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DANTE ALIGHIERI, *Le Terze Rime di Dante* (The Terza Rima of Dante, i.e. The Divine Comedy)

In Italian, printed book on paper

Italy (Venice), Aldus Manutius, August 1502

iii + 244 + iii folios on paper, octavo, blue embossed endpapers, original quire markings printed throughout, complete, watermark, flower with five petals, Briquet 6464 (Venice, 1499), collation (a<sup>s</sup> [-a1, supplied in facsimile] -z<sup>s</sup> A<sup>s</sup>-G<sup>s</sup> H<sup>s</sup>), printed in Aldine italic type (UCLA, I1 = 80), justification 120 x 60 mm, roman capitals at the beginning of each tercet, roman capitals on title page (a1 [facsimile]) and colophon (H4), canto numbers added in top margin of recto and line numbers (4, 10, 16, 22, etc.) added in left margin throughout by a contemporaneous humanist cursive hand in brown ink, 30 lines per page plus headline and quire mark line, guide letters for 3-line drop capitals at the beginning of Inferno (f. a2), Purgatorio (f. l3), and Paradiso (f. x4), very light staining in margins, bifolium c4–c5 slightly loose, otherwise good condition, nineteenth-century English citron morocco binding (164 x 109 mm), covers paneled with gilt linear borders with grape vines within, rectangular foliage pattern stamped in center, spine gilt with circular and linear patterns, two red morocco labels "DANTE" and "ALDO 1502". Dimensions 156 x 97 mm.

The 1502 Aldine edition of the Terza Rima of Dante (the *Divine Comedy*) is a watershed moment in the reception of Dante. The slim octavo format and new italic type display the text of the *Comedy* cleanly and precisely when compared to the bulky folio formats of the late fifteenth century. Despite its small size, Aldus's edition of the *Comedy* was the result of a massive philological undertaking by Bernardo and Pietro Bembo to restore Dante's trecento Tuscan dialect. This edition enshrines Dante as an Italian vernacular poet of Tuscany alongside Petrarch. In this copy of the text, a contemporary reader has added running headings for the cantos and line numbers to facilitate reference with other editions and commentaries.

## PROVENANCE

1. Printed in Venice in the workshop of Aldus Manutius in August 1502. Aldus first announced this edition of Dante in his July 1501 edition of Petrarch's *Le cose vulgari* (Vernacular Writings). Lacking the Aldine anchor device on the verso of the final folio, this book belongs to the first printing of the text.

Aldus Manutius (c. 1449/1452 – 1515) began his career as a teacher of grammar but later became the foremost printer in Renaissance Venice. His editions of Greek, Latin, and Italian authors are highly esteemed for their typographical clarity and philological accuracy. Even within Aldus's lifetime his editions were highly sought after for their inherent worth and as collectors' items (which gave rise to many counterfeiters). Aldus was particularly successful with his *libelli portatiles* or *enchiridia* (portable or pocketbooks), like this book, which present philologically exact texts without a commentary or critical apparatus.

2. Likely owned by a Renaissance humanist in the 16<sup>th</sup> century who added canto numbers and line numbers to the text in a cursive humanist hand. There are also sparse notes near the beginning of the text.
3. A small, embossed monogram in white wax on the front pastedown reads LF (perhaps LT?), belonging to a nineteenth-century owner.
4. From the library of Charles W. Clark (1871-1933) (see *The Library of Charles W. Clark*, 1914, p. 35). Clark was the son of William Andrews Clark Sr., a copper magnate and politician. Charlie Clark's "drinking, gambling, and womanizing were well chronicled" (Dedman and Newell, 2013, p. 142), but he was also an avid book collector.
5. Perhaps owned by the Rosenbach Company in Philadelphia. The book does not appear in *The Collected Catalogues of Dr. A. S. W. Rosenbach*.
6. Purchased from John Fleming (1910-1987) by Thomas Kimball Brooker (born 1939) in 1962. John Fleming is a renowned bookseller based in New York and responsible for handling many important collections. See the New York Times obituary <https://www.nytimes.com/1987/12/21/obituaries/john-fleming-a-book-dealer-dies-at-age-77.html>. Thomas Kimball Brooker amassed one of the largest private collections of Aldine editions outside of Europe. Brooker joined the Grolier Club in 1962, served as president of the Association Internationale de Bibliophile from 2006 to 2013, and became an important American bibliophile and bibliographer. This book contains Brooker's bookplate on the front pastedown and an insert that reads "Bibliotheca Brookeriana 0070."

## TEXT

f. a1, [facsimile, title page], *LE TERZE RIME DI DANTE*

f. a1v, [facsimile, title page], *LO'NFERNO E' L PVRGATORIO E' L PARADISO DI DANTE  
ALAGHIERI*

ff. a2-11v, *INFERNO*, incipit, "Nel mezzo del camin di nostra vita... Et quindi uscimmo a riueder le stelle."

f. 12rv, blank

ff. 13-x3, *PVRGATORIO*, incipit, "Per correr miglior acqua alza le vele... Puro et disposto a salir a le stelle."

f. x3v, blank

ff. x4-H4, *PARADISO*, incipit, "La gloria di colui, che tutto move... L'amor, che move'l Sole et laltre stelle."

f. H4, [Publishing Colophon and Warning], *VENETIIS IN AEDIB. ALDI. / ACCVRATISSIME / MEN. AVG. / M. DII. / Cautum est ne quis hunc impune imprimat, / uendatue librum nobis inuitis.*

The textual history of Aldus Manutius's text of Dante's *Divina Commedia* is well known. Pietro Bembo (1470-1547) sent Aldus his manuscript of the *Divina Commedia* (now Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. Lat. 3197) to use as an exemplar for the printed edition. Pietro copied his text of Dante from a manuscript in his father's (Bernardo Bembo, 1433-1519) library, which was a gift from Giovanni Boccaccio (1313-1375) to Francesco Petrarch (1304-1374) (now BAV, Vat. Lat. 3199). Pietro Bembo's text, printed by Aldus Manutius, became the standard edition of Dante for the sixteenth century. (Gilson, 2018, p. 32-33) Furthermore, the portable octavo size (called *libelli portatiles* or *enchiridia* by Aldus) and clean mis-en-page of this Aldine edition differed greatly from the ponderous folio sized incunabula of Dante's *Commedia* which often transmitted Christoforo Landino's commentary alongside the text of Dante (see for example the 1487 edition printed in Brescia). Aldine octavos have a slightly slenderer aspect than other octavo books printed at the turn of the sixteenth century, with a ratio of 1.6:1, rather than the more standard 1.4:1 ratio found in other octavos. Paul Needham has described this new ratio as a "tangible symbol of how sixteenth-century books differ from their fifteenth-century predecessors." (Needham, 1994, p. 303). The other symbol of the New Style inaugurated by Aldus's press was the use of a new Italic type cut by Francesco Griffo (1450-1518), modeled on the hand of Bartolomeo Sanvito, and first used in Aldus's edition of St Catherine of Siena's *Epistole* in September 1500 (=UCLA, no. 34). One of the last types that Griffo cut for Aldus, it achieved wide popularity in the octavo editions of Latin and vernacular classics printed by Aldus in the early sixteenth century and even inspired counterfeiters to copy the type as early as 1502. (Tinto, 1972, p. 31) (For a technical analysis of the dimensions of Griffo's italic type, see Burnhill, 2003, pp. 83-87.) (USTC 808768; Edit16, CNCE 1144; Renouard, pp. 34-35, *Aldo Manuzio tipografo*, no. 63; Adams, D 83; Lugato, no. 65; Kallendorf, no. 52; UCLA, no. 59).

Dante's (1265-1321) *Divina Commedia* is today considered the cornerstone of the Italian literary tradition. Comprising *Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, and *Paradiso*, the poem follows Dante in an ascent from Hell through Purgatory into Heaven, led by the Roman poet Virgil and Beatrice, a Florentine woman, who for Dante represented divine Love in human form. The *Commedia* combines theological speculation, Virgilian epic poetry, and contemporary Italian history into a vast tapestry that depicts the drama of human salvation. While Dante's position at the center of the Italian canon is today secure, in the fifteen and sixteenth centuries, he was considered second to Petrarch. Thus, Aldus printed Petrarch first in 1501 and then Dante in 1502, just as he printed the poetry of Virgil first and then Horace second, echoing Dante's own sentiment in *Inferno*, canto 4, where Homer, and by extension Virgil, is the sovereign of all poets and "Horace is the second" (Inf. 4.89: *l'altro è Orazio*).

The small octavo size and the title "Le Terze Rime di Dante" is in "strong dialectical tension" with the imposing folio format books of Dante, "the Divine Poet," bristling with Christoforo Landino's commentary. The new title reflects Dante's place "within the realm of the Italian vernacular verse. The title may even indicate unease with the term *Comedy* itself, since this had puzzled many earlier readers and commentators who had failed to see how the style and subject-matter of the poem might fit with conventional late medieval categorizations of the comedy genre." (Gilson, 2018, p. 33) The irregularity and promiscuous nature of Dante's poem earned it censure later in the Baroque and Enlightenment periods, but for the Romantics of the early nineteenth century, the poem was "the perfect model for 'universal' poetry, bridging

literature, philosophy, theology, and science." (Camilletti, 2019, p. 263) Today, the *Commedia*, and especially *Inferno*, has inspired countless translations, artworks, symphonies, video games, and movies.

The Aldine Dante of 1502 marks a major turning point in the transmission of the *Divina Commedia*; it represents a tectonic shift away from gargantuan folio formats that portrayed Dante as a divine and prophetic poet to be approached only with long study and labor and instead toward a handsomely clean octavo format with a crisp italic font that signaled Dante's place within the Italian vernacular pantheon. This new, smaller format allowed readers to approach Dante's poetry edited anew with painstaking attention paid to restoring trecento Tuscan dialectical features.

There are 67 known copies of the 1502 Aldine Dante listed in the USTC. The earlier printing without the Aldine device must make up a smaller number, though it is impossible to determine just how many there are.

## LITERATURE

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UCLA = *The Aldine Press: Catalogue of the Ahmanson-Murphy Collection of Books by or relating to the Press in the Library of the University of California, Los Angeles Incorporating Works Recorded Elsewhere*, Berkeley, 2001.

## ONLINE RESOURCES

"Aldus Manutius," *Cambridge University Library Exhibition*

<https://exhibitions.lib.cam.ac.uk/manutius/case/introduction/>

Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. Lat. 3197

[https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS\\_Vat.lat.3197](https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Vat.lat.3197)

Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. Lat. 3199

[https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS\\_Vat.lat.3199](https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Vat.lat.3199)

*Comento di Christophoro Landino Fiorentino sopra la Comedia di Danthe Alighieri poeta Fiorentino*, Brescia, 1487

([https://archive.org/details/McGillLibrary-rbnc\\_incunabula\\_Divina-Commedia-di-Dante-Alighieri\\_1487-20449/page/n39/mode/2up](https://archive.org/details/McGillLibrary-rbnc_incunabula_Divina-Commedia-di-Dante-Alighieri_1487-20449/page/n39/mode/2up))

EDIT16, CNCE 1144

<https://edit16.iccu.sbn.it/resultset-titoli/-/titoli/detail/1144>

Universal Short Title Catalogue, no. 808768

<https://www.ustc.ac.uk/editions/808768>

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