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Sommaire

À la mémoire de Martin Aurell

Il y a un an exactement disparaissait Martin Aurell. Au moment d'ouvrir ce numéro consacré aux mythes, son absence se fait sentir avec une intensité particulière. Historien du Moyen Âge parmi les plus respectés de sa génération, il était surtout, pour beaucoup d'entre nous, un ami de longue date, un interlocuteur d'une grande générosité intellectuelle, un lecteur attentif dont la curiosité ne connaissait ni frontières disciplinaires ni rigidités institutionnelles.

Formé à l'histoire sociale et politique du Moyen Âge, profondément ancré dans l'étude des mondes aristocratiques et des dynamiques du pouvoir, il s'était imposé comme l'un des plus grands spécialistes du monde plantagenêt, auquel il consacra une part essentielle de ses recherches. La littérature en ancien français, les récits arthuriens et les constructions symboliques de la mémoire médiévale faisaient naturellement partie de son horizon intellectuel, qu'il abordait toujours dans une perspective résolument interdisciplinaire. Chez lui, l'érudition ne manquait jamais de grâce : elle s'accompagnait d'une capacité rare à faire entendre la voix des sources et à restituer la complexité des sociétés médiévales sans les réduire à des schémas abstraits. Ceux qui ont assisté à ses cours ou à ses conférences se souviennent de cette manière si personnelle de raconter l'histoire – précise, nuancée, mais toujours habitée.

Au moment de sa disparition, il travaillait activement à la promotion de son dernier livre consacré à Aliénor d'Aquitaine, figure emblématique de cet univers plantagenêt qu'il avait contribué à renouveler par des analyses d'une grande finesse. Il venait également d'organiser à l'abbaye de Fontevraud un colloque d'ampleur internationale, réunissant historiens et spécialistes de littérature médiévale autour des enjeux politiques et culturels de cette période. Parmi les chercheurs qu'il avait tenu à inviter figurait Carla Rossi, signe supplémentaire de l'attention constante qu'il portait au dialogue entre disciplines et à la circulation des idées au-delà des clivages académiques.

Martin Aurell croyait profondément à la transmission du savoir comme responsabilité civique. Cette conviction expliquait aussi son engagement discret mais ferme en faveur de la sauvegarde du patrimoine écrit. Il avait très tôt compris que la destruction matérielle des manuscrits, sous couvert de valorisation marchande, constituait une atteinte grave à la mémoire culturelle européenne. Dans les moments les plus difficiles, lorsque des

campagnes diffamatoires visaient à isoler et discréditer celles et ceux qui dénonçaient ces pratiques, il n'a pas hésité à exprimer son soutien, au prix parfois d'attaques personnelles d'une rare violence. Ce courage intellectuel, qui ne faisait jamais de bruit mais ne cédait jamais, était l'un des traits les plus marquants de sa personnalité.

C'est dans cet esprit qu'il avait fortement soutenu la création de l'Organisation pour la Protection des Manuscrits Médiévaux (OproM, Paris), convaincu que la lutte contre la destruction spéculative des manuscrits constituait l'un des enjeux majeurs pour les études médiévales contemporaines. Son engagement dans ce domaine fut constant, discret dans la forme mais ferme dans les principes.

Cet engagement eut aussi un coût personnel. Lors d'un colloque académique, Martin Aurell lui-même fut importuné par un blogueur britannique sans affiliation académique, déjà signalé par Carla Rossi (cofondatrice de cette revue) au Comando Carabinieri pour la Tutela del Patrimonio Culturale (TPC) en raison de pratiques illicites liées au marché des manuscrits. Ce même individu, qui s'était fait le principal instigateur des attaques diffamatoires contre Carla Rossi, adressa à Martin, sans la moindre retenue, une série de courriels insistants et inappropriés. Ces messages, révélateurs du climat de pression exercé contre celles et ceux qui refusaient de se taire face aux dérives du marché des manuscrits, témoignent de la violence symbolique dont furent l'objet certains chercheurs engagés dans la défense de Carla Rossi et du patrimoine écrit. Ces courriels, aujourd'hui documentés, peuvent être consultés ici :

https://www.oprom.eu/mefaitscontrenous

Martin Aurell ne chercha jamais à dramatiser ces épisodes. Fidèle à son tempérament, il continua à défendre avec calme et détermination la nécessité d'une recherche indépendante, fondée sur la vérification des faits et sur la protection du bien commun. C'est aussi pour cette raison que l'article de Carla Rossi consacré à la biblioclastie,[1] publié dans

[1] *Biblioclasm for Profit: The Legal Implications of Dismembering Western Medieval Illuminated Manuscripts*, Harvard Art Law Review,1, 1, 2025, pp. 97-167. Le site de la revue américaine a changé d'adresse à plusieurs reprises, mais le numéro contenant l'article est disponible grâce à Web Archive à ce lien :
https://web.archive.org/web/20251008023752/https://orgs.law.harvard.edu/halo/files/2025/07/Vol.-1-Harvard-Law-Art-Review.pdf
DOI: https://zenodo.org/records/19033689

la *Harvard Art Law Review*, lui a été dédié : hommage à un historien qui avait compris très tôt la gravité du phénomène et la violence des résistances qu'il suscitait. Le fait que ce travail fasse encore aujourd'hui l'objet d'attaques de la part de ceux qui souhaitent occulter certaines pratiques douteuses confirme la pertinence de son intuition.
Évoquer Martin Aurell, c'est se souvenir d'une élégance intellectuelle devenue rare. Il savait écouter, encourager, parfois sourire avec une ironie bienveillante devant les querelles académiques, sans jamais renoncer à l'exigence scientifique. Dans un monde universitaire souvent traversé par les rivalités et les stratégies d'influence, il incarnait une forme d'autorité morale fondée sur la compétence, la loyauté et la liberté d'esprit.

Que ce numéro lui soit dédié s'impose comme une évidence. Réfléchir aux mythes, aux récits fondateurs et aux formes de transmission culturelle, c'est prolonger le dialogue qu'il n'a jamais cessé d'entretenir avec le passé. C'est aussi affirmer, dans son sillage, que la sauvegarde des œuvres et la vérité historique demeurent des combats essentiels. Sa mémoire nous oblige – non par le poids du souvenir, mais par l'exemple vivant qu'il continue de représenter pour celles et ceux qui refusent la destruction et le silence.
Dans ce contexte plus large de tensions et de pressions exercées sur le monde académique, il convient de rappeler avec précision les modalités de la campagne diffamatoire dont furent saisis de nombreux éditeurs et revues scientifiques ayant publié les travaux de Carla Rossi. La quasi-totalité des institutions contactées répondit avec la rigueur attendue, en procédant à des vérifications documentaires et en rejetant les accusations infondées qui leur étaient transmises. La revue *Romania*, en revanche, adopta une attitude sensiblement différente. Sur la dernière page du numéro 1-2 de 2024, fut insérée une brève note reprenant une dénonciation orchestrée par le blogueur britannique, sans contextualisation ni examen critique préalable des faits allégués. Le ton et la forme de cette intervention, qui évoquaient davantage l'écriture polémique d'un billet de blog que la réserve traditionnelle d'une revue savante, contribuèrent à donner une visibilité institutionnelle à des accusations déjà largement contestées.
Qui plus est, la codirectrice de la revue, Christine Lefèvre, se montra inflexible face aux répliques argumentées de Carla Rossi, alors même que celle-ci faisait l'objet d'accusations publiques de plagiat prétendument fondées sur la reprise d'un contenu issu d'un billet de blog – accusations qu'un tribunal suisse a par la suite jugées dépourvues de fondement. Un tel épisode invite à s'interroger sur les responsabilités des instances éditoriales dans la diffusion d'informations non vérifiées et sur les effets de légitimation que peut produire,

même involontairement, la reprise de discours diffamatoires dans des cadres académiques autrefois tenus pour respectables.

À propos de plagiat, qu'aurait dû dire Luciano Rossi lorsque *Romania*, en 2004, publia une courte note de Gustav Adolf Beckmann sur les premiers vers de *Cligès*, en la présentant comme une trouvaille , sans relever que cette 'découverte' avait été faite cinq ans plus tôt, en 1999, dans l'article de Rossi sur *Flabel*, paru dans la même *Romania*? Cet exemple, parmi d'autres, rappelle combien les dynamiques de reconnaissance scientifique peuvent être marquées par des oublis sélectifs.

Malheureusement la rédaction de *Romania* a toujours été particulièrement désagréable à l'égard de l'un des plus anciens membres de la Société de ses Amis, à commencer par le célèbre Congrès d'Orléans (conçu pour détruire un de ses articles, *Du nouveau sur Jean de Meun* toujours dans *Romania*!) auquel Rossi a répondu dans la «Revue de Linguistique Romane» en ridiculisant ses adversaires.[2]

Rappeler ces épisodes n'a d'autre finalité que de restituer le climat intellectuel dans lequel Martin Aurell lui-même choisit de prendre position. Son soutien ne relevait ni de solidarités circonstancielles ni de stratégies de camp : il procédait d'une conception exigeante de la probité académique et d'un refus résolu des mécanismes d'intimidation qui menacent la liberté de la recherche. En cela, sa mémoire continue d'éclairer les débats présents et d'inviter la communauté savante à une vigilance accrue face aux dérives qui peuvent fragiliser ses fondements.

Le comité scientifique et éditorial

[2] Voir L. Rossi, «Jean de Meun et la culture de Panurge», *Revue de Linguistique Romane*, 82, 2018, pp. 289-310; Id.'*Defloratio textuum' e 'defloratio puellae' nel Roman de la Rose: dalla retorica alla prassi giuridica*, dans *Parola poetica e parola giuridica nelle letterature romanze*, par Susanna Barsotti et Lorenzo Mainini (éditeurs), Società Filologica Romana, Viella, Roma 2025, pp. 118-131.

Κρεουργία Πέλοποζ
Cannibalising the Medieval Codex

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Abstract: The dismembered body of Pelops, as narrated in ancient sources including Ovid, Apollodorus, Pausanias, Pindar, Virgil, and Pliny the Elder, provides a critical paradigm through which to examine the intentional dismantling of medieval manuscripts for the monetisation of their constituent parts. Such practices transform the codex – historically conceived as an integrated material, textual, and functional unit – into a dispersible assemblage whose market value depends upon the disruption of its structural and semantic coherence. This paradigm gains further interpretative resonance when considered in relation to the figure of Pelops' father, Tantalus, who, as both progenitor and dismemberer, embodies destructive appropriation. His mythic punishment, grounded in the logic of perpetual and unfulfilled desire, provides a conceptual framework for understanding the dynamics that underlie acts of biblioclasm within the art market. In this light, the dismantling of the codex appears as both a material intervention and a manifestation of an ethical imbalance, revealing the tension between the integrity of cultural memory and the pressures exerted by regimes of economic valuation.
The persistent designation of excised leaves as "fragments," rather than as detached or severed components of an originally unified artefact, contributes to the conceptual neutralisation of deliberate acts of biblioclasm by assimilating them to the cumulative effects of time, transmission, and accidental loss. The dispersal of manuscripts illuminated by major artists increasingly compromises the possibility of reconstructing coherent artistic corpora, a problem of particular significance in the case of female illuminators, whose historical visibility remains structurally vulnerable. Interpreted in light of mythic narratives of bodily mutilation and restitution, this phenomenon points to a broader condition of cultural self-erosion within Western societies.

Pelops: Dismemberment, Cannibalism and Imperfect Restoration

The article I contributed to the *Harvard Art Law Review* begins from a proposition that has long shaped the interpretation of cultural destruction: "Biblioclasm – the intentional

destruction of books and manuscripts – has traditionally been associated with ideological repression, censorship, and the erasure of the cultural identity of perceived adversaries."[1] What is at stake in this context is the profitable mutilation of one's own historical foundations.

> While ideological biblioclasm is universally condemned, its commercial counterpart persists, driven by market interests and, at times, enabled by academic leniency. This complicity is particularly evident in the role played by certain scholars who provide expertise for auction houses. Provenance is often presented with deliberate ambiguity and frequently disseminated through self-referential online websites that obscure the origins of excised manuscript leaves while lending them an appearance of legitimacy. These sources, often maintained by individuals with vested interests in the trade, lack rigorous scholarly validation but are nonetheless cited in auction catalogues and private sales, reinforcing a cycle in which excised folios are legitimized through repetition rather than evidence.
>
> A significant issue in manuscript studies is the misclassification of recently excised leaves as "fragments," a practice that obscures their origins and normalizes the destruction of manuscripts. This terminological distortion not only falsifies the historical record but also risks legitimizing the commercial dismemberment of manuscripts. The use of the term fragment can further serve to obscure the illicit provenance of excised leaves, masking instances of theft, illegal trafficking, forgery, and the fencing of stolen cultural property.[2]

Within this conceptual horizon, the myth of Pelops may be read as a paradigm of dismemberment, cannibalistic consumption, and restitution marked by irreversible loss. In Western modernity, a comparable logic governs the treatment of cultural heritage when artefacts are deliberately divided in order to enhance their exchange value. The figure of Tantalus – at once progenitor and dismemberer – situates this paradigm within an allegory of insatiable desire. His act is driven by sacrilegious hybris and by a sense of superiority that challenges the limits imposed by divine and human order. The deliberate dismantling of cultural artefacts for profit may be read as a modern reiteration of the same logic of violation and outrageous presumption.

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[1] C. Rossi, *Biblioclasm for Profit: The Legal Implications of Dismembering Western Medieval Illuminated Manuscripts*, Harvard Art Law Review,1, 1, 2025, pp. 97-167. Digitally available on Google Books: https://tinyurl.com/mryubhsa
Archived here :
https://web.archive.org/web/20251008023752/https://orgs.law.harvard.edu/halo/files/2025/07/Vol.-1-Harvard-Law-Art-Review.pdf
DOI: https://zenodo.org/records/19033689

[2] C. Rossi, *Biblioclasm for Profit*, p. 101.

Schopenhauer's conception of the will as a force that perpetuates itself through renewed acts of assertion clarifies the logic at work in such practices. Desire does not seek fulfilment; it affirms itself through gestures of domination that transform inherited cultural forms into objects of calculation and exchange.

The codex – historically conceived as an integral body of text, image, and use – becomes a quarry for the production of art-market commodities. Once the manuscript has been dismantled, each illuminated leaf may attain a market value far exceeding that of the intact codex, producing a paradox emblematic of Western capitalist society, in which the annihilation of cultural unity functions as a mechanism of financial amplification. [3]

What is sacrificed extends beyond material integrity to the epistemic architecture that enabled texts, images, and practices to operate as a coherent whole. Cultural autophagy designates precisely this process:[4] the progressive internal consumption of historical foundations through which Western societies undermine the conditions of their own intelligibility while sustaining a market of aestheticised remains.

The consequences of this transformation become particularly evident in the field of artistic attribution and historical reconstruction.

The deliberate dispersal of manuscripts illuminated by renowned artists renders the reconstruction of their complete œuvre increasingly unattainable. This problem acquires acute significance in the case of female illuminators, whose contributions remain insufficiently documented and whose artistic identities risk dissolving into anonymous survivals, as discussed in *Beyond the Margins: Female Illuminators in Medieval and Renaissance Europe* (Rossi, 2025, 63–72). Detached leaves continue to circulate as collectable images, while the historical subjects responsible for their production recede beyond recoverability.

At the same time, the dismantling of manuscripts entails the disappearance of textual *corpora* whose rarity cannot be compensated for by reproduction. Rare liturgical uses,

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[3] As extensively documented in my article *Biblioclastia a scopo di lucro e culto feticistico dei frammenti di manoscritti medievali*, «Studj romanzi», XVIII (2022), pp. 161–196, particularly through the example of the De Roucy manuscript. The publication of this research was followed by documented defamatory reactions arising within circles connected to the manuscript market and to the dismantling and commercial dispersal of the De Roucy Hours analysed in the study. These reactions occurred in the context of reports submitted in August 2022 to the Italian Cultural Heritage Protection Unit (TPC). Some of the related allegations were subsequently dismissed by a decision of the Swiss Federal Administrative Court, and corresponding online material was later removed.

[4] When manuscripts are dismantled for profit, the continuity of Western thought is eroded from within.

exceptionally scarce vernacular romances, juridical and scientific treatises, astrological and botanical compilations, historical chronicles, philosophical and theological works, and monumental choir books are progressively severed from the material frameworks that ensured their preservation and intelligibility. The loss of such artefacts disrupts crucial connections to the intellectual and artistic traditions that shaped European culture. Unlike printed books, which exist in multiple copies and may survive dispersal, each medieval manuscript constitutes a unique configuration of knowledge, artistic labour, and historical circumstance.

Knowledge endures in the form of reconstructed survivals marked by irreversible loss of coherence. A civilisation devoted to preserving its past thus consumes the very conditions that make historical understanding possible.

> In recent years, certain intellectual circles have even sought to rationalise biblioclasm, influenced by the controversial actions of Otto Ege (1888-1951), whose questionable operations have become the subject of ongoing research and vigorous scholarly debate. Ege was an American art dealer, collector, and biblioclast who gained notoriety for his practice of dismembering complete manuscripts into individual leaves and selling them separately to North American collectors and institutions.
>
> He cultivated a profound fascination with mediaeval manuscripts and book arts during his European travels.
>
> He sought to justify the destruction of manuscripts by presenting the acquisition of scattered leaves as a means for institutions or individuals with limited resources to access and appreciate the artistry and craftsmanship of manuscripts they would otherwise be unable to afford in their entirety. However, a closer examination reveals that economic motivations were central to Ege's seemingly altruistic rationale. In contemporary times, certain North American scholars vigorously defend the validity of dismemberments and have transformed the fetishisation of scattered leaves into a profitable cult. They formulate research projects centred on manuscript leaves from the Ege collection. In European countries with a robust tradition of historical and philological studies, such projects would be viewed as scientifically dubious. This is primarily because of the absence of philological examination of the texts found within these leaves and the researchers' considerable lack of familiarity with Latin. Furthermore, these scholars demonstrate a deficient understanding of the history of manuscript production workshops.
>
> (C. Rossi, *Isabelle Boursier's Book of Hours : A Dismembered Manuscript from Mary Benson's Collection*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing 2024: 3-4).

Any reflection on digital reconstruction requires a theoretical positioning that takes into account both the philosophy of restoration elaborated by Cesare Brandi and Walter Benjamin's meditation on the historical experience of the work of art.
Restoration, understood in a "Brandian" sense, does not aim at immobilising the artwork within a fictive state of original purity. It presupposes instead a form of conservation attentive to historical stratification and aesthetic coherence, allowing the object to remain inscribed within its temporal trajectory while addressing the material consequences of loss, damage, or fragmentation. Such an approach recognises that the life of an artwork unfolds through successive transformations, and that the marks of rupture may themselves become part of its intelligibility.

> […] it is said that the gods fitted his limbs together again. They found the pieces, but one was lost, between the upper arm and the neck.[5]

Ovid's account of the dismemberment and reassembly of Pelops provides a mythic configuration through which the material fate of intentionally dismantled cultural artefacts may be more precisely understood. In *Metamorphoses* VI (402–411), the gods gather the scattered limbs of the youth after Tantalus' sacrilegious act and restore the body, while one missing portion requires substitution. The episode articulates a form of restitution inseparable from loss, in which the recovered whole bears within itself the mark of its prior destruction.

This logic proves decisive when considering works whose unity has been deliberately violated. Any attempt at reintegration unfolds under the sign of discontinuity: the object survives through processes that seek to recover coherence while acknowledging the historical rupture that has reshaped its material and semantic structure. Transmission thus depends upon recognising that restitution never cancels loss, and that intelligibility emerges from the very persistence of absence. Yet the problem acquires a different urgency when considered through the lens of Benjamin's reflections on *aura*. Digital reconstruction confronts precisely the destabilisation of this condition. When an artefact has been deliberately dismantled, often for economic gain, its *aura* does not simply diminish

[5] *Metamorphoses* VI. 402 - 411. A Translation into English Prose by A. S. Kline, Published in *Entirety with Mythological Index & Illustrations* by H. Goltzius, *Poetry in Translation*, The Netherlands (2000), pp. 1558-1617

through reproduction; it is violently dislocated through the interruption of its material unity. The methodological questions that arise from such circumstances demand concrete responses:

- How should scholars proceed when the object to be reconstructed has been intentionally eliminated as a coherent physical entity?
- Does the responsibility of transmitting Western cultural heritage extend to the preservation – or reactivation – of an *aura* shattered by acts of acquisitive destruction? Does this responsibility bind us simultaneously to the memory of the past and to the claims of the future?

In response to the first question, I have attempted to formulate a methodological framework by devising a manual for the digital reconstruction of dismembered manuscripts, grounded in a set of elementary principles derived from classical philology.
The difficulty of such reconstructions, however, lies in the condition of the visual material retrievable from online auctions, including platforms such as eBay. The examples discussed below are drawn from auctions active on 27 March 2026. The available images generally fall into three categories. In the most favourable cases, one has access to photographs of both recto and verso of the leaf (Fig. 1).
In other instances, only a single digital image is available, typically showing the most visually appealing decorated or illuminated side (Fig. 2), often without any indication as to whether it is recto or verso, since the leaf has been mounted or framed as an autonomous picture. In yet other cases, the documentation is reduced to a mere detail (Fig. 3), which further compromises any attempt at accurate codicological and textual or musical reconstruction.

Any affirmative response to the second question presupposes an acute awareness of historical discontinuity, a condition that Walter Benjamin himself identified as constitutive of modern experience.
The activities of dealers who knowingly dismantle cultural artefacts assume particular significance. The destruction of medieval manuscripts represents a rupture in the chain of transmission that has sustained cultural memory over centuries, restricting access to irreplaceable textual and visual knowledge. Such practices may be described, through a deliberate neologism, as a persistent form of "memoricide."

> Digital reconstruction of dismembered manuscripts can be seen as a response to this barbarism, as it aims to recover and revive what has been lost. By utilising advanced technologies and collaborative efforts, we can piece together *digital fragments* and reconstruct a semblance of the original work.
>
> The act of restoring this "semblance," this idea and aura from the past holds the power to shape the present. In this light, every reconstruction serves as an unequivocal proclamation, loudly echoing the names of those who have shamefully perpetuated such acts of vandalism, thereby depriving future generations of invaluable relics from the past.
>
> Indeed, the very act of digitally piecing back together these dismembered manuscripts is a defiant stance against such destruction of cultural heritage. It reclaims the lost voices and histories bound up in these manuscript fragments, bringing them together once more.
>
> Does the reconstruction of a Book of Hours not resound with the echoes of those who once held that manuscript in their hands, chanting every psalm, intoning every antiphon, singing every responsory, like on a Sunday in church ?
>
> (C. Rossi, *Isabelle Boursier's Book of Hours* : 12).

Although the damage inflicted on dismantled artefacts cannot be wholly reversed, the digital environment opens a space in which relations interrupted by destruction may be partially reactivated. As successive layers of annotation, commentary, and scholarly intervention accumulate within virtual platforms, a form of collective memorialisation takes shape.

In this shared intellectual terrain, dispersed witnesses of vandalised cultural objects become accessible to renewed acts of engagement, interpretation, and commemoration. Manuscripts thus acquire a renewed mode of existence as dynamic textual configurations that continue to evolve historically while retaining the memory of their material origins.

Fig. 1. Leaf with a full-page miniature of the Flight into Egypt (recto–verso), clearly excised from a Book of Hours attributable to the workshop of Robert Boyvin, one of the most prolific illuminators active in Rouen and, for that very reason, among the most heavily affected by the dismemberment of manuscripts. The images are drawn from auctions active on 27 March 2026 (Seller: MFR Rare Books. Item ID: 317011558511). As is typical in such listings, the leaf is presented as an autonomous art object, with a generic attribution ("Book of Hours", "15th century") and without any verifiable indication of provenance, thereby severing the codicological, textual, and historical relationships that originally defined its meaning and reducing the object to a decontextualised commodity.

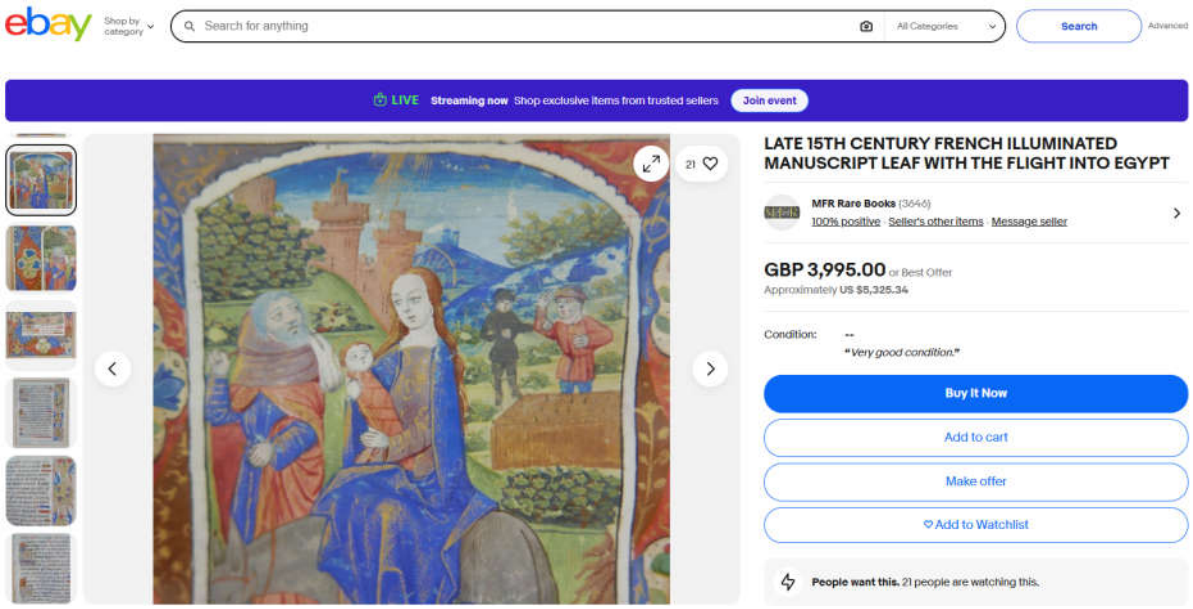

Fig. 1bis

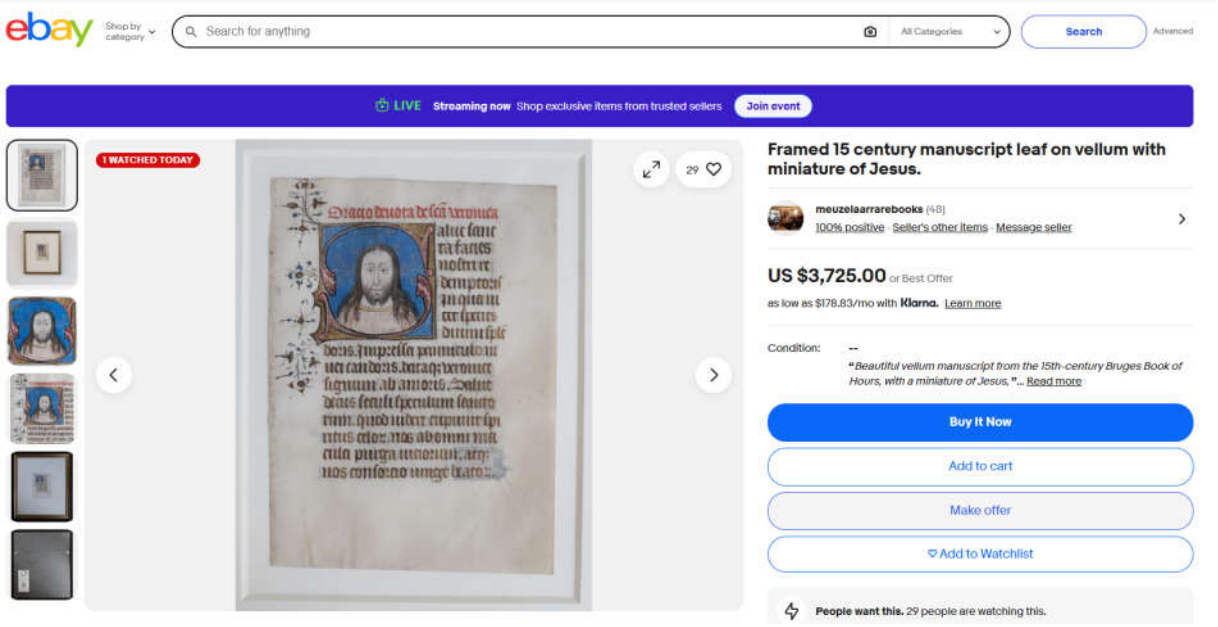

Fig. 2. It should be noted that the leaf has been framed, and the back of the frame does not allow the text on the verso to be seen.

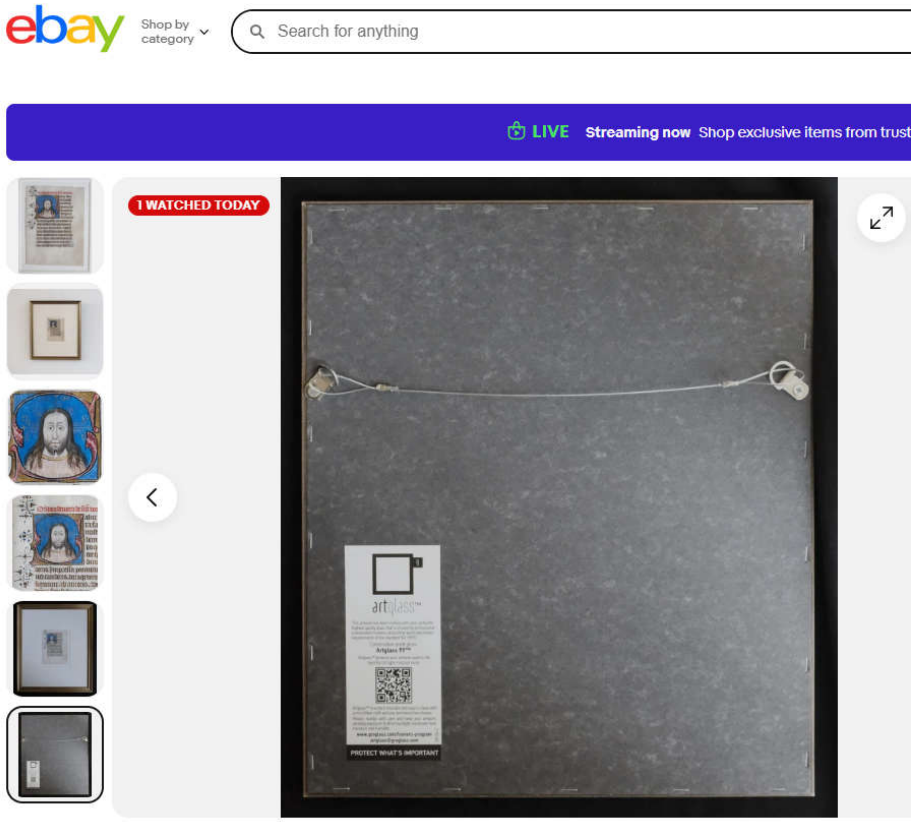

Fig. 2. bis

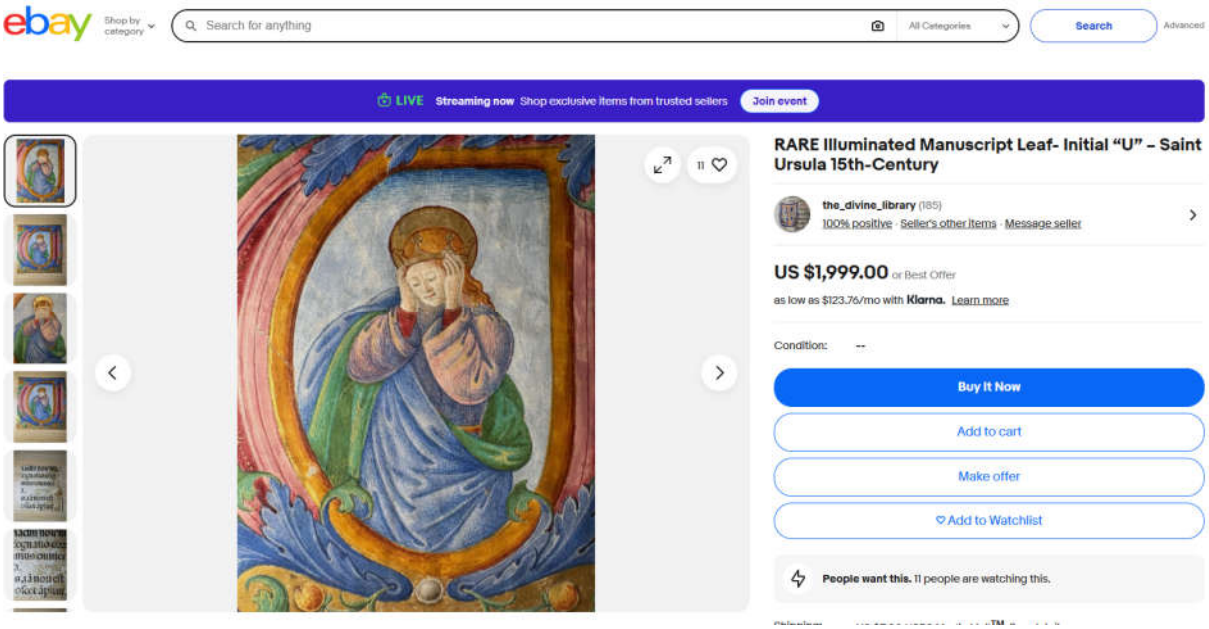

Fig. 3. Historiated initial "U" depicting St Ursula of Cologne, originating from an Italian choir book (15th century). In this case, it has been possible to trace the prior sale of a larger portion of the same excised leaf, subsequently further cut, at Bassenge, *Sonderkatalog Mille Annos Manu-Skriptum III*, Auction 125 (8 April 2025), lot 1021, where the initial (described as *Ursula von Köln*, manuscript initial miniature on parchment, Italy, 15th century) was sold for €650 (US$ 739).

The version currently offered on eBay shows additional trimming of the original leaf, while the asking price has more than doubled, exemplifying the economic logic of progressive dismemberment and resale.

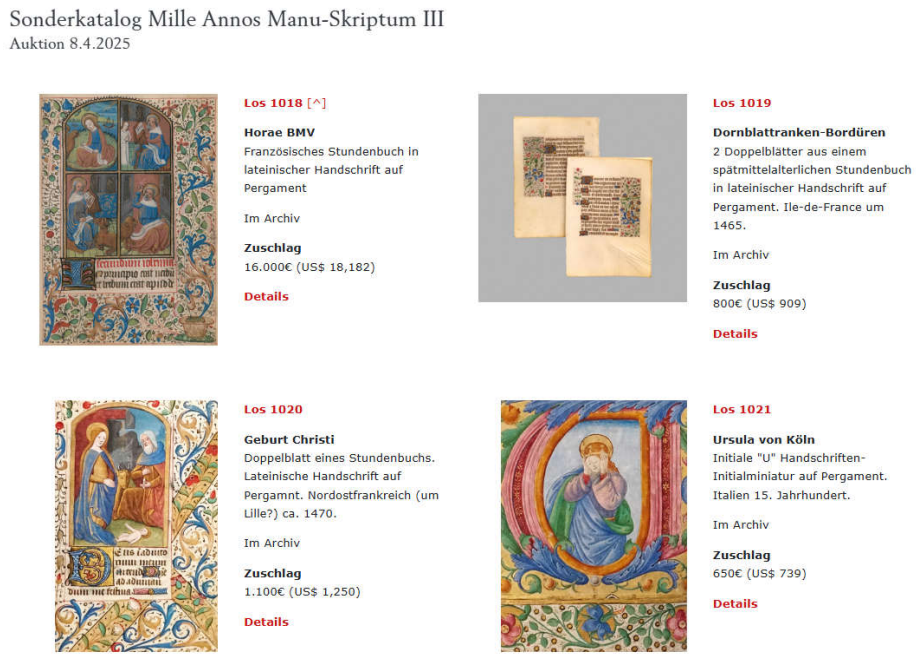

Fig. 3bis

Digital reconstruction remains vulnerable to accusations of inauthenticity, particularly within cultural environments already shaped by the economic forces of the antiquities trade, which simultaneously contribute to the erosion of heritage and may seek to discredit attempts at restitution.
From this tension emerge complex ethical questions regarding the technological mediation of restoration. The initial impetus for reconstruction lies in the desire to safeguard artworks for future generations on account of their historiographical and aesthetic significance. Digital methods extend access and reproducibility, yet frequently operate on materials that have been violently separated through acts of vandalism or plunder. Such conditions raise the possibility of unintended complicity with the processes that produced the loss. At the same time, one must ask whether distributed and decentralised forms of digitisation can adequately transmit the contextual frameworks necessary for meaningful understanding.
The theoretical contributions of Brandi and Benjamin function here as guiding orientations rather than prescriptive solutions. Attention to historical context and to the problem of aura may foster responsible modes of reconstruction capable of reactivating resonances of the original work without claiming to reproduce it. When grounded in ethical awareness and a commitment to accessibility, digital manuscript reconstructions can generate vital pathways of cultural memory, enabling forms of historical relation that would otherwise remain irretrievably obscured by acts of deliberate destruction. The new configurations assembled from dispersed leaves inevitably diverge from any hypothetical intact state; yet they may still sustain meaningful connections with the past, preserving lines of transmission threatened by the blunt force of cultural vandalism.

Reassembly produces continuity while simultaneously exposing the trace of what has been irrevocably consumed. The recomposed body survives through substitution, and it is precisely this substituted element that renders visible the history of violence.
Once the codex has been subjected to calculated excision, its material unity cannot be fully reinstated. Even when dispersed leaves are identified, digitally reunited and reintegrated into a reconstructed sequence, the artefact continues to bear the scars of its transformation. Knife-cuts along decorated borders, the abrupt truncation of textual justification, and sewing stations exposed like opened sutures function not merely as technical evidence but as inscriptions of historical trauma. For instance, the bindings of dismembered manuscripts only exceptionally reappear on the art market; when they do, photographic

documentation is often difficult to obtain, thereby complicating any attempt at digital reconstruction of the codex – a research task that I have pursued systematically since 2006 together with the research teams working under my direction, resulting in the reconstruction of more than one thousand dismembered manuscripts, some of which are accessible through the website of the *Organisation pour la Protection des Manuscrits Médiévaux* –.[6] In many cases, the leaves excised and subsequently sold as individual objects still preserve pencil markings – and occasionally ink annotations – recording the inventory numbers assigned in auction or dealers' catalogues (Fig. 4).

Fig. 1. Digital reconstruction of the famous Livre d'Heures De Ponthieu. Note the pencil markings recording the inventory numbers assigned in dealers' catalogue https://www.carlarossi.art/livre-dheures-de-ponthieu

[6] Central to the mission of the Organisation is the Archivum Codicum Manuscriptorum Disiectorum", a digital repository that symbolises both a personal crusade and a collective commitment to preserving the images of manuscript folios. These folios, once part of larger works, had been disassembled and dispersed, victims of a commercial appetite that valued profit over historical integrity. The Archivum stands as a testament to my dedication, a digital haven where these fragmented pieces of history are methodically compiled, conserved, and shared. Each entry in the Archivum represents a piece of a larger story, a narrative that we are painstakingly trying to reconstruct. Our goal extends beyond mere conservation; it is about dissemination and education, ensuring that these invaluable cultural artefacts continue to inform and inspire. In the face of adversity, the Archivum serves as a powerful symbol of our commitment to history and our refusal to let its physical fragmentation lead to a loss of knowledge and appreciation. Through this endeavour, we not only challenge those who sought to undermine us but also fortify our shared cultural legacy against future threats.

In other instances, the absence of a leaf can be addressed through philological reconstruction grounded in textual sequence, liturgical structure, and codicological comparison (Fig. 5).

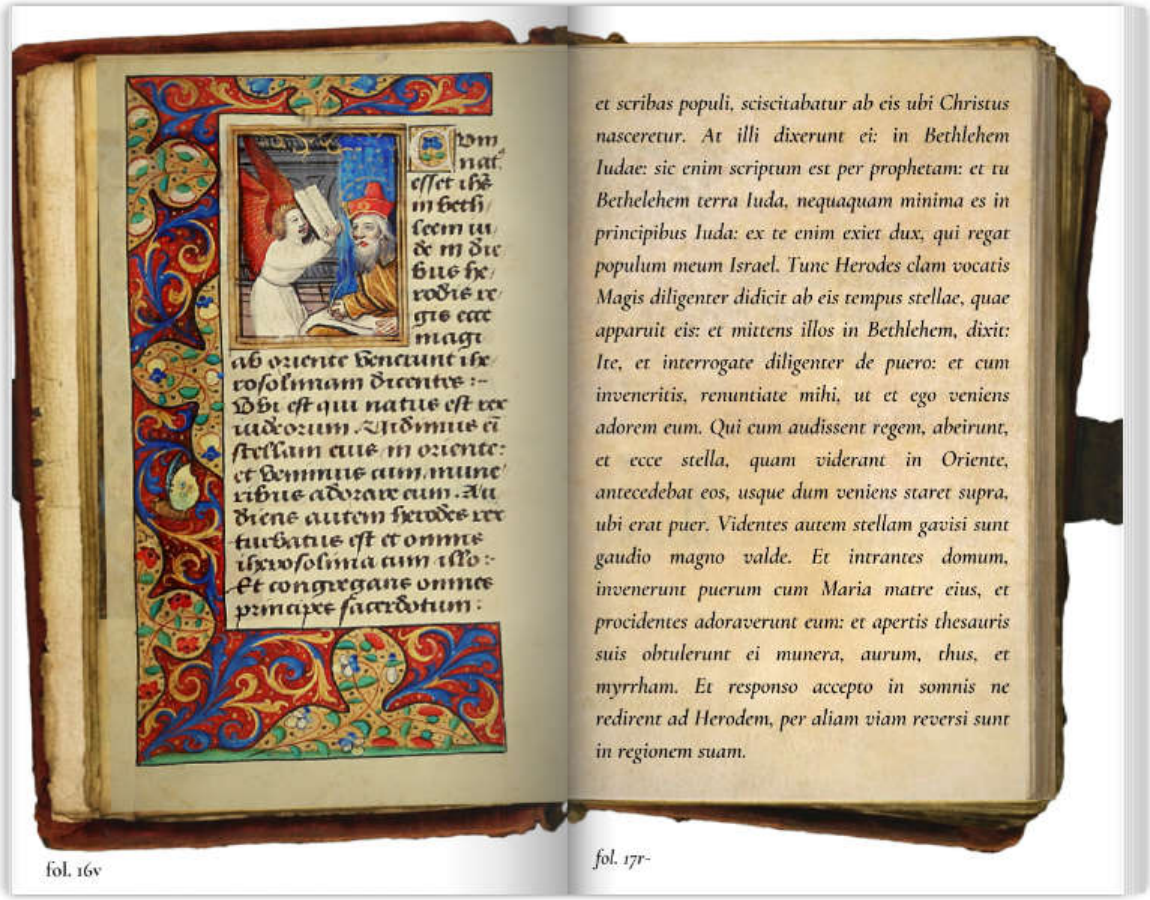

Fig. 2. Digital reconstruction of the famous Livre d'Heures De Ponthieu. Note the pencil markings recording the inventory numbers assigned in dealers' catalogue https://www.carlarossi.art/livre-dheures-de-ponthieu

Such marks may be approached through what Carlo Ginzburg has defined as the "evidential paradigm," whereby marginal material traces function as indices of otherwise inaccessible historical actions.[7] The torn margin or displaced ruling pattern thus registers intentional intervention, marking the transition from liturgical or devotional object to aesthetic commodity.

[7] Carlo Ginzburg, "Clues: Roots of an Evidential Paradigm," in *Myths, Emblems, Clues*, London, 1989.

Images persist across temporal ruptures, yet their persistence remains inseparable from transformation and loss. The dispersed folio survives as an image, though no longer as part of the organic visual and textual economy that originally structured the codex. Once the support is mutilated, the image itself undergoes a shift in status: it ceases to operate within a ritual or narrative continuum and instead emerges as an isolated visual presence, subject to new regimes of perception and value.

The efficacy historically attributed to images – conditioned by their material setting, liturgical or devotional use, and modes of reception – is profoundly altered when manuscripts are deliberately dismantled. Reconstruction, whether material[8] or digital, therefore unfolds within what may be described as a post-cannibalic horizon. It seeks to restore intelligibility while recognising that the conditions of original integrity remain irrecoverable. It does not restore an original state but seeks instead to reconstitute conditions of intelligibility that have been structurally compromised.

In this sense, reconstruction does not efface violence; it renders it intelligible and historically accountable. Reconstruction begins where violence has already taken place. What has been severed cannot be restored to its former state, yet neither can it remain epistemically mute. The dismantling of medieval manuscripts interrupts a historically constituted field of relations. Once detached from this network, individual leaves cease to function as elements of a codicological organism and enter a different regime of existence, defined by mobility, exchange, and aesthetic isolation.

The work of recovery does not reverse this transformation. Rather, it confronts its consequences. In attempting to rearticulate dispersed materials into a legible configuration, reconstruction – whether codicological, philological, or digital – may be understood as forms of cultural *pietas*: they do not deny loss nor seek to restore an unattainable original state, but attempt to recompose intelligibility from what has been deliberately disarticulated. The reconstructed manuscript thus becomes a site of ethical and epistemological tension, where knowledge emerges through the acknowledgement of rupture.

Myths of dismemberment offer precise analogies for the fate of broken manuscripts. The myth of Orpheus introduces a different, equally instructive figure. Torn apart by Bacchic violence, his severed head continues to sing. Detached manuscript leaves often retain a

[8] M. Rickert, *The Reconstructed Carmelite Missal: An English Manuscript of the Late Fourteenth Century in the British Museum (Additional MSS 29704–5, 44892)*, Chicago, 1952; now available online at: https://archive.org/details/reconstructedcar0000rick/page/n9/mode/2up

comparable capacity for articulation. A folio from an antiphonary may still be performable; a page from an Old French narrative may continue to recount its episode; an illuminated initial may still organise the visual memory of a lost textual sequence. Meaning continues to resonate in severed leaves, as voice persists in Orpheus's head. In this sense, dispersed leaves resemble voices separated from their bodies. They circulate as autonomous aesthetic presences, valued for intensity, rarity, and portability. Reconstruction intervenes within this altered field, to recompose relations, to allow what still speaks, sings, or narrates to be heard again within a reconstructed horizon of sense.

Efforts to reconstruct dismembered manuscripts must confront the epistemological implications of violence. Reconstruction operates within what may be termed a post-cannibalic condition.

Projects dedicated to the identification and recontextualisation of dispersed leaves, such as the research initiatives conducted within the Archivum Codicum Manuscriptorum Disiectorum (https://www.oprom.eu/acmd),[9] demonstrate both the possibilities and the limits of such endeavours. By collecting digital surrogates, analysing palaeographical and codicological features, and tracing the trajectories of dispersed folios, scholars can restore a significant degree of structural coherence to mutilated manuscripts.

Yet, as in the myth of Pelops, a residual absence remains. Reconstruction can approximate integrity – often to a remarkable extent – but it cannot fully recover the original material unity of the codex. Every reconstructed manuscript bears an "ivory shoulder": a visible reminder of loss.

Numerous medieval manuscripts have reached the present in materially coherent form, preserved across centuries of transmission before undergoing deliberate dismantling in the modern art market. Their destruction introduces a retrospective fracture into a continuity that had long remained operative, transforming intact codicological bodies into dispersed objects of aesthetic extraction and economic circulation.

The digital and codicological reconstructions undertaken in the series *Biblioclasm and Digital Reconstructions* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing), including the forthcoming fourth volume edited by Antonella Ippolito, respond to this historically recent disruption. They re-establish relations among leaves whose textual and visual interdependence had endured for generations prior to their intentional violence.

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[9] https://www.academia.edu/129557679/2000_2025_Archivum_Codicum_Manuscriptorum_Disiectorum_ACMD

Reconstruction thus acquires a significance that extends beyond the recovery of individual manuscripts. It reveals the historical contingency of transmission itself, showing how intelligibility depends on the preservation, or interruption, of material continuities.

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