

**BRUNETTO LATINI, *Livre de Trésor***  
In French, decorated manuscript on paper  
Western France (Brittany?), c. 1475-1500

*i* (paper) + 179 + *i* (paper) folios on paper (with watermarks similar to Briquet no. 2013, "Armoiries: Moucheture d'Hermine": Beaumont, 1475, Saint-Malo, 1487; similar to Briquet no. 1565, "Armoiries: Une fleur de lis": Saint-Malo 1494; similar to Briquet no. 15086, "Tête de bœuf": Plouzané, 1477; similar to Briquet nos. 1526, "Armoiries: Une fleur de lis": Orléans, 1444, Paris, 1445, Juigné-sur-Loire, 1446, Orléans, 1447-56, Anvers, 1448-49, Chartres, 1453, Lorris, 1455, Châteaudun, 1457 and 1530, "Armoiries: Une fleur de lis": Tours, 1509, Rillé, 1513), modern foliation in pencil, top outer recto, 1-179, final flyleaf foliated in ink, top outer recto, 180 (collation, i<sup>10</sup> ii-xii<sup>12</sup> xiii<sup>10</sup> xiv-xv<sup>12</sup> xvi<sup>4</sup> [-4, cancelled with no loss of text]), quire vii signed f in inner lower margin of first recto (f. 71), quires xii and xiv signed a and c in inner lower margins of final versos (ff. 142v, 164v), horizontal catchwords on the inner lower margin (quires iv-viii, x, xiv; partially cropped ff. 70v, 94v, 164v), parchment reinforcement strips pasted in the fold on the inner bifolia of each quire and on the outer bifolia of quires iii-xv, frame-ruled in brown or, in five of the six bifolia in quire vi, red ink (justification, 209-222 x 141-153 mm.), text written in brown ink in a French gothic cursiva script in 28 to 52 long lines per page, guide letters for initials, red rubrics, majuscules stroked in red, names of cited authorities written or underlined in red, 1- to 3-line plain initials alternately in red and blue, 4-line plain red initial (f. 103v), 3-line red and blue parted initial (f. 53), four 4- to 5-line red and blue parted initials with pen decoration in red and blue (ff. 11, 82, 142v, 169v), corrections in scribe's hand, marginal annotation in another hand (f. 110), corner of f. 1 missing with some loss of text, outer edges of ff. 76-79 have been restored neatly, some mostly marginal wormholes in the opening quires, some staining and other signs of use. Bound in eighteenth-century mottled sheep blind-tooled with diagonal double fillets extending from the corners of an inner rectangular double fillet frame to a larger rectangular double fillet frame near the edges of each board and stamped within the inner rectangles with an armorial medallion, over pasteboards with four double bands, shelfmark "250" painted on the spine in white. Dimensions 264 x 200-204 mm.

Although this text (the first medieval vernacular encyclopedia) by Brunetto Latini, the Florentine writer and politician known for his mentorship of Dante Alighieri, circulated widely, there are only three copies in the United States and it is relatively rare on the market (only four other copies listed in the Schoenberg Database in the last century). Owned in the eighteenth-century by a noble Breton family, in the nineteenth century the manuscript belonged to the notorious book thief Guglielmo Libri, who was preparing an edition of this text, and it had many other illustrious owners.

## PROVENANCE

1. Evidence of script and watermarks points to this book's production in Brittany in the late fifteenth century. It seems noteworthy that this manuscript is copied in one cursive hand with highly variable spacing of lines per page and with some rather visible corrections in the scribe's hand (e.g., f. 35), possibly suggesting that it was copied for personal use or at least produced for a person/group of people more concerned with the text's accuracy, searchability, and utility than the book's visual appeal or appearance as a luxury object. This contrasts with many *Trésor* manuscripts that are expensive, often illuminated productions. Copies of the *Trésor* appear in a number of royal and aristocratic libraries in the later Middle Ages. Though this manuscript is decorated with

a few parted and flourished initials, the emphasis in this copy seems to be more on function than form.

In the upper margin of f. 176v, an inscription, "Anno domini millesimo quingentesimo nono [1509]," offers a terminus ad quem for the book's production.

2. The manuscript remained in Brittany into the eighteenth century, the date of the present binding that includes the arms of the Goyon-Matignon family of Brittany (quarterly, 1 and 4 argent, a lion rampant gules, crowned or [Goyon]; 2 azure, three fleurs de lis or, a label and a bendlet coupé argent [Orléans-Longueville]; 3 azure, three fleurs de lis or, a bendlet coupé gules [Bourbon-Saint-Pol]; similar to Olivier, 1930, plates 1820-23). They were an old Norman/Breton noble family, dating back at least to the twelfth century. In the late Middle Ages and beyond, members of the family held prominent civil and military positions. The arms with which the binding is stamped date back to the 1596 marriage between Charles (1564-1648), lord of Matignon, count of Torigni, baron of Saint-Lô, prince of Mortagne to Éléonore d'Orléans (1573-1639), daughter of Léonor d'Orléans, duke of Longueville.
3. Belonged to Count Guglielmo Libri-Carucci dalla Sommaia (1802-1869), Italian mathematician, bibliophile, and notorious book thief. In the 1830s, Libri had undertaken the project of editing Brunetto Latini's *Trésor*, which had not yet been printed in its original French, but he never completed this project. Sold by Libri with the assistance of Victor Tilliard in Paris in 1855; no. 1849 in *Catalogue de livres la plupart rares et curieux provenant de la bibliothèque de M. Libri Carucci*, Paris, 1855, 166.
4. Belonged to Prince Baldassarre Boncompagni (1821-1894), Italian historian of mathematics and physics and book collector, who acquired it from Libri (see above). In his 1862 catalogue of Boncompagni's manuscripts, Enrico Narducci lists this as MS 250 (*Catalogo di Manoscritti Ora Posseduti D. Baldassarre Boncompagni*, Rome, 1862, 112-13). The "250" painted on the spine probably reflects Boncompagni's shelfmark. Boncompagni made this manuscript available to literary scholar and philologist Bartolomeo Sorio (1805-1867), who believed that study of Brunetto's work, and particularly his *Trésor*, offered a means of advancing Dante studies. He describes this manuscript, one of six he consulted, in his *Trattato della sfera di Ser Brunetto Latini*, Milan 1858 (pp. x-xii). This manuscript is also described in Narducci's 1892 catalogue of Boncompagni's manuscripts (p. 39, no. 70 [250]) and in the 1898 catalogue of the sale of Boncompagni's manuscripts by his heirs (*Biblioteca Boncompagni. I. Manoscritti. Fac-simili e copie di manoscritti. Edizioni del secolo XV. Libri di abbaco e di aritmetica mercantile. Riviste scientifiche, annuari, periodici. Vendite dal 27 Gennaio al 12 Febbraio 1898*, Rome, 1898, 10, no. 51).
5. Belonged to Henri Gallice (1854-1930) of Épernay, director of Perrier-Jouët and book collector.
6. Belonged to Marcel Jeanson (1885-1942), French industrialist and bibliophile, known for his collection of books on hunting; his MS 117. He purchased the complete library of Henri Gallice in the 1930s.
7. Sold at Sotheby's in 1987; lot 331 in *Bibliothèque Marcel Jeanson*, Monaco, 28 February – 1 March 1987.

8. Sold by Alain Sinibaldi in 1987; lot 54 in catalogue 27: *Beaux livres anciens et modernes, livres illustré, revues: bibliothèque du Marquis de M\*\*\*: vente, Marseille, Hôtel des ventes Prado-Borde, 13 juin 1987.*
9. Sold by Heribert Tenschert in 1989; *Leuchtendes Mittelalter 21: 89 libri manuscripti 89 illuminati vom 10. bis zum 16. Jahrhundert*, lot 20.
10. Belonged to Joost R. Ritman (b. 1941-), Amsterdam, the Dutch businessman, distinguished collector of art and books, and founder of the Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica (bookplate "Philosophia Hermetica" inside front cover); purchased in the Tenschert sale. Sold on Ritman's behalf at Sotheby's in 2000; lot 44 in *A Selection of Illuminated Manuscripts from the 13<sup>th</sup> to the 16<sup>th</sup> Centuries, the Property of Mr. J.R. Ritman, Sold for the Benefit of the Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica, Amsterdam, London, 6 July 2000.*
11. North American Private Collection.

## TEXT

ff. 1-8v, table of contents, *Ensuient les liures qui sont compris en ce present liure. Et premier. Le liure de philosophie. Le liure de ethiques. Le liure de moralite.* [inserted to the right in darker red: *Le liure de rethorique*] *Le liure de politique. Enpres ensuit la table desdits libures [sic], incipit, "Du premier chappitre du premier liure i, Icy parle de philosophie ij ... Comment le sire doit demourer a rendre son compte cv";*

f. 9, ruled but blank;

f. 10, blank;

ff. 11-82, *Icy commence le liure du tresor lequel translacta maistre Brunet Latin de latin en francois et parle de la naissance de toutes choses cest premier liure est extrait de touz les liures de philosophie, incipit, "Cest liure est appelle tresor car si comme le sires [sic] qui vieut en petit lieu amasser de grantdisme [sic] vallour non pas pour son delit seullement ... pour amasser la seconde partie de son tresor qui doit estre de pieres precieuses";*

ff. 82-142v, *Icy commence le second liure de aristote qui parle des vices et des vertuz lequel translacta maistre Brunet Latin de latin en romens, incipit, "Quant le maistre ot finie sa [scribe has written "la" over "sa"] premiere partie et ot mis en escript de retorique ce que en apartenoit son proposement ... pour enseigner la bonne science de parler sellon ce que il dit en son prologue dauant";*

ff. 142v-179v, *Cy commence la rhetorique cest le liure de bonne paroleure I, incipit, "A ce que le maistre Brunet Latin ot acomplie la seconde partie de son liure en quoy il demontre assez bonnement quel homme doit estre en moralite ... et teu yras ches toy a ta gloire et honour," Cy finit le liure du tresor lequel translacta maistre Brunet Latin de Florance de latin en francois. Amen.*

Brunetto Latini wrote the first redaction of his *Livre de Trésor* between 1260 and 1266 and completed a second redaction after 1267 in which the text's historical contents, previously ending with the Battle of Montaperti (1260), were brought up to date. The most recent edition (Beltrami et al., 2007) is a critical edition of the first redaction, based on a large number of manuscripts in full or in "critical locations," with a facing-page modern Italian translation. The *Trésor* circulated widely in manuscript form. The Jonas Database (IRHT, Online Resources) lists 97 complete or partial manuscript copies of *Trésor*, including this one. Nearly all of these are in

Europe; only three of are housed in American collections, all in New York. The text in this manuscript is closest in content to the 2007 edition, and concludes its historical content with the expulsion of the Guelphs from Florence in 1260 and a brief account of Brunetto's exile. A brief collation against this edition reveals some discrepancies, however: while the Beltrami edition contains 200 chapters within the first book, this copy of *Trésor* contains 97 and whereas Beltrami contains 132 chapters within the second book, this copy contains 128.

The *Trésor* was not printed in its original French until it was edited by Chabaille in 1863. The Italian translation of *Trésor*, *Il Tesoro*, was first printed at Treviso in 1474 (Hain 4009) and was printed in subsequent editions at Venice in 1528 and 1533. The complete French text has been edited in three modern editions before the recent 2007 edition. Chabaille (1863) examined 41 manuscripts and used a manuscript containing the first redaction of the text as a base. Carmody (1948) chose a second redaction manuscript as his base and examined a greater number of manuscripts, around fifty. Baldwin and Barrette (2003) based their edition on a relatively early second redaction manuscript (not available to Carmody) that contains material lost in other second redaction manuscripts. None of these editors examined this manuscript, though Squillaciotti includes it in the 2007 Beltrami edition's list of ninety *Trésor* manuscripts.

Brunetto Latini (c. 1210-1294), notary, diplomat, and politician, was born in Florence and played an important role in the city's politics. In 1260 he was sent to Castile as an ambassador on behalf of the Guelph government to request the aid of Alfonso X of Castile against the Ghibellines, the faction that opposed the Guelphs. On his journey back to Florence, Brunetto discovered that the Guelphs had been defeated at the Battle of Montaperti and expelled from the city. He fled to France where he spent the next six years in exile, studying and working as a notary with the financial support of a generous fellow countryman. During this time, Brunetto composed his *Livre de Trésor* in French prose and dedicated it to this unnamed patron. When the Guelphs triumphed over the Ghibellines in 1266, Brunetto returned to Florence, where he subsequently led an active political life and promoted the study of oratory and political science. During this time he was a mentor to the young Dante Alighieri, who famously and fondly memorialized Brunetto in canto 15 of his *Inferno* as a father figure who taught him "how man makes himself eternal." In addition to *Trésor*, Brunetto is known to have written *Tesoretto*, an allegorical dream vision in Italian verse that must have exerted a significant influence on Dante's *Commedia*; *La Rettorica*, an Italian prose translation of, and commentary on, Cicero's *De Inventione*; and the Italian verse *Favolletto*, an epistle on letter-writing and friendship.

Brunetto's *Livre de Trésor* is his best known work and immensely popular during the Middle Ages, as attested by its profusion in manuscripts and its medieval translation into several other vernaculars, including Italian, Aragonese, Castilian, and Catalan. The first medieval encyclopedia to be written in a vernacular, it was an influential work in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Like the Latin compilations of earlier medieval encyclopedists, Brunetto's *Trésor* draws on a range of authorities, most of which are classical. In the work's opening chapter, Brunetto compares the value of his project to that of collecting treasure: "just as the lord who wishes to amass things of great value, not only for his own pleasure but to increase his power and elevate his social status in war and in peace puts into his treasure the most precious jewels he can gather together according to his intention, in a similar manner the body of this book is compiled out of wisdom, ... extracted from all branches of philosophy in a brief summary" (trans. Barrette and Baldwin, 1993, p. 1).

Brunetto divides *Trésor* into three books, one focused on wisdom, one on ethics, and one on rhetoric, and, continuing in his earlier metaphorical vein, he analogizes their contents to ready

money, precious gems, and gold, respectively. The first book draws on Scripture, Isidore of Seville, Solinus, and others and presents versions of the medieval bestiary and textual mappamundi. The second book draws mostly on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, while its briefer second part on the vices and virtues draws on a variety of classical and biblical sources. The third book focuses first on Cicero's *De Inventione*, which Brunetto knew well, having translated it into Italian, and concludes with a discussion of practices of governance within the Italian cities of Brunetto's day. This contemporary focus, Brunetto's framing of his project, and his choice to write in the vernacular all underscore the fact that, unlike many earlier encyclopedists, he was not writing for a chiefly scholarly audience, but to be read more widely and, in all likelihood, pragmatically.

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