

JOHANNES BURIDANUS, *Questiones super octo Physicorum libros Aristotelis* (Question-commentaries on Aristotle's Eight Books on Physics), Books III-VI, Book VIII  
In Latin, decorated manuscript on paper  
France, Paris(?), dated 1395

51 folios on thick paper, watermarks close to Briquet no. 4582, "Coupe": Paris, 1396-1403; Briquet no. 4583, "Coupe": Paris, 1395-1398; Briquet no. 3969, "Cloche": Paris, 1393, lacking an undetermined number of leaves at the start (at least the first six quires, likely all of 12 leaves, so a total of 72 folios?), lacking a quire between ff. 35-36 (quire signature L), ends complete, with ff. 47-51v actually blank leaves at the end (collation i<sup>12</sup> [-1, with loss of text] ii-iv<sup>12</sup> v<sup>4</sup>), quire signatures, a few catchwords, ruled in ink (justification 165 x 180 mm.), written in brown ink in a highly abridged gothic libraria bookhand in two columns, colophon at end of manuscript (f. 46v), rubrics in bright red, paragraph marks in alternating red or blue, large 3-line initials in red or blue, 6-line initials in blue highlighted in white on burnished gold grounds with colored and gold vine leaves and baguettes extending into the margin (introducing the major textual breaks: ff. 7v, 15v, 28). Bound in a contemporary binding of overturned green-stained calf on thick wooden boards, smooth spine, includes a chain fastened to a hasp on the back cover, chain renewed; boards with wormholes, some leather wanting with wooden boards left apparent. Dimensions 300 x 220 mm.

This deluxe manuscript preserves a rare, early, and unauthorized version (surviving in only 6 other copies) of an influential philosophical commentary on Aristotle. Produced only a generation after the death of the author, John Buridan, a celebrated fourteenth-century logician and philosopher, this volume is signed, dated, and even localized by its French scribe, Yvon Courtoys. Preserved in its original binding, this manuscript shines with elegant ivy-leaf and baguette decoration.

## PROVENANCE

1. A scribal colophon dates and localizes this manuscript to Paris, 1395: "Iste questiones physicorum sunt de tercio opere buridani et fuerunt scripte parisiis anno domini millesimo .ccc. nonagesimo quinto" (f. 46v). Since "parisiis" was added over an erasure, the manuscript may have been copied elsewhere (perhaps Brittany? see below) and then completed in Paris. The watermarks in the paper suggest a paper stock from Paris.

The scribe identifies himself in identical inscriptions at the ends of Books III and IV: "Deo gracias et fratri Yvoni Courtoys" (f. 7v, first column, and f. 15v, first column). In a third colophon at the end of the volume, he provides not only his name, but also that of his abbey: "[...] totius libri physicorum per manus Yvonis Courtoys filii conventus sancti pauli in Leonia per eo orate cum diligencia" (f. 46v, second column). This is the Couvent des Carmes of Saint-Pol-de-Léon, in Brittany (France). The scribe is unrecorded in Bénédictins du Bouveret, 1973.

2. A fifteenth-century inscription "F. G. Zelini iste liber pertinent" (f. 50), appears to indicate monastic ownership, with the initial "F" likely standing for "Frater."
3. Effaced inscription (completely illegible) beneath the colophon (f. 46v).

#### 4. France, Private collection.

##### TEXT

ff. 1-7v, [Johannes Buridanus, *Questiones super octo Physicorum libros Aristotelis*, Book III, *quaestiones* 16 to 21 (lacking beginning)] incipit, “//in columpna de tercio . . . omnium questionum 21 libri in phisicorum. Deo gracias et fratri Yvoni Courtoys etc. Expliciunt questiones tercii libri phisicorum et cetera”;

ff. 7v-15v, [Johannes Buridanus, *Questiones super octo Physicorum libros Aristotelis*, Book IV, Table of the *quaestiones*; *quaestiones* 1-2 ; part of *quaestio* 4; *quaestiones* 15-16 ; table] *Sequitur tabula quarti libri phisicorum cum questionibus eiusdem. . .* ; incipit, “Primo in isto quarto tractabitur de loco . . . questiones quartus phisicorum deo gracias et Yvoni Courtoys. Expliciunt questiones quarti phisicorum”;

ff. 15v-27v, [Johannes Buridanus, *Questiones super octo Physicorum libros Aristotelis*, Book V, Table of the *quaestiones*; *quaestiones* 1-8, table] *Incipit questiones quarti seu tabula. Tabula questionum quarti libri phisicorum. Et est questio primus. . .* ; incipit, “Post predicta queritur primo utrum . . . Expliciunt questiones quarti libri phisicorum”;

ff. 28-35v, [Johannes Buridanus, *Questiones super octo Physicorum libros Aristotelis*, Book VI, Table of the *quaestiones*; *quaestiones* 1-8 (*questio* 8 ends incomplete, almost completely lacking with only beginning on f. 35v, since quire signature “L” is wanting), table] *Finitis questionibus quarti libri phisicorum. Incipiunt questiones quinti et sequitur tabula questionum quinti libri*; incipit, “Primo questio [. . .] utrum puncta . . . mutari est mutari sed tunc ego primo falsi//”;

ff. 36-46v, [Johannes Buridanus, *Questiones super octo Physicorum libros Aristotelis*, Book VIII (lacking *questiones* 1-2; lacking beginning of *questio* 3), *questiones* 3-13] incipit, “//anno fierunt dies multi . . . totius libri phisicorum per manus Yvonis Courtoys filii conventus sancti pauli in leonia per eo orate cum diligencia. Explicit iste liber hac pena est scriptor liber. Iste questiones phisicorum sunt de tertio opera buridani et fuerunt scripte parisiis anno domini CCCo nonagesimo Quinto” ; [ff. 47-51v, blank, but for a few inscriptions].

The *Questiones super octo Physicorum libros Aristotelis* – or Question-commentaries on Aristotle’s Eight Books on Physics – were composed by John Buridan (died c. 1361). There is an early print edition of these Question-commentaries (1509), as well as a modern critical edition of a selection of questions on Aristotle’s *Physics* (Pluta, 2002). A complete study and edition of the work is currently underway, with a new edition of Books I and II already published (Strejiger and Bakker, 2015). Drawing on eleven manuscripts, this edition is based on the “second collection” or “ultima lectura” of Buridan’s *Questiones super Physicorum*, which survives in 32 manuscripts (see Thijssen’s list in Streijger and Bakker, 2015, p. XX and following).

Our manuscript, however, is part of an earlier redaction, known as the *tertium opus* in reference to Buridan’s third series of lectures on the *Physics*. The colophon corroborates this identification: “Iste questiones phisicorum sunt de tertio opera buridani. . .” (f. 46v). The present manuscript is one of only seven witnesses containing this earlier collection (see Thijssen in Streijger and Bakker, 2015, pp. XIII-XIV); three others (the Toulouse, Vatican and Zaragoza manuscripts, listed in Thijssen, in Streijger and Bakker, 2015, p. XIV) identify their contents as the *tertium opus*. Editors suggest that this rare version of the Question-commentaries derived from a first *reportatio*,

or a written listener's account. The later, more common version (the *ultima lectura*) likely reflects an *ordinatio*, a version authorized by Buridan himself.

John Buridan (or Buridanus) remains one of the most influential philosophers of the fourteenth century. He did much to shape philosophy not only during his own lifetime, but throughout the later scholastic and early modern periods. He spent his entire career as a teaching master in the arts faculty at the University of Paris, lecturing on logic and the works of Aristotle and producing many commentaries and independent treatises on logic, metaphysics, natural philosophy, and ethics. His most famous work is the *Summulae de dialectica* (Compendium of Dialectic), a text aimed at redeeming the older tradition of Aristotelian logic using the newer, logic of 'moderns' such as Peter of Spain and William of Ockham.

As in much of Buridan's work, these Question-commentaries were produced for educational purposes and "were the material embodiment of oral teaching" (Thijssen, in Streijger and Bakker, 2015, p. XVIII). Most of Buridan's works are commentaries on Aristotle. He wrote both *expositiones* (expositions or literal commentaries consisting of detailed, line-by-line explanations of the meaning of Aristotle's words) and *quaestiones* (longer, critical studies of the philosophical issues raised by Aristotle's words, usually centered on a specific lemma from the text). Both genres originated in the classroom, a fact which becomes clear in the references to student queries and student concerns which survive in the written versions. Like teachers in our own day, Buridan lectured more than once on the same text over the course of his career, with the result that there are sometimes different versions of his commentary on the same work. For example, there are three versions of his *Quaestiones* on Aristotle's *De anima*, the last of which identifies itself as the "third or final lecture [*tertia sive ultima lectura*]." Where there are multiple versions of the same commentary, their relationship is generally one of increasing length and sophistication over time.

Buridan's students and followers carried handwritten copies and early printed editions of his commentaries throughout Europe in order to use them as primary texts in university courses on logic and Aristotelian philosophy. In other words, masters would teach Aristotle by reading and explaining Buridan's commentaries to the class. These commentaries thus continued to shape European thought well into the Renaissance. Important because it is an early dated witness and because it preserves the relatively rare earlier version of Buridan's Question-commentaries, this manuscript merits further study alongside the other witnesses to the *tertium opus*. Our knowledge of the book's scribe and place of production also offer promising avenues for research into the circulation of this important philosophical work.

## LITERATURE

Bénédictins du Bouveret. *Colophons de manuscrits occidentaux des origines au XVIe siècle*, vol. 3, Fribourg, 1973.

Buridan, John. *Subtilissimae Quaestiones super octo Physicorum libros Aristotelis*, Paris, 1509. [Repr. as *Kommentar zur Aristotelischen Physik*, Frankfurt am Main., 1964.]

Courtenay, William J. *Parisian Scholars in the Early Fourteenth Century: A Social Portrait*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999.

Grant, Edward. *Physical Science in the Middle Ages*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1977.

Pluta, O. "John Buridan on Universal Knowledge," *Bochumer Philosophisches Jahrbuch Für Antike Und Mittelalter* 7 (1), 2002, pp. 25-46 [in an appendix, the paper contains an edition of the key question on universal knowledge in the penultimate redaction of John Buridan's *Physics* commentary].

Streijger, Michiel, Paul J. J. M. Bakker, and Johannes M. M. H. Thijssen, eds. John Buridan. *Quaestiones super libros De generatione et corruptione Aristotelis. A Critical Edition with an Introduction, History of Science and Medicine Library 17, Medieval and Early Modern Science 14*, Leiden, 2010.

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Thondike, L. and P. Kibre. *A Catalogue of Incipits of Medieval Scientific Writings in Latin*, Cambridge, 1963.

## ONLINE RESOURCES

On John Buridan

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean\\_Buridan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean_Buridan)

Buridan: Editions, Translations and Studies on the Manuscript Tradition

<https://www.ontology.co/biblio/buridan-editions.htm>

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