

Reformed Rule of Fontevraud

In Latin, illuminated manuscript on parchment

France (Paris), c. 1500-1510

ii + 125 + ii folios on parchment, modern foliation in pencil, 1-125, modern foliation in black ink (mostly cropped, "115 fo" and "121 fo" visible, foliated after the three leaves were lost), lacking three leaves, two of which probably contained illumination (collation i-v⁸ vi⁸[-2, lacking one leaf after f. 41, with loss of text and illumination] vii-xii⁸ xiii⁸[-3, -4, lacking two leaves after f. 97, with loss of text and possibly illumination] xiv-xvi⁸), alphanumeric signatures (mostly cropped, "H.i." visible on f. 56), ruled in dark pink ink (justification 84 x 48 mm.) (flyleaves are also ruled), written by a notary in brown ink in a small, handsome gothic hybrid bookhand in single column on 20 lines, rubrics in red, several very fine descenders and ascenders decorated with elaborate cadels extending into the margins, capitals and cadels highlighted with yellow wash, paragraph signs and line-endings in liquid gold mostly on blue grounds, occasionally on red grounds, 3- to 4-line cadel initials for the second letter opening each chapter and immediately following the 3- to 5-line illuminated initials painted either in liquid gold on grounds in blue or red or both (divided), or the initial painted in blue or dark pink with white penwork ornamentation placed on liquid gold grounds decorated with strawberries, roses, bluebells, pimpernels, and other flowers, TWO LARGE HISTORIATED INITIALS (8 lines) on liquid gold grounds with band borders in liquid gold framing the text (ff. 1 and 115), minor damp stain in the upper outer margin throughout the book, a very small section (2 x 18 mm.) cut off the outer margin of f. 96, a tear in the outer margin of f. 121 (possibly since the making of the book), in overall excellent condition. Bound in the eighteenth or nineteenth century in plum-colored velvet over pasteboards, covers blind-tooled with a single frame of roses with a small pimpernel in each inner corner, flat spine blind-tooled (motifs now faded), gilt edges, only minor wear to velvet, in overall excellent condition. Dimensions 125 x 80 mm.

This unusually luxurious copy of the reformed statutes of the Royal Abbey of Fontevraud, dates from 1474 during the abbacy of Renée de Bourbon (1491-1534), "la grande réformatrice."

Fontevraud, a double monastery including both nuns and monks under the authority of the abbess, was the largest European pre-modern Order under female leadership. Among its fine illumination, the historiated initial depicting Robert of Arbrissel is possibly a unique medieval representation of the founder of the Order.

PROVENANCE

1. This manuscript was written by a notary for use at the Royal Abbey of Fontevraud during the abbacy of Renée de Bourbon (1491-1534). The large cadel initials, as well as the cadels that decorate several capitals, and those that develop from the descenders and ascenders of letters into the margins, as well as the tell-tale fish-motif that inhabits some of these cadels, identify the scribe as a notary.

Fontevraud was a double monastery including both nuns and monks, all under the authority of the abbess. The manuscript has been brought up to date by the inclusion of a Mass for the reception of a brother at the end of the manuscript (ff. 115-121). This text is highlighted with an initial enclosing a miniature of the *Presentation of Christ in the Temple*. The Rules of the Brotherhood probably originally opened with illumination; this

leaf is now lacking. These details suggest that our manuscript could have been copied for one of the brothers of Fontevraud, perhaps the Prior (see further discussion below).

An inscription in brown ink at the top of the final end flyleaf appears to read "Renée" (the final "e" is almost effaced), probably referring to the abbess, Renée de Bourbon. There are no coat of arms or other signs of ownership.

The style of illumination of the fine initials decorated with flowers and strawberries, as well as the historiated initials, suggests that the manuscript was painted in Paris around 1500-1510. This coincides with an especially important period of major advances made by Renée de Bourbon in order to reform the nuns and monks. In 1503, she obtained the necessary parliamentary approval to allow her to evict recalcitrant members from the Abbey and to send them to convents that had already been reformed (see paragraph 3 below). In 1504, a wall was installed at the Abbey to enforce the vow of enclosure.

The abbey and the Order of Fontevraud were founded in 1101 by the charismatic preacher Robert of Arbrissel. 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.

2. In the outer margin of the first leaf is a seventeenth-century inscription in brown ink by Jean Lardier, stating that the manuscript was for (either to be returned or given to) the library of the Fontevraud Abbey: "F. Joa. Lardier pro bibliotheca Fontis-Ebr." (Frater Johannes Lardier for the library of Abbatia Fontis-Ebraldi) (f. 1).

Jean Lardier was one of the former priors of the male monastery Saint-Jean de l'Habit, located within the walls of the abbey of Fontevraud, and a confidant of the abbess Jeanne-Baptiste de Bourbon (abbacy 1637-1670). Between 1646 and 1658 Lardier wrote a seventy-two volume study of the abbey of which only the Inventory of title deeds survives, in a work entitled *Trésor de l'Ordre de Fontevraud* (see the discussion below). It was perhaps for this purpose that the manuscript of the statutes was lent to him.

3. An inscription of over six lines, made in the sixteenth century on the first front flyleaf: "Religiosus transgrediendo ea quae sunt..." concerning the transgression of the rule.
4. Modern booksellers' notes on the front pastedown.
5. Modern inscription "No. 8" in pencil in the top corner of the first front flyleaf.
6. Swiss private collection.

TEXT

ff. 1-6v, [Prologue], *Incipit prologus in regulam monialium Reformationis fontisebraldi*, incipit, "In nomine domini nostri Iesu Christi; Nos Joannes miseratione divina Bituricensis archiepiscopus..." [Jean Cœur, archbishop of Bourges 1446-1483];

ff. 6v-97v, [Rules of the sisterhood of the Order in eighty-five chapters], *De instrumentis bonorum operum. Capitulum .I.*, incipit, "Instrumenta bonorum ... Sorores vero applicent vigilias huius diei pro dicto mortuo dicentes Ex habundantia, De profundis, Inclina (vel Quaesumus, et Fidelium, genibus flexis)///";

Ending imperfectly, and lacking one leaf after f. 41 beginning the Ordination of the Priors; the rule is divided into the following chapters: ff. 6v-9, ch. 1, *De instrumentis donorum operum*; ff. 9-15v, ch. 2-14, *De humilitate et gradibus eius*, *De primo gradu humilitate*, etc.; ff. 15v-18, ch. 15, *De (re)ceptione noviciarum*; ff. 18-19v, ch. 16, *De forma voti*; ff. 19v-21, ch. 17, *De stabilitate sub clausura*; ff. 21-22, ch. 18, *De non exeundo a clausura*; ff. 22-23, ch. 19, *De non intrando clausuram*; ff. 23-24, ch. 20, *De conversione morum*; f. 24r-v, ch. 21, *De paupertate*; f. 25r-v, ch. 22, *Ut non liceat litteras vel dona recipere* (only letters from parents are authorized and can only be opened in the presence of the prioress); ff. 25v-26, ch. 23, *De castitate*; ff. 26v-27v, ch. 24, *De obedientia*; f. 28, ch. 25, *Si sororibus impessibilia iniunguntur*; f. 28r-v, ch. 26, *Ut in monasterio altera non possit defende(re) alteram*; ff. 28v-29, ch. 27, *Ut non presumat ali qua passim alia cedere*; f. 29r-v, ch. 28, *Ut obedientes fuit sibi invicem sorores*; f. 30, ch. 29, *De zelo bono quem debent habere religiose*; ff. 30v-32, ch. 30, *De divino officio*; ff. 32v-34, ch. 31, *De disciplina psallendi*; ff. 34-35, ch. 32, *De reverentia orationis*; f. 35r-v, ch. 33, *De reparatione eorum que falliuntur in oratorio*; ff. 35v-36, ch. 34, *De diebus et horis confessionis*; f. 36v, ch. 35, *De communione corporis christi*; ff. 37-39v, ch. 36, *De taciturnitate et silentio*; f. 39v, ch. 37, *De disciplinis*; ff. 39v-41v, ch. 38, *De officio priorisse* (ending imperfectly, lacking a leaf); ff. 42-43v, ch. 39, *De ordinando priorissa* (beginning imperfectly, lacking a leaf, see above; the prioress was elected for three years); ff. 43v-45v, ch. 40, *De protestate priorisse*; f. 46, ch. 41, *De discretis sororibus*; ff. 46-48v, ch. 42, *De officio hostiarie et torerie*; ff. 48v-50v, ch. 43, *De officio celerarie*; ff. 50v-51v, ch. 44, *De officio deponitarie*; ff. 51v-52v, ch. 45, *De officio bursarie*; ff. 52v-53v, ch. 46, *De procuratore*; ff. 53v-54, ch. 47, *De officio camerarie*; ff. 54-55v, ch. 48, *De officio sacristarie*; f. 55v, ch. 49, *De officio cantris et subcantriciis*; f. 56r-v, ch. 50, *De magistrate scole*; f. 56v, ch. 51, *De septimanaria chori*; ff. 56v-58, ch. 52, *De septimanariis mense et coquine* (all nuns must help at the table and the kitchens); ff. 58-59, ch. 53, *De ebdomadaria lectrice in mensa* (the reading and the blessing are obligatory at the table); ff. 59-60v, ch. 54, *De infirmis sororibus*; f. 61, ch. 55, *De senibus et juvenibus*; ff. 61-62, ch. 56, *De mensura ciborum* (meat is given to the sick); ff. 62v-63, ch. 57, *De mensura potus*; f. 63r-v, ch. 58, *De horis ordinariis quibus refici debent sorores*; ff. 63v-65, ch. 59, *De his quae ad opus dei tarde veniunt*; ff. 65-67v, ch. 60, *De vestimentis et calciamentis* (the nuns must wear day and night the surplice, the use of which was defended in the first rule written by Robert d'Arbissel in 1115); ff. 67-68, ch. 61, *De modo jacendi*; ff. 68-69, ch. 62, *De opere manuum*; ff. 69v-70, ch. 63, *De artifiis monasterii*; ff. 70-71, ch. 64, *De adhibendis sorores ad Consilium*; ff. 71-72v, ch. 65, *De ordine congregationis*; ff. 72v-74, ch. 65bis, *De capitulo congregando*; ff. 74-76, ch. 66, *De recognoscendis culpis in capitulo*; f. 76rv, ch. 67, *De capitula prima die lune quadragesme*; f. 77r-v, ch. 68, *De secretis culpis (publice) non revelendi*; ff. 77v-78, ch. 69, *De quantitate et qualitate culparum*; f. 78r-v, ch. 70, *De excommunicatione culparum levium*; ff. 78v-79, ch. 71, *De excommunicatione gravium culparum*; ff. 79-80, ch. 72, *De excommunicatione gravissimarum culparum*; f. 80, ch. 73, *De his que sine iussione iugunt se excommunicatis*; ff. 80v-81, ch. 74, *Qualiter debeat esse priorissa sollicita circa delinquentes*; ff. 81-82, ch. 75, *De his que sepius correcte non emendaverint*; f. 82, ch. 76, *De recipiendis sororibus ad misericordiam*; ff. 82v-83, ch. 77, *Quomodo satiffacere debeant excommunicate*; ff. 83-84, ch. 78, *De instituendo visitatore*; ff. 84v-86v, ch. 79, *De electione visitatoris*; ff. 86v-87v,

ch. 80, De statu persone eligibilis; ff. 88-89, ch. 81, De tempore visitationis; ff. 89-92, ch. 82, De forma visitationis; ff. 92-93, ch. 83, De potestate visitationis; ff. 93-96, ch. 84, De potestate abbatisse; ff. 96-97v, ch. 85, De obsequiis defunctorum (ending imperfectly, see above).

ff. 98-114v, [Rule of the Brotherhood of the Order in seventeen chapters, lacking two leaves containing the introduction and prologue, beginning imperfectly at the very end of the prologue], incipit, "[spiritualis conversation]//nis incrementum. De receptione noviciorum, ...";

Divided into the following chapters: f. 98, ch. 1, De receptione noviciorum; f. 98r-v, ch. 2, De forma voti; ff. 98v-99v, ch. 3, De paupertate nuda; ff. 99v-100, ch. 4, De castitate; f. 100r-v, ch. 5, De obedientia; ff. 100v-102, ch. 6, De divino officio; f. 102r-v, ch. 7, De silentio; f. 103, ch. 8, De disciplinis; f. 103r-v, ch. 9, De sacrista; ff. 103v-104v, ch. 10, De mensura ciborum; ff. 104v-106, ch. 11, De vestimentis; f. 106r-v, ch. 12, De modo jacendi; ff. 106v-108, ch. 13, De opere et laboribus fratrum; ff. 108-110, ch. 14, De capitulo et culpis agnoscendi; ff. 110v-111v, ch. 15, Qualiter secrete culpe non sunt revelande; ff. 111v-112, ch. 17, De hospitibus recepiendis".

ff. 115-121, [Mass for the reception of a brother], incipit "Promo messa celebrata et collatione facta breviter"; ff. 117-121, Sequitur quid faciendus sit in professione fratrum; [ff. 121v-125v, ruled, otherwise blank].

DECORATION

Two historiated initials (of the original four):

f. 1, large (8 lines) initial "I" on a liquid gold ground, enclosing a miniature representing the founder of the Order, Robert d'Arbissel, shown standing in a landscape, wearing a black monk's habit, holding a crozier and a book; a gold bar border frames the text;

f. 115, large (8 lines) initial "P" on a liquid gold ground, enclosing a miniature representing the *Presentation of Christ in the Temple* a gold bar border frames the text. This initial opens the Mass for the reception of a brother.

One leaf is lacking at the opening of the Ordination of the Priors (after f. 41) and two leaves are lacking at the beginning the Rules of the Brotherhood (after f. 97). There was probably a historiated initial at the beginning of these texts. The placement of the historiated initials (for priors and brothers, but none for the abbess), as well as the fact that the manuscript ends with a Mass for the reception of a brother, may suggest that the book was made for an important prior at Fontevraud. The style is quite close to that of the Ritual of Renée de Bourbon (Chantilly, Musée Condé, MS 48) and it is possible that Renée may have financed the making of this manuscript. Apart from the Chantilly manuscript, three other manuscripts are known to have belonged to Renée (Paris, Bibliothèque Mazarine, MS 1399, Paris, BnF, MS nouv. acq. lat. 302 and Bruxelles, Bibliothèque Royale, MS IV.291).

The new reformed rule of Fontevraud, also called the rule of Sixtus IV, was established in 1474 at the request of Marie de Bretagne (abbatial 1457-1477), and pronounced in January 1480 by three apostolic officials, Jean Cœur, archbishop of Bourges, Louis Pot, abbot of Saint-Laumer, and Jean Berthelot, canon of Tours. It comprised 74 chapters in the first part for the nuns, who

follow the rule of St. Benedict, and 16 chapters in the second part for the monks, who followed the rule of St. Augustin. This rule was printed for the first time in 1642 during the abbacy of Jeanne-Baptiste de Bourbon, the last of the five Bourbons who succeeded each other as abbess, passing the role from aunt to niece (see Online resources for a digitized copy of this first edition). To our knowledge, there has been no census of surviving copies; we note the following manuscripts: Paris, BnF, MSS lat. 11077, lat. 15069, lat. 4389, lat. 4393; Paris, Mazarine, MSS 1762 and 1763, and Paris, Bibliothèque de Ste-Genviève, MS 2977. The text in our manuscript is the same as that established by Marie de Bretagne in 1474, and printed by Jeanne-Baptiste de Bourbon in 1642, although the chapter division in our manuscript is different with 85 chapters for the nuns and 17 chapters for the monks. This is explained by the division of chapter 2 on humility and its twelve degrees in the first part of the rule into separate chapters in our manuscript (ff. 9-15v), and the division of chapter 14 in the second part into two separate chapters in our manuscript (ff. 108-111v).

The chapters concerning nuns are in the first part of the rule and deal with such subjects as humility and its degrees (chapters 2-14, ff. 9-15v), the reception of novices (ff. 15v-18; at the age of 10 for the girls and 15 for the boys), vows of enclosure, poverty, chastity, obedience (ff. 18-27v; from the age of 14 for the girls and 18 for the boys), the Divine Office (ff. 30-32), singing (ff. 32v-34; one should sing with the mouth and heart) confession (ff. 35v-36), Eucharist (f. 36r-v), silence (ff. 36v-39), sick nuns (ff. 59-60v), clothes and shoes (ff. 65-67v), the order of the congregation (ff. 71-72v), assembling in the chapter house and how to recognize guilt (ff. 72v-76), sin, guilt, mercy (ff. 77-78), visits (ff. 83-93), the abbess (ff. 93-96), funerals (ff. 96-97v), and so forth. 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, visits, the celebration of the Divine Office and the chapter of the monks. The manuscript ends with a Mass for the reception of a brother (ff. 115-121), opening with an initial enclosing a miniature of the *Presentation of Christ in the Temple*, symbolizing the reception of a brother to the Order.

In the seventeenth century, the manuscript was in the hands of Jean Lardier, the first archivist of the Fontevraud Abbey. Lardier, born in Châteaugontier in 1601, devoted the last thirty years of his life to the study his Order and wrote over 72 volumes, of which he provided a list. Most of these works are now lost, but what survives is the famous *Thrésoir de l'Ordre de Fontevraud* written in 1646-1658 in seven large volumes (Archives Départementales du Maine-et-Loire, 101 H 153; cf. Online Resources; De Viguerie 1979, p. 107, n. 2 mentions only 3 volumes). Jean Lardier also composed the work *Le Sainte Famille de Fontevrauld*, a genealogical history of illustrious people whose names are inscribed in the martyrology of the abbey (conserved today as Bibliothèque de Château-Gontier, MS 12; only the third volume of this manuscript survives, the microfilm of which is Archives Départementales du Maine-et-Loire Mi87).

The present manuscript offers exciting new research material for studying the Abbey of Fontevraud. Apart from its beginnings in the twelfth century, the later history of the abbey has been largely ignored in modern scholarship and would merit serious study. Other than the work by Annalena Müller, there are no monographs about this important royal abbey in the later Middle Ages. An immensely important source for supporting this research are the Fontevraud archives, in which the most vivid account of the life of the Order was provided by Dom Jean

Lardier (Archives départementales de Maine-et-Loire, 101H–241H). The extremely high quality of our manuscript denotes its importance.

LITERATURE

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Dalarun, J. "Capitula regularia magistri Roberti: de Fontevraud au Paraclet," *Comptes rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, 2003, pp. 1601-1636. Available online: https://www.persee.fr/doc/crai_0065-0536_2003_num_147_4_22673

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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-Evrauld, Paris, 1642
https://archive.org/details/wotb_6743969
<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k1912758v>

Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS lat. 15069 (15th century, on paper)
<https://archivesetmanuscrits.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cc75785m?collect>

Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS lat. 4389 (16th century, on parchment)
<https://archivesetmanuscrits.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cc63206z?collect>
Digitized: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b100342858>

Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS lat. 4393 (16th century, on paper)
<https://archivesetmanuscrits.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cc63210q?collect>

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

Prioré Saint-Jean de l'Habit (Wikipedia)
https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prieur%C3%A9_Saint-Jean_de_l%E2%80%99Habit

Ordre de Fontevraud (Wikipedia)

https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ordre_de_Fontevraud

Le "Trésor" de l'abbaye royale de Fontevraud

<https://archives.maine-et-loire.fr/decouvrir-et-apprendre/parcourir-lhistoire-de-lanjou/le-tresor-de-labbaye-royale-de-fontevraud>

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