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## Liturgical Documents: French Ordinals

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# LITURGICAL DOCUMENTS: FRENCH ORDINALS

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Session 419 (Saturday, May 9): **Iconography and Liturgy**

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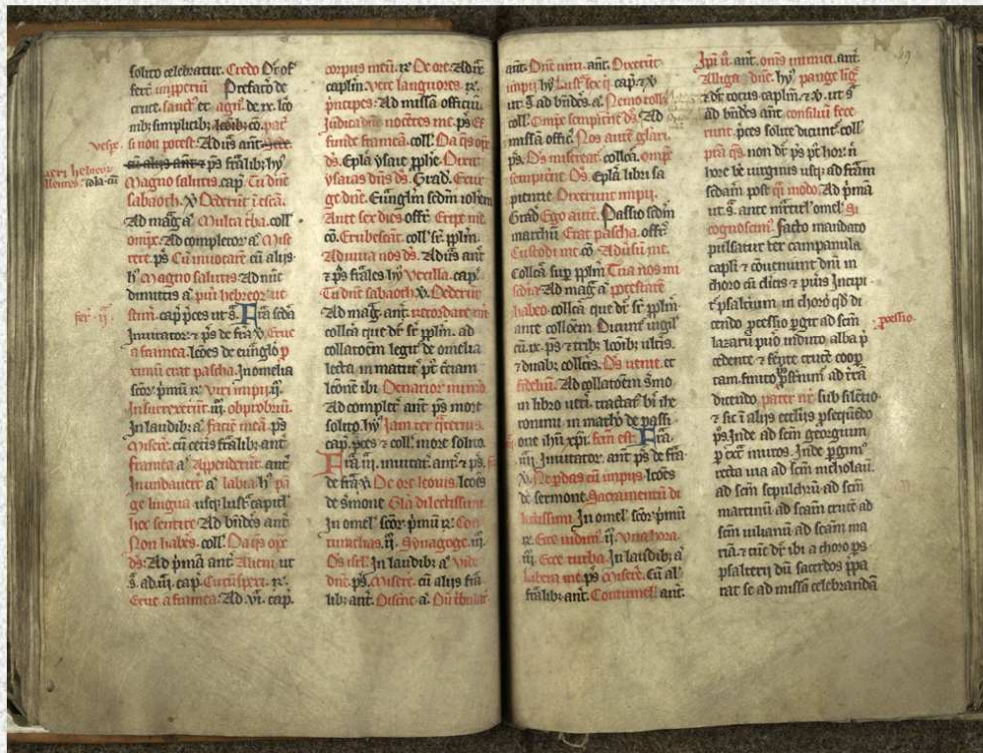
Organizer: Martha W. Driver, Pace Univ., and Patricia Stirnemann, Institut de recherche et d'histoire des textes (CNRS).

Among liturgical books, the ordinal is the least understood, because it is the most difficult to characterize. Its name comes from the Latin word *ordo*, a generic term that can mean both the description of a ceremony and the list of texts to be read. Unlike the missal, the antiphony or pontifical, an ordinal is not used in the celebration of a service. It does not contain the complete text of the prayers, chants or readings that the celebrant or the other clergy pronounce during the mass, the office, or for the sacrament. It is a sort of general guide to the liturgy for a particular church.

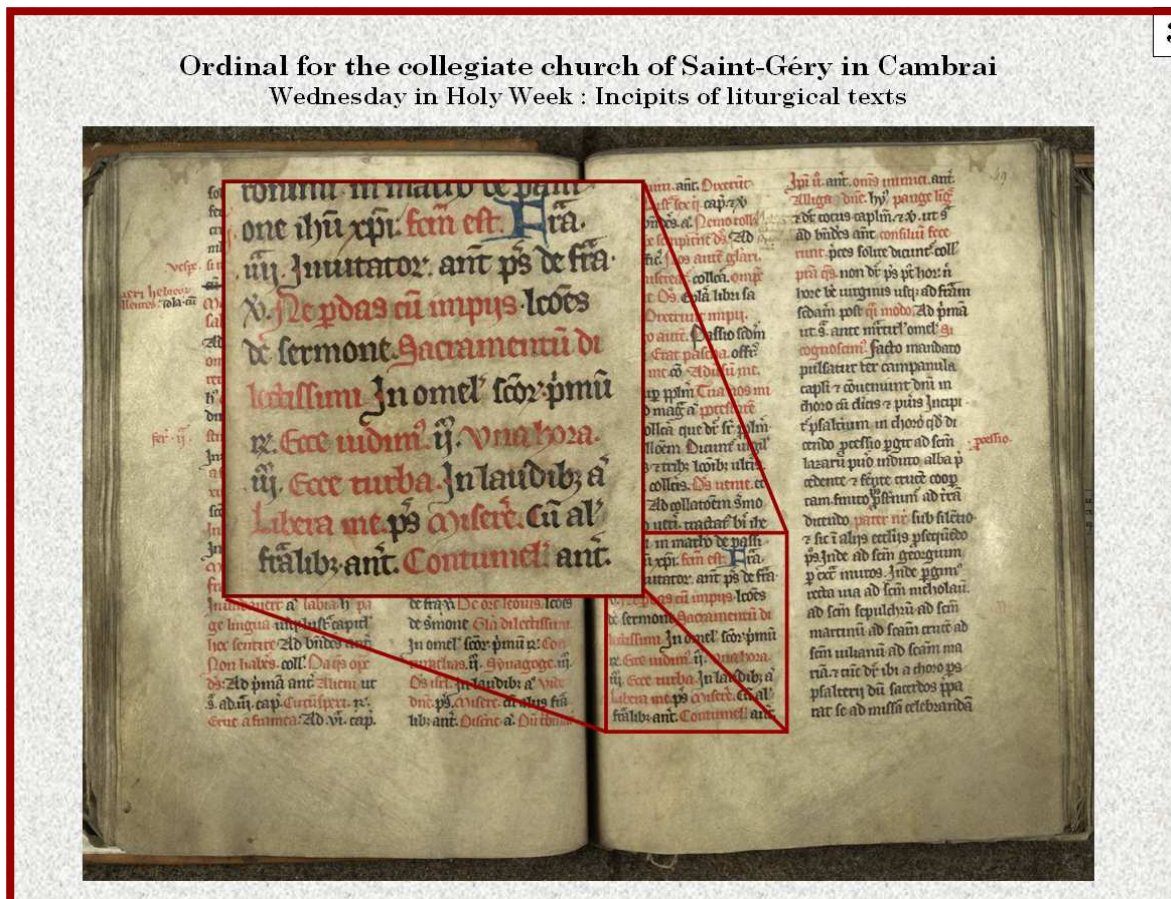
## I. Exploration of an ordinal

For all the days of the year, feasts, Sundays and ferial days within the week, the ordinal gives an abbreviated list of the chants, readings and prayers, in the form of incipits:

Ordinal for the collegiate church of Saint-Géry in Cambrai  
Cambrai, Bibl. mun., ms. 202, f. 48v-49



[2] Here is a page from an ordinal from the collegiate church of Saint-Géry in Cambrai, a city in the north of France; it is datable to the third quarter of the thirteenth century. The incipits of the liturgical texts, written in red in this manuscript, are particularly visible.



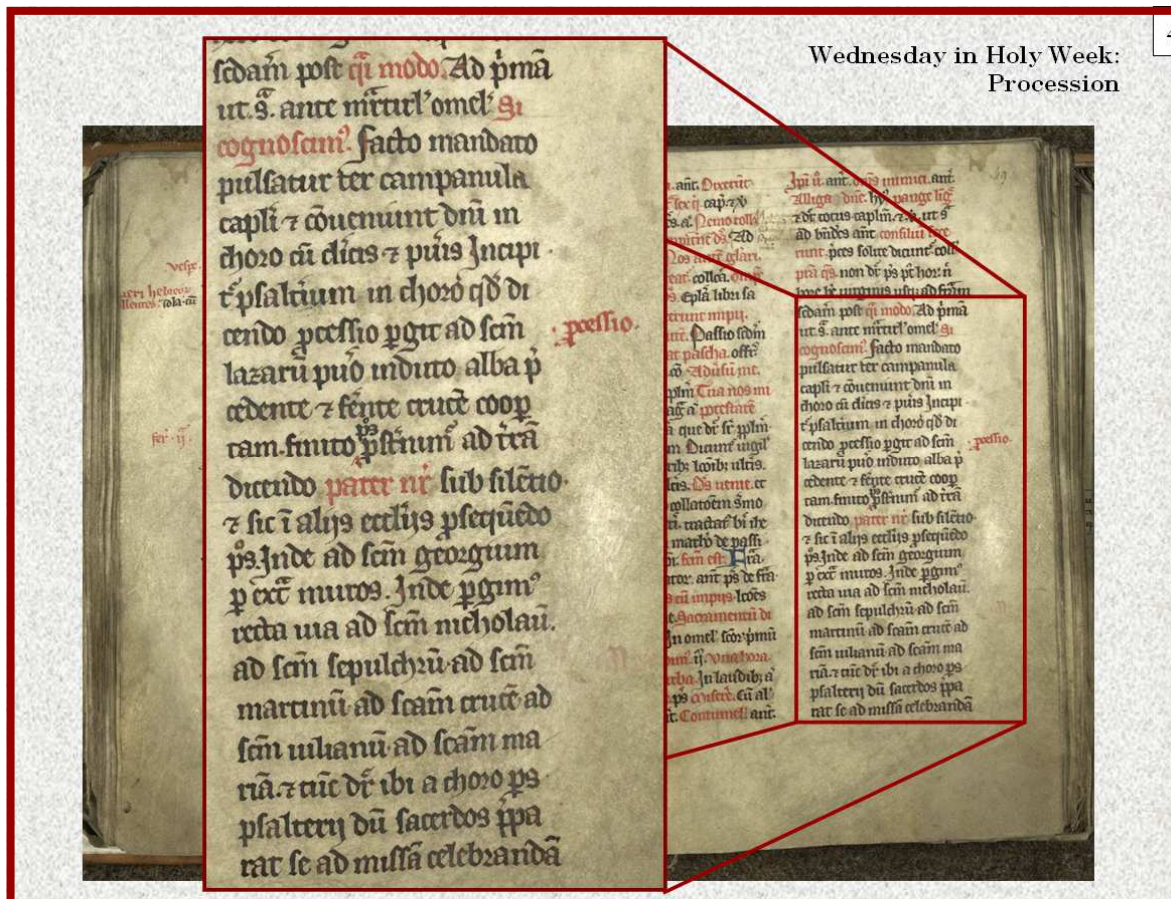
[3] - Each article begins with an indication of the liturgical day: *Feria quarta*, which means Wednesday, and in this case Wednesday of Holy Week.

- Next are the details of the liturgical pieces: *Invitatorium, antiphona, psalmi de feria* – which are the invitatory, antiphons and psalms for the ferial day. Since they are the same as those recited every Wednesday at Matins, it is not necessary to mention the incipits.

- On the other hand, the manuscript gives the incipits of the texts recited only on the Wednesday of Holy Week: the verse- *Ne perdas cum impiis*; the readings for Matins - *Sacramentum dilectissimi*; the three responses that must accompany the readings: *Primum responsorium 'Ecce vidimus', secundum 'Una hora', tertium 'Ecce turba'*.

- Then come the pieces for Lauds: the antiphon *Libera me*, with the psalm *Miserere*, and so on.

But an ordinal is not simply a list of texts. It also contains a description of the liturgical acts, such as processions, and certain unusual rites such as the Easter Vigil, the diocesan synod or the distribution of alms on certain occasions.



[4] Here you see in the right-hand column a long passage, written in brown ink, which contains very few incipits of liturgical texts. It is the itinerary of a procession through the city of Cambrai. It begins at the hour of Prime, the moment of the washing of the feet, which took place every day during Lent.

*Facto mandato*

After the washing of the feet

*pulsatur ter campanula capituli*

the bell must be rung three times in the chapter house

*et convenient domini in choro*

and the canons (of Saint-Géry) assemble in the choir

*cum clericis et pueris.*

with the clergy and children.

*Incipitur psalterium in choro.*

The recitation of psalms begins in the choir.

*Quod dicendo processio pergit ad Sanctum Lazarum.*

While they are read, the procession advances to Saint Lazarus,

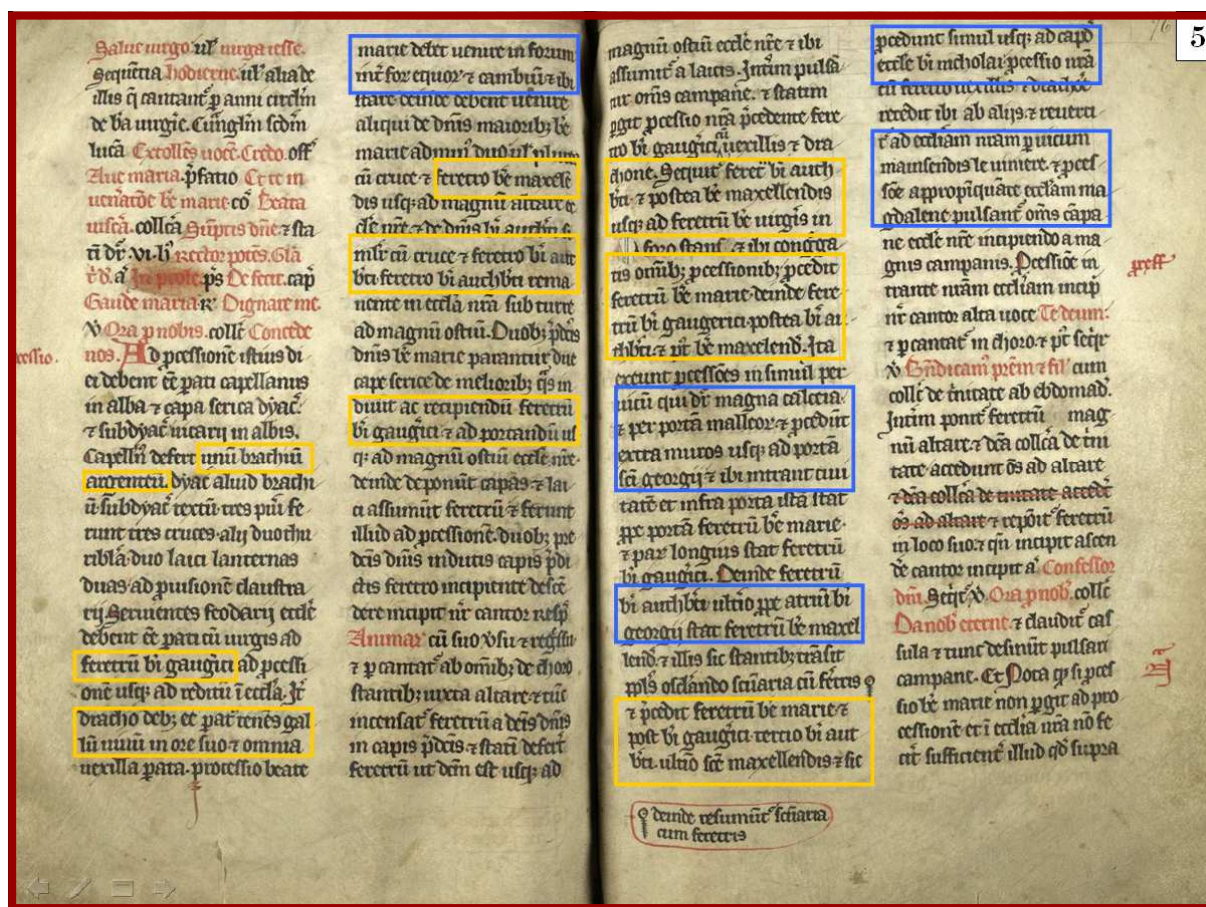
*puero induto alba precedente*

led by a child wearing an alb

*et ferente cruce coopertam.*

and carrying a veiled cross.

The procession then visits most of the churches in the city of Cambrai, before returning to the collegiate church of Saint-Géry.



[5] A little further in the same manuscript, here is the *ordo* of another procession in honour of the Virgin. It took place on the Monday following Trinity Sunday, and all the major churches in Cambrai participated: the canons of the cathedral, those of the abbey of Saint-Aubert and the collegiate church of Saint-Géry. I have framed in yellow the mention of liturgical objects, such as, in the left-hand column, the reliquary in silver containing the arm of Saint Géry (*brachium argenteum*) and, a bit lower, a dragon holding a live rooster in its mouth (*dracho tenens gallum vivum in ore suo*). The names of the places and streets where the procession passed are framed in blue: for example, in the right-hand column, the name of the street: *per vicum Mainsendis le Viniere*.

This topographical information is particularly important for the city of Cambrai, which was partially destroyed in the sixteenth century, and then completely levelled during the First World War. Likewise, all the reliquaries mentioned on this page disappeared at the French Revolution. Passages like this are extremely interesting for historians. They help reconstruct the ground-plan and place-names of a medieval city and they are an archaeological witness to the cultural furnishings and interior disposition of the church, with its altars and its adjacent buildings: the chapter house, cloister, treasury and so on.

The ordinal also settles the problem of the convergence of several offices on the same day. For example, when a feast falls on a Sunday, one has to decide which of the two offices should be celebrated on that day. For the one that is judged secondary, should it be

transferred to another date, or be the object of a simple commemoration on the given Sunday, or be completely omitted? These situations vary from year to year. The role of the ordinal is to foresee what should be done in each case.

**Ordinal for the cathedral  
in Amiens**

Amiens, Bibl. mun., ms. 184, f. 33

**Feast of St Nicasius  
(14<sup>th</sup> December)  
Incidence on Temporal**

1. Thursday in the 2<sup>nd</sup> week in Advent
2. Friday in the 2<sup>nd</sup> week in Advent
3. Saturday in the 2<sup>nd</sup> week in Advent
4. Third Sunday in Advent
5. Monday in the 3<sup>rd</sup> week in Advent
6. Tuesday in the 3<sup>rd</sup> week in Advent
7. Embertide Wednesday in Advent

6

capellanus in caput feriat. *in*  
*Stola prima. un. cinglin*  
*Cum audierint. Non dicit*  
*Credo. off. Annuntia. San*  
*ctus scs. Agnus d. Et si*  
*coram. Benedictamus dno.*  
*Ad vs ultimol regit. chour*  
*in caput vltra. a. Acepta g.*  
*Sola sup ps dicit. q. Sancti*  
*Jerusta. h. Scorum merital.*  
*Letamini in dno. Apulo. an*  
*prepuent. xpi. Tota ante*  
*magus. Ab uno in capu ru*  
*tea thurificat altare. o. De*  
*us qui nos conat. De aduen*  
*tu sequit mem. v. eme de*  
*mirib. Aliaquo. v. Gultet*  
*ipst. o. pia qis o. d. Benedi*  
*camus d. Ad completorui*  
*ur sup. Si hie fructibus fir*  
*ipstibus fir. velyi de mitaly p. la*  
*duplici. de adueru rami me. p. nolo*  
*rig. de adueru q. i. Et salbi dicit de*  
*ber. i. c. hio dicit ad pcessione. hie*  
*is h. est. i. dicit. hie. ipi offic. fier. i*  
*ctio. c. dicit. o. ipa. dicit. fier. de*  
*adueru. In h. dicit. hie. velyi de sal*  
*mchallo. locit. et. i. me. de. adue*  
*tu. de. sal. fulciano. ipa. d. fia. h.*  
*te. hie. velyi. de. recepde. facie*  
*scidupli. hie. i. dicit. o. h. magu*  
*o. h. dicit. o. dicit. o. dicit. de*  
*recepde. a. o. dicit. o. dicit. de*  
*de. sal. machallo. i. sal. fulciano. men*  
*Laudes. v. p. p. e. e. u. s. e. m. f. e. r. e*  
*scie. dicit. h. i. s. e. r. t. a. p. r. e. a. d. e. r. e.*  
*Item si hie festum h. i. s. e. d. a. t. i. e.*  
*et. d. m. a. d. e. a. d. u. e. n. t. u. s. e. u. e. n. i. t.*  
*ip. u. s. o. f. f. i. c. i. u. m. f. i. e. r. i. p. s. a. d. i. e. l. a. u. d. e. s.*  
*de. s. u. o. p. p. r. e. e. u. s. d. e. f. e. r. i. e. s. c. i. e.*  
*d. i. c. e. n. t. u. r. h. i. t. r. a. q. u. a. r. t. e. e. t. d. o.*  
*m. a. d. e. a. d. u. e. n. t. u. s. Item si h*  
*festum h. i. s. e. d. a. t. i. e. e. t. d. o. m. a.*  
*de. a. d. u. e. n. t. u. s. e. u. e. n. i. t. i. p. s. u. s.*  
*o. f. f. i. c. i. u. m. f. i. e. r. i. p. s. a. d. i. e. l. a. u. d. e. s.*  
*v. p. p. r. e. e. u. s. d. e. f. e. r. i. e. t. i. e. d. i. c.*  
*t. u. r. h. i. q. u. a. r. t. a. q. u. a. r. t. e. e. t. d. o.*  
*m. a. d. e. a. d. u. e. n. t. u. s. Item si h. i. e.*  
*festum h. i. s. e. d. a. t. i. e. q. u. e. d. i. a. d.*  
*ang. l. i. m. g. r. i. g. i. t. i. p. s. u. s. o. f. f. i. c. i.*  
*u. m. f. i. e. r. h. i. q. u. i. n. t. a. s. e. q. u. i. t.*  
*r. e. n. s. o. n. a. v. e. r. l. a. u. d. e. s. p. p. r. e.*  
*e. u. s. d. e. m. f. i. e. q. u. i. n. t. a. d. i. c. e. n. t.*  
*h. i. q. u. i. n. t. a. q. u. i. n. t. e. e. t. d. o. m. a. d.*  
*u. e. n. t. u. s. Et notand e quod*  
*sempr in crastino scil mcha*

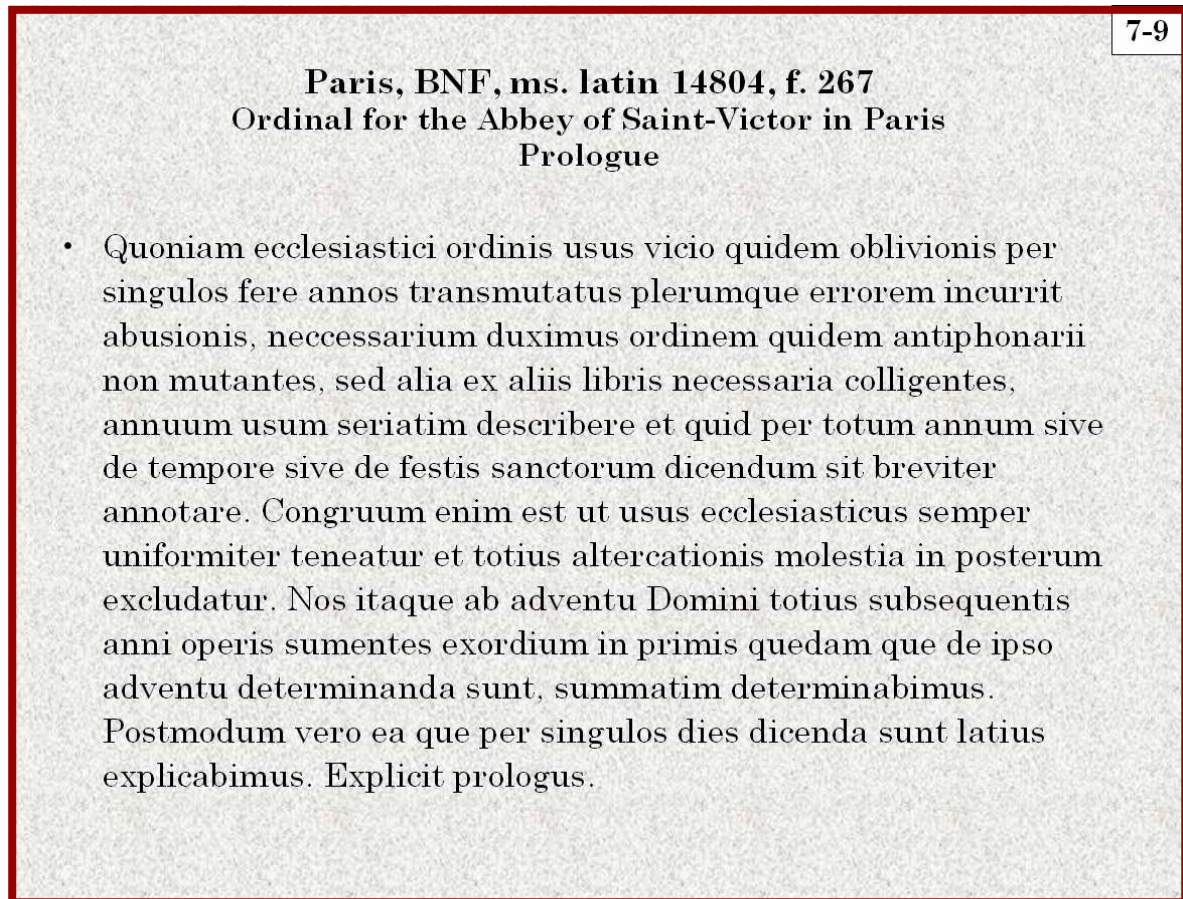
5  
6  
7

[6] This is an ordinal for Amiens Cathedral from the late thirteenth century. At the end of the article is the feast of Saint Nicaise, which falls on the fourteenth of December. The drafter of the ordinal needed almost an entire page in order to foresee all the possible situations. Depending upon the year, the feast of Saint Nicaise can conflict with seven other offices in the temporal, between the Thursday of the second week in Advent and the Wednesday of the third week, called Embertide Wednesday in Advent. The two first cases are not treated, because they pose no problem: the Thursday and Friday of the second week in Advent have no particular texts apart from the antiphons at the *Benedictus* and *Magnificat*. If these days fall on the fourteenth of December, their office will simply be commemorated at the end of Lauds and Vespers of the office for the feast of Saint Nicaise. The other situations are more complex and have to be dealt with one by one. For example, the office of the third Sunday in Advent cannot be displaced (this is number four in the outline). Thus, if it falls on the fourteenth of December, the feast of Saint Nicaise will be transferred to the following day. But the Vespers of Sunday evening will then conflict with the first Vespers of the feast of Saint Nicaise.

The case of Saint Nicaise is relatively simple, because it may conflict with only seven offices. Imagine all the possible combinations that can occur during the Easter cycle, where the date of the movable feasts varies over a full month! And the use of the cathedral of Amiens includes feasts for over two hundred and fifty saints, without counting the vigils and octaves!

## II. Why are ordinals written in the Middle Ages?

This is one of the reasons ordinals were needed in the Middle Ages, but it is not the only one. This is the prologue for the ordinal of the abbey of Saint-Victor in Paris, composed in the first decade of the thirteenth century. It summarizes rather well the motivations that led to the making of this kind of book.



[7] First, one had to resolve the difficulties stemming from the infinite variations in the office due to the mobility of temporal celebrations, which could easily provoke errors.

[8] Secondly, the ordinal made up for the deficiencies in other liturgical books. The chants, prayers and readings for the mass and the office are dispersed in many books: lectionaries, homilaries, passionaries, collectars, antiphonals, missals, graduals, and so on. This prologue states that it was necessary to complete the antiphonal (*ordinem antiphonarii*), namely the books of chants for the office and the mass, with the texts taken from other books (*alia ex aliis libris necessaria colligentes*).

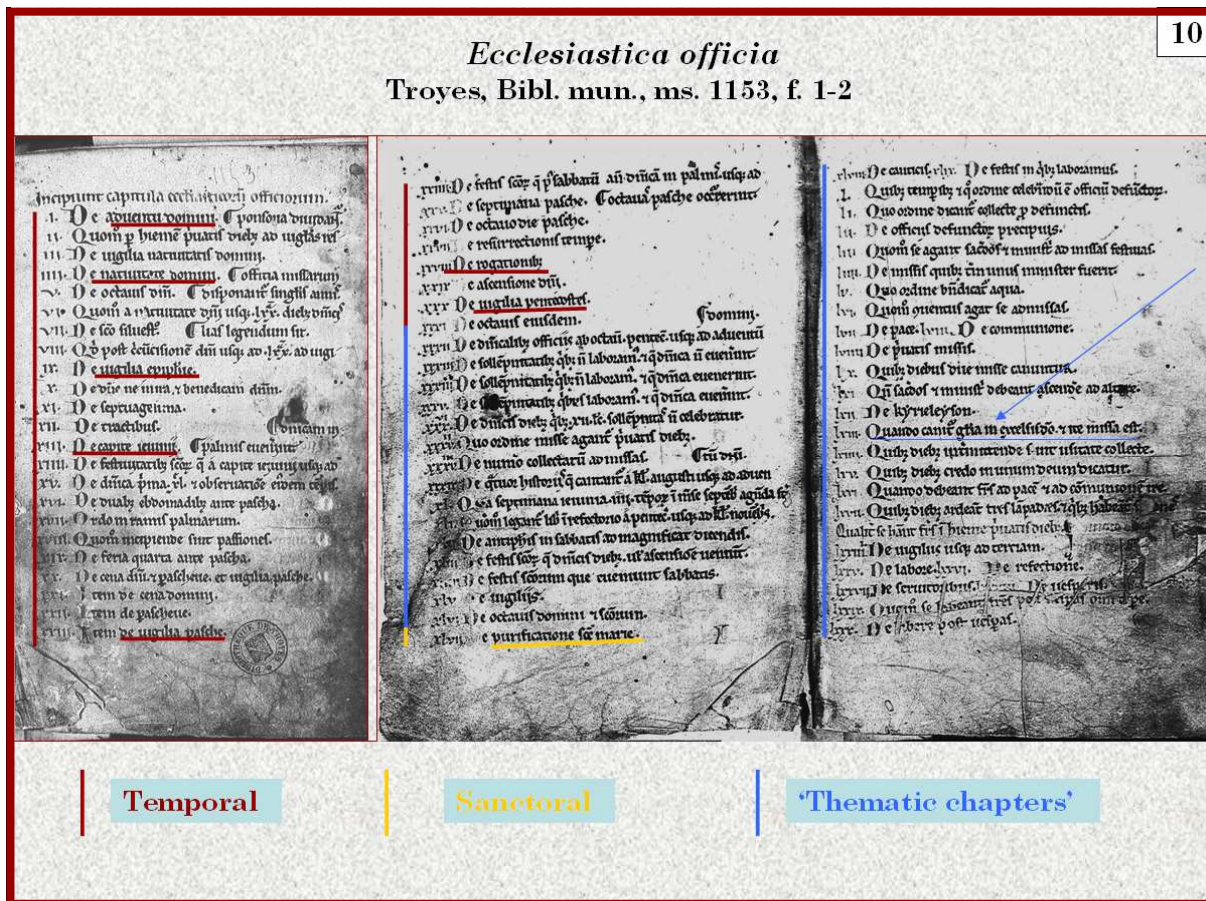
Furthermore, the manuscripts are not as complete as modern printed books. When a liturgical text, such as a response, is used for several offices in the year, it is copied *in extenso* only on its first occurrence in the manuscript. Thereafter it is sometimes recalled by an *incipit*, but generally it is omitted. In this case, only the ordinal allows one to know which response to use or where to find it.

[9] Finally and most importantly, the ordinal serves to avoid conflicts within communities of canons or monks.

*Congruum enim est ut usus ecclesiasticus semper uniformiter teneatur et totius altercationis molestia in posterum excludatur.*

“It is indeed a good thing that the ecclesiastical usage always be observed in a uniform manner and that hereafter the inconvenience of any dispute be avoided.”

All prologues insist on this point. The ordinal is not only a practical instrument. It is a normative code that has authority, approved and published at diocesan synods or general chapters. These assemblies were the occasion for clearing up liturgical problems, like the introduction of a new feast in the calendar after the canonisation of a new saint. The diocesan statutes and capitularies contain many decisions concerning the cult, treated in the same manner as legal matters.

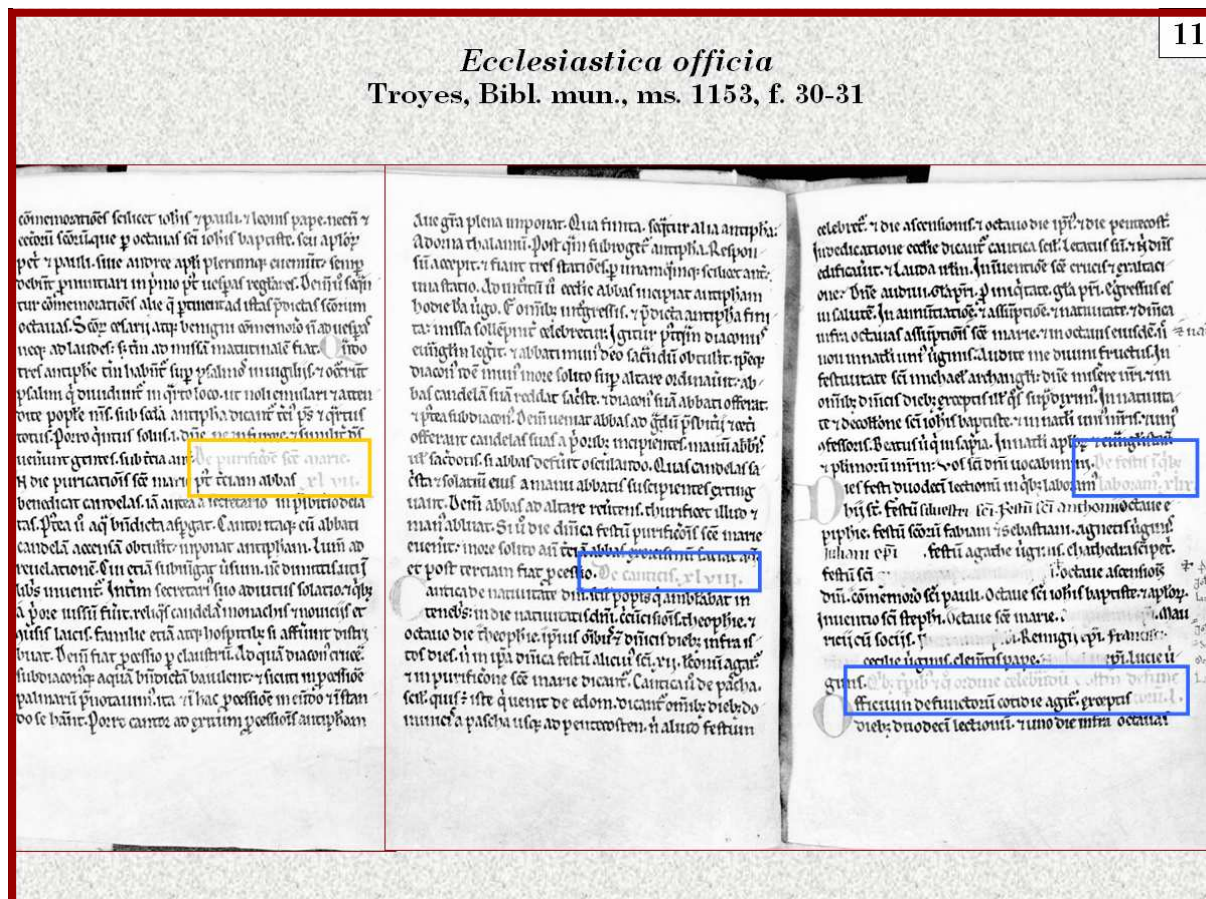


[10] This legal aspect pertains specially to the communities of monks and regular canons, who try to maintain a unified liturgy convent to convent. In the third quarter of the twelfth century, the Cistercians, for example, composed a customary called *Ecclesiastica officia*, which contained many liturgical prescriptions, but not the details for the offices, as would be provided by the ordinal. You can see here the table of contents of this book.

- The temporal is underlined in red. These chapters deal with problems of scheduling and give no liturgical texts.



- The sanctoral is absent, with the exception of the Feast of the Purification (underlined in yellow).
- All the other feasts for saints are treated in the ‘thematic’ chapters (underlined in blue), such as *De festis in quibus laboramus...* “Feast days on which we work...”, etc.
- Most of the liturgical questions are treated independently of the calendar. For example: *Quando canitur ‘Gloria in excelsis Deo’ et ‘Ite missa est’* (When one must sing *Gloria in excelsis Deo* and the *Ite missa est*).

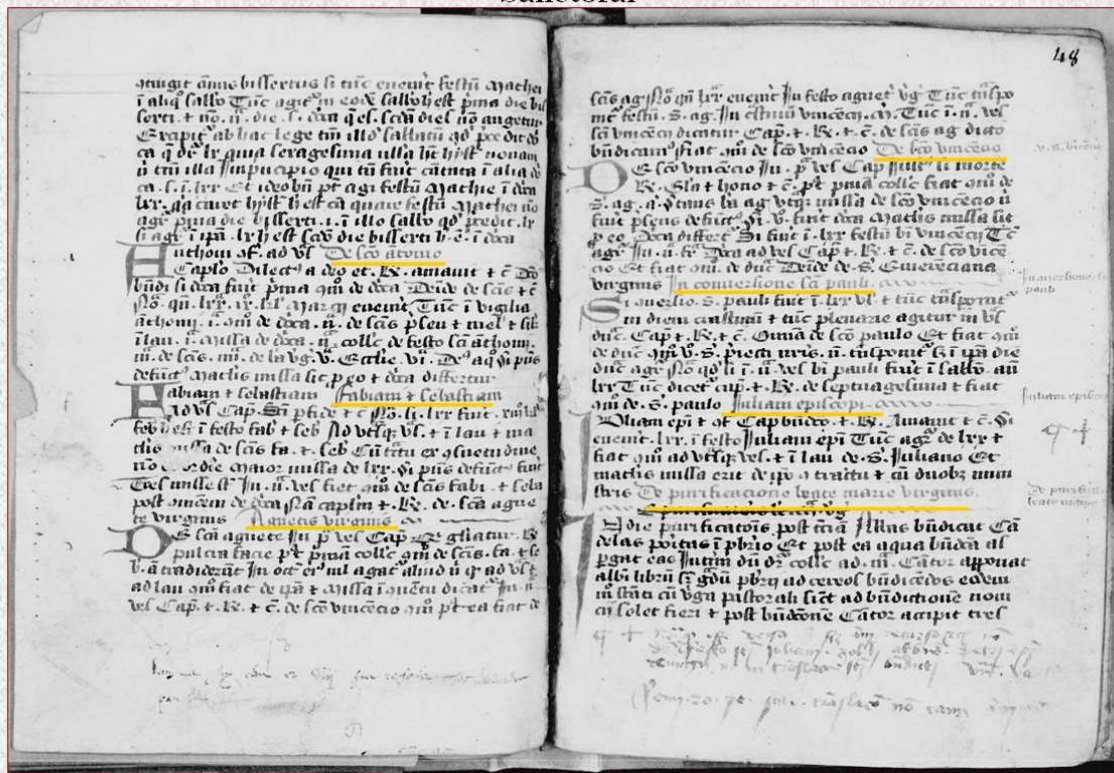


[11] When one looks at the content of a text, here the article for the feast of the Purification of the Virgin, it contains almost no incipits, but is limited to the details concerning the benediction of candles. Therefore you cannot confuse the *Ecclesiastica officia* with an ordinal.

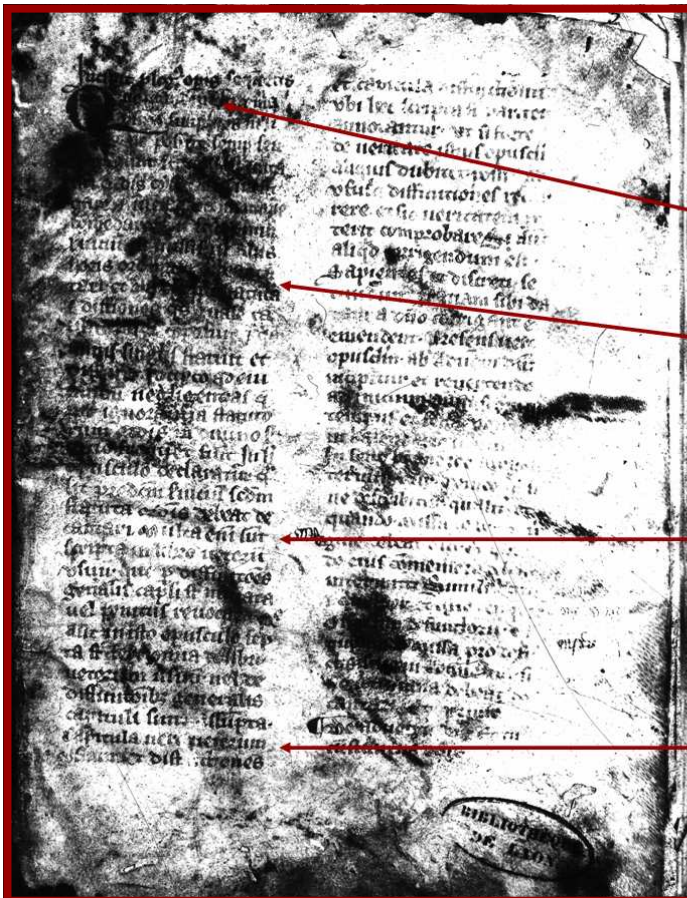
In the second half of the twelfth century, Cistercians did not need an ordinal, because their liturgical books were copied directly on the very complete models at Cîteaux. [12] The situation changed in the course of the thirteenth century. The decisions taken by the general chapter became so numerous that the Cistercians were obliged to gather them together and write an ordinal<sup>1</sup>.

1. All those documents of the Cistercian liturgy were discovered and analysed by Olivier LEGENDRE (2007, October 5: “Préserver, unifier? À quoi sert un ordinaire liturgique”, Séminaire “L’Église et les églises en Occident au Moyen Âge”).

Cistercian Ordinal – 13<sup>th</sup> century  
Troyes, Bibl. mun., ms. 1881, f. 47v-48  
Sanctoral

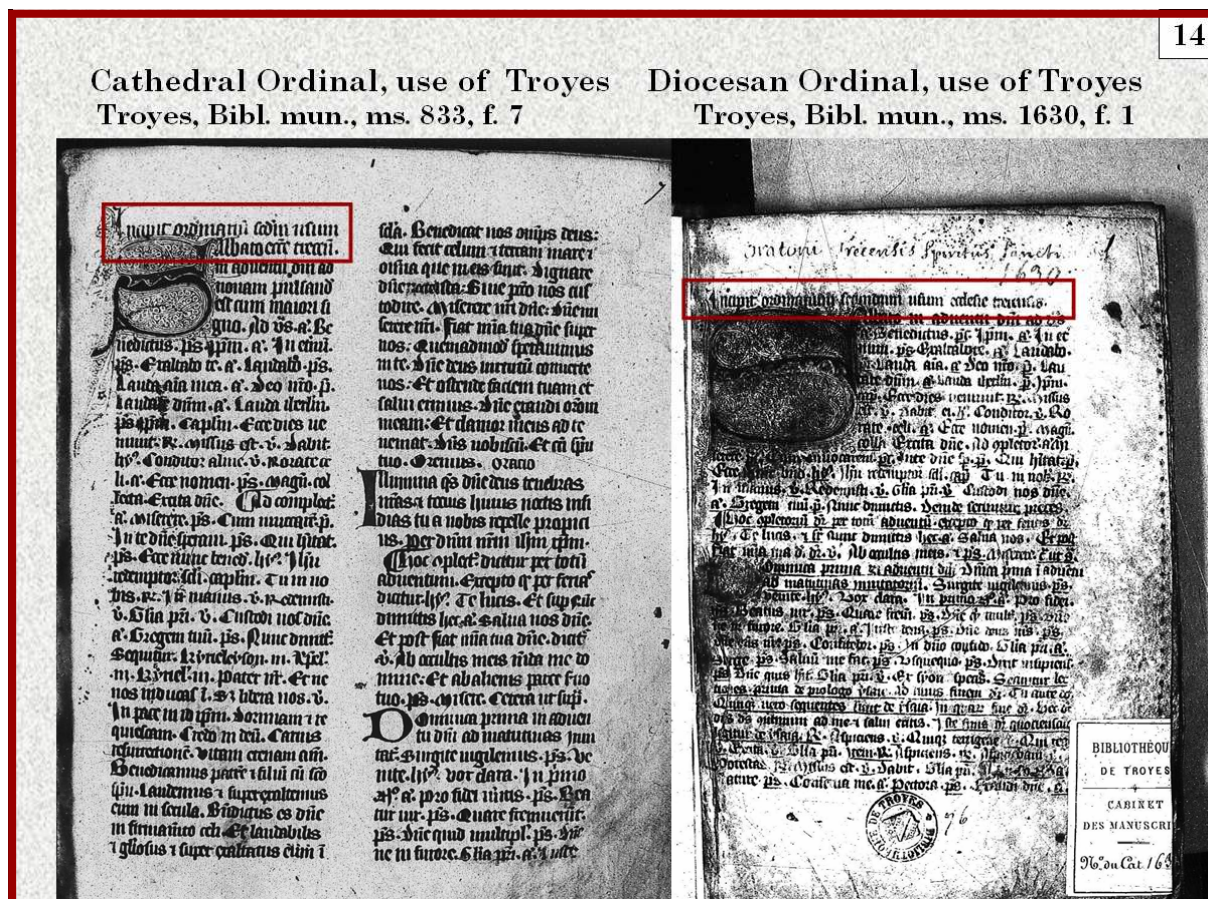


Cistercian Ordinal – Quoniam multi  
Laon, Bibl. mun., ms. 210, f. 1  
Prologue



- Quoniam multi...
- ...et maxime propter statuta et diffinitiones quas generale capitulum composuit [et quas] annis singulis statuit et diffinivit...
- Multa enim sunt scripta in Libro veterum usuum [= Ecclesiastica officia], que per diffinitiones generalis capituli sunt mutata vel penitus revocata...
- Capitula vero veterum usuum et distinctiones et capitula [diffinitionum] ubi hec scripta sunt pariter annotantur...

[13] But the liturgical legislation grew so large that, in the early fourteenth century, they had to write a new ordinal, entitled *Quoniam multi*, after its incipit. The prologue tells us that this is a vast synthesis integrating the material of the *Ecclesiastica officia* and all the statutes and definitions of the general chapter that complete or cancel them. By the end of the Middle Ages, the Cistercians are completely out of control. They copy enormous compilations that bring together the *Ecclesiastica officia*, the ordinal *Quoniam multi*, and new collections of statutes.



Cathedral Ordinal, use of Troyes  
Troyes, Bibl. mun., ms. 833, f. 7

Diocesan Ordinal, use of Troyes  
Troyes, Bibl. mun., ms. 1630, f. 1

[14] The ordinals of secular churches show the same desire to unify and synthesize the legislation of the cult. The liturgy of the cathedral is the model for all the parish churches in the diocese. This can be shown by two ordinals from Troyes. At first glance, they look the same. Both have the title *ordinarium secundum usum ecclesie Trecentis*: “Ordinal for the use of the Church of Troyes”. But the one on the right is an abridged version of the one on the left. All the ceremonies that take place only in the cathedral, like certain offices and solemn masses where the bishop is present, are not reproduced in the diocesan ordinal.

### III. Conclusion and projects

By showing you these manuscripts, my purpose has been to demonstrate the interest of medieval ordinals, which are still so little known. You have seen that they are a mine of information for the archaeology, place names and certain aspects of daily life in the Middle Ages. But more specially, they give the measure of the power and identity of the ecclesiastical institutions with relation to one another. The fact that a collegiate church like Saint-Géry has a liturgical usage that is quite distinct from that of the cathedral of Cambrai is proof of its independence. In a very centralised order like that of the Cistercians, the particularities of the local diocese never influence the liturgy of their abbeys. On the other hand, diocesan practice has far more influence on the abbeys of Premonstratensian or Victorine canons. This permeability of local use is evidence of a lesser cohesion in these congregations. The history of religious institutions in the Middle Ages is too often limited to the study of their spirituality and their temporal power. In the eyes of their contemporaries, their identity was defined in the first place by their liturgy. This historiographical blind spot can only be filled by the study, analysis and dating of these manuscripts.

15

P. Collomb, J.-B. Lebigue, O. Legendre, *Catalogue des ordinaires des bibliothèques publiques de France* (CNRS, Coll. Documents, études et répertoires) — 2011

*Catalogue de manuscrits liturgiques médiévaux et modernes*, dir. J.-B. Lebigue, Orléans : Institut de recherche et d'histoire des textes, 2006 → (Ædilis, Publications scientifiques, 7)  
[on line:] <http://www.cn-telma.fr/liturgie/>

*L'Abrégé de Guillaume Lévêque : l'ordinaire-coutumier de Saint-Germain-des-Prés en 1395*, éd. J.-B. Lebigue (CNRS, Coll. Sources de l'histoire médiévale) — 2010

J.-B. Lebigue, *Initiation aux manuscrits liturgiques*, Orléans : Institut de recherche et d'histoire des textes, 2007 (Ædilis, Publications pédagogiques, 6)  
[on line:] <http://aedilis.irht.cnrs.fr/initiation-liturgie/>

[15] This is why Olivier Legendre, Pascal Collomb and I have undertaken a catalogue of ordinals in French libraries. It will include around two hundred and fifty entries, drawn from a list of some eight hundred manuscripts compiled by Eric Palazzo. The manuscripts that are eliminated are briefly described in an on-line catalogue that you can consult on the website Telma, developed by IRHT and the École des chartes. Of course it is difficult to analyse these fascinating documents without wanting to edit one or two. The ordinal of Saint-Germain-des-Prés, composed by the abbot Guillaume Lévêque in 1395, and known from two copies at the Bibliothèque nationale in Paris, will be published in 2010. It is a marvellous document because it gives us a graphic description of monastic life, including non liturgical details, such

as the distribution of fur-lined boots in October, or the menu for certain meals. It also contains an exceptional type of calendar, in which the hagiographic readings for Matins have precise references to seventeen books of readings used at the office, designated by the common title and the number of the text. This has permitted the identification of the collections of lives of saints, passionaries and homilies used for the office at Saint-Germain-des-Prés at the end of the fourteenth century.

**ÆOLIS** **Initiation aux manuscrits liturgiques** **irht**  
Edilis, Publications pédagogiques, 6

Accueil | Notions préliminaires | Livres de l'office | Livres de la messe | Organisation du culte | Bibliographie | Index

Jean-Baptiste LEBIGUE (IRHT)

◀ précédent | suivant ▶

## Initiation aux manuscrits liturgiques



Douai, Bibl. mun., ms. 90, t. II, f. 98v-99  
Missel d'Anchin  
Anchin, vers 1200

Ce dossier pédagogique propose une initiation aux manuscrits liturgiques de rite

### Sommaire du dossier

- Accueil
- Notions préliminaires
  - Temps en liturgie
  - Temporal
  - Sanctoral
  - Liturgie votive
- Livres de l'office
  - Office des heures
  - Psautier et ordinaire de l'office
  - Propres de l'office
  - Offices supplémentaires au propre
  - Primes et processions
  - Exercices
- Livres de la messe
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  - Livres des lectures de la messe
  - Livres pour le chant de la messe
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  - Ordines, statuts et coutumes
  - Liturgie des défunts
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  - Index des manuscrits

[16] In conclusion, I would like to remind you of our website, which provides an “Introduction to liturgical manuscripts”, not as yet translated into English. I hope nonetheless that it will help you to become familiar with these documents, which are indeed complex, but so promising for future discoveries.

Jean-Baptiste LEBIGUE