

The first manuscript containing Euclid's *Elementa Geometria*

Euclid, *Stoiceia* or *Elementa*. Byzantine manuscript, in Greek, on parchment, dated 888 AD. 9 1/8 inches x 7 3/8 inches (232 x 187 mm), iii + 782 pages.

Euclid's mathematical treatise, *Elements of Geometry*, is the most famous textbook in history. Numerous manuscripts attest to its widespread use in the era before Gutenberg, and over a thousand printed editions survive, circulating in millions of copies. Although a handsome edition of the *Elements* was published in Venice in 1482, its text was derived from a late thirteenth-century Italian's version of an early twelfth-century Englishman's translation of an Arabic rendition of Euclid's original Greek. Until Simon Grynaeus' edition, published in Basel in 1533, Euclid could only be read in the original in a manuscript such as this.

This Byzantine manuscript has been one of the treasures of the Bodleian Library for just over two centuries. It came to Oxford with the purchase in 1804 of the 570 manuscripts owned by the Dutch classicist Jacques Philippe D'Orville (1696–1751), sometime Professor of History, Eloquence, and Greek at Amsterdam. Few of his manuscripts were ancient, this Euclid being the chief exception. William Dunn Macray describes it as “the gem of the collection” in his *Annals of the Bodleian Library, Oxford* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1890), p.282.

Dated manuscripts are uncommon, and of great documentary and paleographical value. This manuscript bears the date September AD 888 on the verso of folio 387. The scribe's name is also recorded: “ceiri stefanou klhrikou” (by the hand of Stephanos the clerk). This leaf also records the name of an early tenth-century owner, Arethas of Patrae (later Bishop of Caesarea), and the price he paid for the book. The manuscript contains not only the thirteen genuine books of Euclid, complete with diagrams, but the two supplementary non-Euclidean books: the fourteenth is generally considered to date from the second century BC and the fifteenth from the sixth century AD.

This valuable manuscript is bound in late eighteenth-century calf, lettered

“Euclidis Codex” with “D.O.” lettered in gilt at foot of the spine. Inscribed on verso of front free endpaper is the Bodleian code: MS D’Orville 301.

Octavo code: eucmsd