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

42 folios, complete (i⁶, ii-iv⁸, v³ [of 4], iv now fol. 42], vi⁸⁺¹ [ix formerly a blank following fol. 33]), written on 27 long lines (justification 173 x 114 mm.), in dark brown ink in an elegant bâtarde script, two headings in red, paragraph-marks and 1- and 2-line initials throughout in liquid gold on red and brick-red grounds with gold tracery, TWO VERY LARGE ILLUMINATED INITIALS (ff. 7v and 34r), 8 lines high in brick-red and blue with leafy extensions and decorative scrolling tracery in liquid gold and white, FULL-PAGE MINIATURE with surrounding architectural border (fol. 7r), some rubbing to frontispiece and slight smudging, a few other pages thumbbed and marked, else in excellent condition, paper flyleaves. Bound in dark blue velvet over pasteboards, edges gilt, red watered silk endleaves, covers detached. Dimensions 242 x 178 mm.

Rare illuminated manuscript of the text of the Statutes of the royal French chivalric Order of St. Michel by an artist in the circle of the Master of the Paris Entries (perhaps identical with the Parisian illuminator Etienne Collaud). Whereas many manuscripts of the Statutes must once have existed, because each knight received a copy, no manuscript of the text has appeared at auction since 1920. Only a few extant copies are illuminated with frontispieces.

PROVENANCE

1. Most likely from a series of twelve manuscripts documented as having been ordered by the court of Francis I, king of France (1515-47), for distribution to knights of the Order. Books of chivalric statutes were to be returned to the Order on the knight's death. The documents date the manuscripts between 1523 and 1528.
2. Hemricourt de Ramioul, c. 1810, from Belgium, Liege, his printed armorial bookplate on the front pastedown, along with shelf mark A./III./69 (see *Armorial belge de bibliophiles*, vol. 2, Brussels, 1886).
3. Howel Wills (1845-1901), of Baillol College, Oxford, and the Inner Temple, London, later resident in Florence, with his printed label; his sale, London, Sotheby's, 11 July 1894, lot 1104, bought by Ellis.

TEXT

ff. 1-6, numbered list of 92 chapters: "La table des chappitres du livre de l'ordre du trescrestien roy de France Loys XI a l'honneur de Saint Michel,"

ff. 7v-33v, incipit: "Loys par la grace de Dieu roy de France ..."; explicit: "... et de nostre regne le ix^e;"

ff. 33v-41, Statutes and Ordinances for the Office of Prevost, Master of Ceremonies of the Order, incipit (f. 34): "Loys par la grace de Dieu Roy de France. Savoir faisons ...;" explicit: "... et de nostre regne le seiziesme."

In response to the founding of the Burgundian Order of the Golden Fleece by Philip the Good, duke of Burgundy, King Louis XI founded the Order of Saint Michel in 1469. It belongs with a group of chivalric orders, known as monarchical or royal orders because the goal was to assure the loyalty of the knights to the king. Originally, there were a limited number of knights, thirty-one, then thirty-six including the king. The office of Provost was appointed in 1476. Not surprisingly, the first knights were among the most powerful men in France, close relatives of the king and a few from other royal houses in Europe. By the sixteenth century the Order was less selective, and in 1565, the formal number was increased to fifty but there may have been as many as seven hundred knights under Henry III in 1574.

Named after the saint to whom it is dedicated, the Archangel Michael, the Order of St. Michael conveyed to every member a gold badge of the image of the saint standing on a rock (Mont-Saint-Michel) in combat with the serpent. It was suspended from an elaborate gold collar made of cockleshells (the badge of pilgrims to holy places) and tied together with double knots. The statutes state that the badge could be hung on a simple chain, and later it was suspended from a black ribbon.

The Order was awarded as late as the 1960s when Jaime (Jacques II), Duke of Anjou and Segovia, nominated six new knights.

A copy of the Statutes would have been owned by each member, and the present manuscript follows the text of the revised Statutes, to which were added the special duties of the Office of the Provost in 1476. Delaissé notes that “copies of the Statutes and Armorial of Orders are in some respects like liturgical manuscripts: like them, they grew and changed with time” (p. 361).

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. (Delaissé, p. 361).

Manuscripts of the Statutes are extremely rare. There is no record of any copy at auction in England since the former Ashburnham copy was resold in London, Sotheby’s on 9 June 1920, lot 281. Five copies are recorded in North American collections in DeRicci/Bond. Of these only the one for Jean II, duke of Bourbon, in the Pierpont Morgan Library is illuminated. Of the others, at least one is fragmentary (ex-Ricketts collection [now Lilly Library, University of Indiana?], University of Pennsylvania Library, and Folger Shakespeare Library, the latter a fragment).

Amongst the copies that date from Francois I’s reign, those Durrieu refers to as “*exemplaires de série officielle*” (Durrieu, 1911, p. 29), 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, Harl. 4485; Milano, Trivulziana, ms. 1394. 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 and 4314). Durrieu comments on the copy offered by the French king to Henry VIII, brought over to England with the gold collar by the Connétable Anne de Montmorency: this royal copy is described in Lyte, p. 28, case no. 64. .

ILLUSTRATION

f. 7, full-page miniature showing the king of France (Louis XI, initial founder of the order but meant to represent any king of France, in this case Francis I), holding the scepter and main-de-justice, enthroned attended by ten members of his court all wearing the collars of the Order of St.-Michel, with a tiled floor, curtains behind and gothic windows, architectural framing border including marble pillars emblazoned with gold fleur-de-lys, swags of leaves suspended at top.

When the Order of St. Michel was founded, the famous Jean Fouquet was commissioned to paint the title miniature of the Statutes showing the king presiding over the knights (Paris, BnF, fr. 19819). This exquisite miniature serves as the ultimate prototype for most of the copies of the Statutes. The double strand of cockleshells in

the present miniature shows the later form of the collar which had changed by c. 1520. In fact, the collar represented here is found also in BnF, MS fr. 19815, another manuscript of the same date from the official series.

The style of the frontispiece miniature of the present manuscript, roughly based on the Fouquet model, is that of artists working in the circle of the French court circa 1520, especially those in the circle of the Master of the Paris Entries (see Orth, below). The Master of the Paris Entries, so named for his work on the funeral books of Anne of Brittany and the Parisian entries of Mary Tudor (both 1514) and Claude de France (1517), was one of the leaders of a very busy group of illuminators. "His work is recognizable through its recurring physical types, the clumsy yet decisive rhythm of movement, strong outlines, sketchy modeling over unmodulated color areas, primitive spatial compositions, and other traits that point to speed of execution" (Orth, pp. 21-22). His work "can be traced through the 1520s" (Orth, p. 31).

A review of the documentation on manuscripts of the Statutes leads to further observations regarding the identity of the artist(s). Our manuscript is very likely one of a series referred to in two contemporary documents transcribed by Durrieu in his 1911 study: in 1523 and then 1528, Antoine Tavart, the Order's herald, commissioned and paid a Parisian artist named Etienne Collaud to illustrate a total of twelve copies of the Order's Statutes:

Cette induction se trouve confirmée par les documents qui nous parlent de semblables exemplaires, commandes par la Cour de France pour être ensuite distribués aux chevaliers de l'Ordre de Saint-Michel. Dans une quittance du 22 janvier 1523, le héraut roi d'armes de l'Ordre, qui était alors Antoine Tavart "confesse avoir reçu de Maitre Nicolas de Neuville ... la somme de LXXXVI escus d'or soleil pour icelle somme estre baillee aux escrivains, enlumineurs et relieurs qui feront XII livres en parchemin, esquels seront declaréz, contenuz et escritz les articles, statuts et ordonnances dudict ordre". [...] Par une autre quittance, "Estienne Collaud, enlumineur, demeurant a Paris, confesse avoir reçu de Maitre Antoine Tavart, chevalier, roy d'armes de l'ordre et valet de chambre du roy, la somme de LXXII livres tournois pour avoir fait par ledit Collaud et livré VI livres contenans les chapitres, statuts et ordonnances de l'ordre du roy" (Paris, BnF, Coll. Clairambault MS. 1242, f. 1630). Le susdit enlumineur Etienne Collaud reçut encore le 10 septembre 1528 une nouvelle somme de 72 livres tournois pour le paiement de six autres livres semblables...." (Durrieu, 1911, p. 31-32).

Might the Master of the Paris Entries thus be identical with Etienne Collaud? Although there is more than one style among the manuscripts that can be identified from the official series, the convergence of the style of the Master of the Paris Entries and the documented name of Etienne Collaud is nevertheless intriguing and leads to the tantalizing hypothesis that the two artists may be identical.

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Online Resources

Chivalric Orders site, mostly written and maintained by Guy Stair Saintry. Best site on the subject.

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