

Statutes of the Order of the Golden Fleece

In French, manuscript on paper

Low Countries, c. 1560-1580

i (paper) + 16 + *i* (paper) folios on paper (with watermark similar to Briquet no. 5845, "Dauphin": Aartrijke, 1562, Holland, 1563, Steyerberg, 1567, St-Omer, 1568 and no. 5846, "Dauphin": Creil, 1570), contemporary foliation written out or in Roman numerals, top outer recto, "Premier feuillet," ii-xvi, modern foliation, bottom center recto, 1-16 (collation *i*¹⁶ [structure uncertain: modern binding is too tight to permit an examination of the current quire structure now that the leaves have been remounted, but the distribution of watermarks points to an original quire of sixteen bifolia]), ruled faintly in lead with full-length vertical bounding line on the left and full-length horizontal bounding lines on top and bottom (justification 222-229 x approx. 154 -164 mm.), written in a rapid gothic cursiva script showing some of the spikiness of *bâtarde* in thirty-two to thirty-four long lines, opening line written in thick capitals and a fine, slanted humanistic cursive, some folios stained, some wear to the upper corners, tear to f. 1 repaired, tear to upper corner of f. 16 patched, old stitching holes visible in the inner margins. Bound in modern quarter vellum with marbled paper on the sides over pasteboard, smooth spine, leaves remounted, deckle fore-edge. Dimensions 285 x 211 mm.

Despite its late date, this manuscript preserves one of the few known copies of the original statutes defining the rules and practices of the Order of the Golden Fleece, the epitome of late medieval aristocratic chivalric ideals. Copied during a tumultuous period in the Order's history, this manuscript raises interesting questions regarding the use and perception of the Statutes during that time of transition. Given the relative infrequency with which any copies of the Statutes change hands, this manuscript is a great rarity on the market.

PROVENANCE

1. Evidence of script and watermarks indicate this manuscript's origin in the Low Countries, most probably, judging from the watermark, between the years of 1560 and 1580. The prevalence of the watermark throughout the region, noted by Briquet, makes further localization difficult.

The final general chapter of the Order of the Golden Fleece convened in Ghent in 1559. It is possible that this copy of the Order's Statutes was made for one of the nine men elected to the Order at this chapter, though the relative plainness of this copy and the choice to copy an older version of the Statutes most likely indicate another purpose behind its production, possibly the satisfaction of antiquarian interest in the Order's history or in the language of its original Statutes. This warrants further scholarly investigation.

2. European Private Collection.

TEXT

f. 1, [added title], *Ordonnances de l'ordre de la thoyson d'or*, incipit, "PHILIPPE par la grace de Dieu, Duc de Bourguoigne, de Lothier de Brabant et Lembourg, Comte de Flandres ... que voulons estre appele lordre de la thoison dor, soubz la forme condition statuz et manieres et articles qui sensuyvent";

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ff. 1-16, incipit, "Premierement ordonnons que lordre deuant dit aura trente et vng cheualiers gentilhommes de nom et d'armes sans reproche ... Et que les souuerains et frere dudit ordre soient pour ce tenuz de y respondre";

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f. 16r-v, incipit, "Tous lesquelx poinctz conditions articles et choses dessusdites ... Donne en nostre ville de Lylle le vngt septieme jour de Nouembre lan de grace mil quatre centz trente vng."

Ordinances of the Order of the Golden Fleece.

Unlike most surviving copies of the Statutes of the Order of the Golden Fleece, this manuscript contains the original version of the Statutes completed in 1431 rather than the revised version begun in 1445 and completed in 1446 (see Korteweg in Cockshaw and Van den Bergen-Pantens, 1996, pp. 39-40 and Dünnebeil, 2002, pp. 189-90). The text of the original version of the Statutes has been edited in a modern critical edition by Sonja Dünnebeil (2002, pp. 196-231), who uses the text preserved in The Hague, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, MS 76 E 14 as the base text for the edition and tracks the differences between the earliest and revised versions of the Statutes. This manuscript generally follows the text of the Dünnebeil edition closely. Like both manuscripts containing the pre-1445 version of the statutes Dünnebeil consults, it not only lacks the major revisions undertaken in that year but significant earlier revisions made to the Statutes in 1440 (see below). The manuscript contains all 103 articles present in the original version of the Statutes, though articles 69 and 70 have been copied as a single article with some losses of text, most likely on account of an eye-skip error.

There is no comprehensive study of the surviving manuscripts. Of the twenty-seven fifteenth-century manuscripts counted by Dünnebeil (twenty-five in her list of manuscripts and two booklets noted elsewhere), only six contain the original version of the Statutes (pp. 190-92); Korteweg estimates that about thirty-eight copies of the Statutes survive from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries together, but identifies no sixteenth-century copies of the original version of the Statutes to add to Dünnebeil's list (p. 43). The Schoenberg Database records fourteen other copies of the Statutes changing hands in the last century. It is hard to know whether any of these contain the original version, but given that none of these are dated prior to 1450 it appears relatively unlikely.

It is curious to find a copy of the original Statutes of the Order copied so late. Upon being inducted as a member, each Knight received, in addition to the famous collar from which a gold enameled pendant of the Golden Fleece was suspended, a copy of the Statutes—also referred to as a "quayer de l'ordre"—most often in manuscript form and copied on vellum. Such copies, however, would almost certainly have reflected the most recent version of the Statutes. Furthermore, as Lemaire and Korteweg have both discussed, most copies of the Statutes produced during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were lavish productions on parchment, often illustrated or bearing the arms of the owner, whereas this manuscript, though it has been copied in a clear, flourished hand, would have been a much less expensive production. The Order's archives do preserve some copies of the Statutes that are less lavish, having been used for different purposes. A fifteenth-century bound paper booklet housed in the archive of the

Order of the Golden Fleece in Vienna, Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv contains a copy of the Statutes teeming with annotations reflecting the revisions formalized in 1446 (Bautier and Sornay, 2001, p. 22; Korteweg, p. 40; Dünnebeil, pp. 189, 192). This manuscript appears to have been used as a working copy, possibly by the Greffier or the commission of Knights who formulated the revisions. Another fifteenth-century booklet housed in the same archive contains the revised text and was probably the Greffier's copy, produced for storage in the Order's archive (Dünnebeil, pp. 190, 192). The existence of a seventeenth-century copy of the Statutes housed in the archive of the Golden Fleece in Vienna, similarly preserving the pre-1445 version of the Statutes in a form quite like that of The Hague manuscript (see Dünnebeil, p. 190, n. 10), indicates a continuing interest in the original form of the Statutes, whether for purposes of consultation or out of antiquarian interest, as does the manuscript described here.

The most renowned of all chivalric orders, the Order of the Golden Fleece was founded in 1430 by Philip the Good, duke of Burgundy (1396-1467) "for the reverence of God and maintenance of our Christian Faith, and to honor and exalt the noble order of knighthood" (Boulton, trans., 1987 [2000], p. 361). It was instituted as a Burgundian alternative to the influential Order of the Garter, founded in 1348 by Edward III, and it was designed to strengthen the allegiance of Philip's vassals and ties with foreign states friendly to his realm. The Order of the Golden Fleece originally included twenty-four knights in addition to the Sovereign of the Order, a position held by the Duke of Burgundy and his successors. The 1431 statutes, drawn up for the Order's first chapter, fixed the number admitted at thirty-one (including the Sovereign). In 1516, Charles V increased membership by fifty-one, including himself as Sovereign, and Philip IV later increased it by a further ten members. The Statutes also made provision for four officers of the Order, the Chancellor, Treasurer, King of Arms, and Greffier.

In the 1431 Ordinances, Philip granted that changes could be made to certain articles of the Statutes in consultation with other members of the Order, excepting particular articles that only he could revise. Thus, for example, in 1440 the second article of the Statutes was emended to allow emperors, kings, and dukes to belong to other orders as well as the Order of the Golden Fleece. At the 1445 chapter in Ghent, the Order decided that a thorough review of the Statutes was needed and a committee of five Knights duly presented revised statutes to Philip in January of 1446. The principle changes wrought by these revisions dealt with the organization of the statutes. All of the articles addressing the duties of the four officers of the Order were set aside and renumbered as a separate set of statutes, and some of the remaining articles were rearranged so that the text would follow a more logical progression. All of these revisions are lacking in this copy.

At the time that this manuscript was produced members of the Order of the Golden Fleece were struggling to maintain the rights granted them in the Statutes. After the election in 1559 of a new Knight of the Order against the will of the sixth Sovereign of the Order, Philip II of Spain, Philip ceased convening the members of the Order for chapters, thereby undermining the members' ability to elect new members and exercise other rights outlined in the Statutes. From this point onward, the Sovereign of the Order appointed its new members. Furthermore, during the revolt of the largely Protestant Low Countries against the rule of the Catholic Philip beginning in the 1560s, members of the Order struggled with the Sovereign over the upholding of the Statutes. An example of the importance of the Statutes in this time period is the case of two members of the Order, Lamoral, Count of Egmont, and Philip de Montmorency, Count of Horn, who were imprisoned by Fernando Álvarez de Toledo, Duke of Alba, a representative of the king and fellow member of the Order, for protesting Philip's policies of taxation and religious repression in the Low Countries. They cited the Statutes in arguing their right to a

trial by their peers in the Order. In spite of this, the Duke of Alba had them executed in 1568, citing precedents in the Order's records.

LITERATURE

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Reiffenberg, Baron Frédéric Auguste Ferdinand Thomas de. *Histoire de l'Ordre de la Toison d'Or depuis son institution jusqu'à la cessation des chapitres généraux, etc.*, Brussels, 1830.

ONLINE RESOURCES

Chronique de Jean le Fèvre, Seigneur de Saint-Rémy, ed. François Morand, Paris, 1881 (with early history of the Order and a copy of the revised Statutes)

<https://archive.org/details/chroniquedejeanl02lef>

La Toison d'or ou Recueil des statuts et ordonnances du noble ordre de la Toison d'or, leurs confirmations, changemens, additions, cérémonies, immunités, exemptions, prééminences, honneurs et bulles papales depuis l'institution jusques à présent. Avec les remarques sur le contenu desdits statuts et ordonnances, Cologne, Pierre Sweitzer, 1689 (this Edition preserves the revised Statutes)

http://books.google.com/books?id=Yj8VAAAAQAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summy_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false

Society of the Golden Fleece (with many links, including a list of members)

<http://www.antiquesatoz.com/sgfleece/>

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