash (e.g. ff. 108, 113), 2- to 4-line initials in brown and red inks often decorated with human profiles, interlacing ornamentation (cadels), flowers, or foliage, line-fillers with similar flower or foliage in red and brown inks, lacking a part of the first leaf including the first words of text, the lacune (c. 60 x 40 mm.) has been repaired with modern parchment and some of the lacking words have been inserted in pencil, a tear in the lower margin of f. 59, stains and signs of use, in overall very good condition. Bound in the nineteenth century in brown calf over wooden boards, covers blind-tooled with a frame design with triple fillets and fleurons in the corners, spine with four raised bands blind-tooled with fleurons, two pairs of brass clasps and catches, leather worn along the hinges of the spine and corners, in overall very good condition. Dimensions 149 x 98 mm.

Monastic Rules are a topic by themselves. Beginning in the fourth century, they govern the spiritual and practical life for the men and women who took monastic vows. Although the Rule of St. Benedict is the most well-known, those of other orders can also tell us a lot about the everyday life of monks and nuns. The double Order of Fontevraud became the largest pre-modern Order under female leadership in Europe. This important, previously unknown copy of the new rule of the Order of Fontevraud established by Marie de Bretagne in 1474 is an early, textually significant, and decorated copy.

PROVENANCE

1. The manuscript was copied probably at the Abbaye Notre-Dame de Fontevraud or the Priory of the Madeleine in Orléans soon after January 1479. The new rule was approved by Pope Sixtus IV in 1474 and translated into French in January 1479 for the use of the Priory of the Madeleine, the first priory reformed by Marie de Bretagne.

The introduction to the rule explains that the new statutes were extracted from the rule of St. Benedict and that of the founder of the order, Robert d'Arbrissel, by Marie de Bretagne with the advice of regular and secular clergy, and this new rule was corrected and amended by Jean Coeur (d. 1483), archbishop of Bourges, Louis de Pot (d. 1505), abbot of Saint-Laumer de Blois, Jean Berthelot, canon of Tours, and the archbishop of

Lyon (Charles II de Bourbon, d. 1488) (f. 1). The original text was written by the notaries of the above-mentioned prelates, as the text implies: "Nous vous envoions ces presentes articles soubz noz sceaulx et signes de noz notaires" (f. 1v) "pour estre observez a tousjoure, mais comme Regle et forme de vivre pour vous et voz ensuivantz ausdictz vostres monasteres et demourantz et qui y demoureront perpetuellemen" (f. 2). This new volume of statutes was completed in 1479 at La Madeleine-lez-Orléans (see our manuscript, f. 1v; cf. printed copy, p. 2, Online Resources), a priory of Fontevraud that Marie reformed first. Our manuscript may be a copy of the original (without notarial signatures and seals). It was probably made at Fontevraud for another dependent priory or at La Madeleine-lez-Orléans for their own use, and may have been copied from Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS fr. 10822 (see the discussion below).

The decoration has cadels and human profiles, typical of notarial documents, suggesting that the decoration was also copied from the original.

2. The manuscript belonged to André Bizouillier (1902-1978), scholar and bibliophile from the Anjou. He managed the Éditions de l'Ouest in Angers, was Secretary General of departmental tourism, and especially the Angers Drama Festival. Under the pseudonym Jacques Isolle, he published stories, poems, and scholarly works.
3. Private European Collection.

TEXT

ff. 1-149v, [Part one, ff. 117v], incipit, "[Au] non de nostre seigneur [Jesu C]hriste. Nous Jehan par la misericorde de Dieu, archevesque de Bourges, primat d'Aquitainie, et Louis Pot, abbe du monastere saint Laumer de Blois du diocese de Chartres, par le subscripsit siege apostolique especiallement deputez Juges et executeurs du contenir en ce present escript avecques aultres nom condelequem en ceste partie avecques la clarise, qua tenus duo et cetera vobis et cetera, Et Jehan Berthelot chanoisne en l'esglise de Tours le quel nous archevesque et abbe avons accepte comme subdeleques tres reverend pere l'archevesque de Lion, primat de France por lui et en son absence en Jesuchrist Religieuse femmes que hommes ... sentz et advenir ... (ob)servance de reformation de l'ordre de fontevrault ou monastere ... Benoiste de la benoiste madgalene pres orleans. Salut Nous vous envoions ces presentes articles soubz noz sceaulx et signes de noz notaires qui contiennent la substance et effeict des articles que reverente mere abbessse de l'ordre de noble ligne et devotion Marie de Breteigne par le conseil des bons prudentz et expertz hommes tant Reguliers que seculiers renommez de vie et devotion lovable avoit faict extraire des riglez et statutz du bon pere saint benoist et de reverend pere Maistre Robert fondeurs dudict ordre. Lesquels articles escriptz a l'instance de ladicte Mere reverente, de vostre requeste, volunte et consentement et requeste par nous ont estez appliquez, corrigez et amendez pour estre observez a tousjoure, mais comme Regle et forme de vivre pour vous et voz ensuivantz ausdictz vostres monasteres et demourantz et qui y demoureront perpetuellement. Recepvez doncques devotement et de bon coeur tous et chacun de ces articles comme ilz sont ordonnee. Et vous preparez en servir desperit a l'execution diceulx pour le salut de voz amis. La grace et benediction de Jesuchrist vous voeulle conforter a ceste oeuvre devotement commencer. (the end of the introduction) Asleves doncques devotement vostre pensee a entendre l'admonition du bon pere saint benoist ... [f. 117v] quand el Jour de salut adviendra

ou//” [the first part ends imperfectly, lacking one leaf, followed by a table of contents on ff. 118-121, and three blank pages ff. 121v-122v];

ff. 123-149v, [Part 2, ff. 123-144, begins imperfectly], incipit, “//court affin a selon iceulx statutz vous compozes vos meurs, resreigues vos excez et que en saint propos par devotz exercices avecques saint multiplie de vertuz puissez perseverer ... [f. 144, the end of the second part] ... qu’il ne luy est loisible parler avecques les hostes. Deo gracias”; [followed by a table of contents f. 144v; f. 145], incipit, “Cerimonie observande in professionibus ordinis novis fontevrald... . Pro crispanti crine sit tibi calviciium ut sollicite cuves superflua vesecave seculaviumbam tatus.”

The rule of Fontevraud, as established by Marie de Bretagne in 1474.

The abbey and the Order of Fontevraud was founded in 1101 by the charismatic preacher Robert of Arbrissel. It was a double monastery including both nuns and monks, all under the authority of the Abbess. It became the largest pre-modern order under female leadership in Europe. The economic weight and influence of Fontevraud in France was considerable: by 1450 the abbey directed 78 priories, and over 100 dominions from Picardy to the Pyrenees. It was one of the largest monastic estates in Europe.

Marie de Bretagne, the 26th abbess of Fontevraud (abbatial 1457-1477), had new statutes of the order approved by Pope Sixtus IV in 1474. This rule, contained in our manuscript, was composed of two parts. The first part comprises 74 chapters for the nuns, who follow the rule of St. Benedict. The second part includes 16 chapters for the monks, who, since this reform of the order, followed the rule of St. Augustin. This new rule, which notably included the vow of enclosure, was applied energetically by Marie’s successors, especially Anne d’Orléans (abbess 1478-1491), Renée de Bourbon (abbess 1491-1534) and Jeanne-Baptiste de Bourbon (abbess 1637-1670). It was Jeanne-Baptiste de Bourbon who had the rule printed for the first time in 1642. The reform of the order and the printing of the rule ensured the continuation of the order at a difficult period in its history, which included several conflicts with monks who were resistant to accepting female authority and left Fontevraud for other orders.

A copy of the rule was made in January 1479 for the priory of the Madeleine near Orléans, the dependent priory of Fontevraud, where Marie de Bretagne went to stay from 1471 onwards, accompanied by six nuns from Fontevraud, and where she set out the new statutes with the help of a group of powerful prelates; this copy is Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS Fr. 10822. According to the catalogue of the Bibliothèque Nationale, it is “traduite en français par les soins de Marie de Bretagne, abbesse de Fontevrault, pour l’abbaye de la Madeleine d’Orléans, en janvier 1479 [1480], sous la direction de Jean III Coeur, archevêque de Bourges, Louis Pot, abbé de Saint-Laumer de Blois, et Jean Berthelot, chanoine de Tours” (see Online Resources). The copy now in Paris was certified by the notaries D. Chenu and P. Roland.

Our copy is not signed by notaries, but also includes the names of the prelates under whose direction the statutes were made, and the mention of the priory of the Madeleine. Our manuscript may have been copied from the manuscript now in Paris; further research is required to establish their relationship (the Paris copy is not digitized). Later manuscript copies of the rule survive from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but, significantly, these no longer

contain all the information found in the long introduction in our manuscript; see, for instance, the copy in French made in the early sixteenth century, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS fr. 2470 (see Online Resources). Another sixteenth-century copy in French is found in Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS fr. 13885, and copies of the rule in Latin are found in Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MSS lat. 15069 (15th century), lat. 4389 (16th century), lat. 4393 (16th century), and lat. 13865 (17th century).

The chapters concerning nuns are in the first part of the rule and deal with humility (ff. 10v-18v), the reception of novices (ff. 18v-21v), vows of enclosure, poverty, chastity, obedience (ff. 21v-34), singing (ff. 39-41), prayer (ff. 41-), confession (f. 43-), Eucharist (ff. 44-), silence (ff. 44v-), rules governing the various tasks and comportment of the nuns (f. 47v-): "des sœurs discrettes" (ff. 55v-), "la portiere et thouriere" (nuns who keep guard of the door and tower) (f. 57v-), "celeriere" (cellar master) (ff. 60-), "depositeur" (f. 62v), "boursiere" (ff. 63v-), "procurer" (ff. 64v-), "chambriere" (ff. 66-), "secretaire" (ff. 66v-), "chantre et soubzchantre" (f. 68), "maistresse d'escolle" (ff. 68v-69), the weekly plan in the cloister and the refectory (ff. 69-), sick nuns (ff. 72-), fasting, how and when to eat and drink (ff. 74v-), clothes and shoes (ff. 79-), going to bed (ff. 82-), washing hands (ff. 83-), workers (ff. 84v-), the order of the congregation (ff. 86-), assembling in the chapter house (ff. 87v-), sin, guilt, mercy (ff. 93-), visits (ff. 100v-), the abbess (ff. 113-) and funerals (ff. 116-117v). The second part concerning the monks is much shorter and deals similarly with the reception of novices, the vows, poverty, obedience, silence, the task of the secretary, clothing, and visits, in addition to the celebration of the Divine Office and the chapter of the monks. One chapter in this second part of the rule stipulates that the nuns are not allowed to enter the monks' chapel, garden, cloister or dormitory, except in an emergency, in which case an honest nun of more than fifty years of age may enter (ff. 125v-126).

The present manuscript offers exciting new research material for studying female monasticism, and more specifically Fontevraud Abbey. The text of our manuscript varies quite noticeably from the text as it was printed over a century later, and occasionally offers information that was later lost, making our document especially precious. Apart from its beginnings in the twelfth century, the later history of the abbey has been largely ignored and would merit serious study. Other than the thesis by A. Müller, there are no monographs about this important royal abbey in the later Middle Ages. Another important source for supporting this research will be the Fontevraud archives, the majority of which are held in the Archives départementales de Maine-et-Loire, 101 H – 241 H.

LITERATURE

Dalarun, J., G. Giordanengo, A. le Huërou, J. Longère, D. Poiriel, B. L. Venarde, *Les deux vies de Robert d'Arbrissel fondateur de Fontevraud*, Turnhout, 2006.

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Müller, A. "Forming and Re-forming Fontevraud: Monasticism, Geopolitics and the Querelle des Frères (c. 100-1643)," Ph. D. thesis, Yale University, 2014.

Nicquet, H., *Histoire de l'ordre de Font-Evraud*, Paris, 1642. Available online:
<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k6261489s?rk=21459;2>

ONLINE RESOURCES

Regula Ordinis Fontis-Ebraldi. La Regle de l'Ordre de Font-Evraud, 1642
https://archive.org/details/wotb_6743969

Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS fr. 2470
<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b9007362m/f7.item>

Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS fr. 10822
<https://archivesetmanuscripts.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cc5052x>

Printed sources on the Order of Fontevraud at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France
https://data.bnf.fr/fr/13573818/ordre_de_fontevraud/

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