Isabelle Boursier's Book of Hours, a Dismembered Manuscript from Mary Benson's Collection

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By

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Cambridge Scholars Publishing

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By Carla Rossi

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INTRODUCTION

MODERN-DAY ASSAULT ON MEDIAEVAL MANUSCRIPTS: THE PROFIT-DRIVEN BIBLIOCLASM

Twenty-seven years have passed since I delved into the intricate web of circumstances surrounding the fate of the lost Royal MS 16 E VIII. Preserved at the British Museum until the summer of 1879, this illuminated manuscript was the sole custodian of the Anglo-Norman poem known as Le Voyage de Charlemagne (hereinafter referred to as VdC).

It was during this pivotal moment that my profound interest in dismembered manuscripts was first kindled.

Ever since then, I have vigilantly monitored the market for scattered leaves of mediaeval manuscripts, driven by the enduring hope of finding any vestige that may shed light on the VdC *disiecta membra*'s whereabouts, and my pursuits can be epitomised by the guiding maxim found within a verse from the poem itself: *Ja ne m'en turnerai trescque l'avrai trovez* (I shall not cease my search until I have found it, VdC, v. 75).

Since the theft of the manuscript can be interpreted as an act of intellectual guerrilla warfare by German philologists against the French, in recent years my research has centred on scrutinising Eduard Koschwitz's private documents, which are housed within French archives.

Of particular significance are the hitherto undisclosed private letters of the Prussian philologist. These letters, as I mentioned during the conference held in November 2023 in Sofia to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Department of Romance Studies, in a presentation titled 'The theft of the Royal 16 E VIII manuscript from the British Museum in 1879: the last twenty years of research', completely exonerate August Leopold Rothe, the final known individual to have consulted the codex on 7 June 1879, before its enigmatic vanishing from the Round Reading Room of the British Museum.

These newly discovered materials provided illuminating insights into the context encompassing the theft and the subsequent fate of the manuscript.

It is noteworthy that the Prussian philologists of the 19th century harboured not only the ambition to withhold invaluable testimonies of a glorious past from their French adversaries, whom they perceived as rivals in the realm of critical editions of Old French texts but also the intent to subject them to humiliation (Rossi, 2005). To achieve their goals, they waged sabotage campaigns, unabashedly resorting to acts of theft, as exemplified by the unfortunate destiny of the Royal MS 16 E VIII.

Despite the considerable transformations that have occurred over the course of nearly two centuries, it is significant how the contemporary actors in this narrative often trace their lineage to the descendants of these very Prussian scholars.

On the one hand, there exists a jurisdictional void, akin to *terra nullius*, wherein the dismemberment of mediaeval manuscripts occurs, i.e., Germany. On the other hand, the objects of these dismemberments primarily consist of manuscripts originating from France.

It was through this path that I became acquainted with the market of scattered leaves from mediaeval manuscripts, and to my utmost astonishment, I encountered the disconcerting reality of the widespread dismemberment of these precious artefacts.

Since the 1960s, several hundred mediaeval manuscripts and incunabula, treasured pieces of the Western bookish heritage, have been physically disassembled. Thousands of illuminated folios have been put up for sale to satisfy the demand of private collectors and public institutions, primarily located in North America and Australia.

These “pieces of manuscripts whose tearing leaves enduring wounds that still bleed” (Delisle, 1883, 223) originate mainly from Latin devotional and liturgical texts produced in mediaeval France. Specifically evidenced are Bibles, Psalters, Breviaries, Books of Hours, Missals, and Choir Books. In addition, the corpus contains leaves in Hebrew of a liturgical, exegetical, and philosophical textual nature. Furthermore amongst these variegated textual and illuminated leaves are Old French verse and prose literary works alongside specimens representing Arabic scientific treatises on medical or legal matters.

Remarkably, only a mere twenty per cent of these scattered folios are already known to scholars each year, implying that the remaining eighty per cent are derived from recently dismembered manuscripts.

The act of collecting scattered leaves can be traced back to the Middle Ages when obsolete manuscript fragments were reused as pastedowns in new manuscripts. However, the systematic dismemberment of manuscripts for economic gain, along with the subsequent fascination with collecting detached illuminated leaves, originated during the Victorian era and has persisted ever since. In the late 19th and throughout the 20th century, the practice of intentionally damaging mediaeval manuscripts became widespread, involving the removal of illuminated or decorated initials, miniatures, or even just text leaves using a craft knife, for individual commercialisation in the antiquarian market.

As a result, countless invaluable parchment art treasures have been irretrievably lost, while hundreds of thousands of illuminated leaves have been dispersed throughout the world. Regrettably, attempts to curb this harmful practise have proven futile.

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.

It is not only scientifically questionable to continue considering "Fragmentology" as a distinct discipline in its own right, but we must acknowledge and denounce the current dismembers operating in the market, rather than becoming complicit in their actions!

Each manuscript leaf should be studied through a philological, linguistic, and historical approach, requiring a solid understanding of the language and style of the texts it contains.

For instance, it is regrettable to observe that some transcriptions of Latin found on "fragment" cataloguing websites are far from satisfactory from a scientific standpoint.[1]

Equally embarrassing is reading "studies" like the one brought to attention in this link: https://manuscriptevidence.org/wpme/leaf-from-a-tiny-book-of-hours/,[2] where one essentially admits complete ignorance regarding the examined manuscript leaf and is only capable of providing its dimensions and physical characteristics as if it were merely a design object!

These projects lack genuine scholarly value and instead seem to serve as a means to sustain a profitable enterprise that primarily benefits its collaborators. In some cases, these websites even encourage manuscript-destroying merchants, further undermining the integrity of academic research.

A clear demonstration of culpable omission of information regarding recent acts of profit-driven biblioclasm can be seen in the cataloguing website www.fragmentarium.ms, which avoids mentioning the origin of leaves from dismembered manuscripts in the past few years, only providing provenance details for those destroyed in the distant past, specifically from the Ege collection. While it is easy to locate and put just a few folios from the Ege collection in sequence, as seen in Fragmentarium.ms's so-called "codices restituti", it is difficult and a real mission to follow the path of each leaf from recently destroyed manuscripts. Simply sequencing some leaves from the Ege collection cannot be considered genuinely reconstructing a manuscript, but rather a fake academic endeavour. The so-called "codices restituti" are a maximum of 30 leaves not even placed in the correct sequence, without information about the history of the manuscript before its

dismemberment, about the production workshop, without correct textual transcriptions (as shown by way of example at the following link: https://fragmentarium.ms/overview/F-6f1x). Not to mention the Latin errors and the confusion prevailing on a site whose purpose should be to digitally restore the famous Breviary of Lionello d'Este (https://broken books.omeka.net/).

An instance showcasing a glaring absence of information regarding recent biblioclasm can be found in Fragmentarium, as demonstrated by a leaf originating from a Book of Hours that was previously part of the de Ponthieu collection. This leaf was dismembered in 2014 after its sale at a Sotheby's auction for a nominal sum of 20,000 pounds.

The De Ponthieu Book of Hours, written in Latin and measuring 160 by 102 mm, originally consisted of over two hundred leaves, but by the time of the two auctions at Sotheby's in 2013 (during which the codex remained unsold) and in 2014, only 178 leaves remained. In the 18th century, some loose leaves from this precious Book of Hours had become part of the collection of John Percival (1683-1748), Earl of Egmont, but by 2014, the manuscript was still in a good state of preservation.

The catalogue of the London auction house mentions an inscription at the end of the manuscript, dated March 26, 1605. With this information, it was not difficult for me to identify, through a well-known North American biblioclast dealer, the final leaf of the codex bearing this precise note, which proved to be extremely interesting for the historical reconstruction of the manuscript that I digitally reconstructed.[3]

The Necessity of an Accurate Terminology

It is crucial to make a clear distinction between ancient parchment fragments, which arise from natural historical processes, and recently excised leaves that have been intentionally removed for profit from a manuscript.

In the field of manuscript studies, the term "fragment" is typically employed to refer to a residual part of a codex that has undergone various types of damage throughout its history. These damages can include natural wear and tear, deterioration, or even intentional acts such as the deliberate reuse of the parchment.

A “genuine fragment” typically represents a piece of a larger manuscript, preserving a portion of its original content. It can range from a small section of a single leaf to larger segments that contain multiple pages or parts of a text. These fragments offer valuable insights into the historical, cultural, and textual aspects of the original manuscript they originated from.

The study of these pieces plays a crucial role in reconstructing and understanding lost or fragmented works, tracing the transmission and circulation of texts, and shedding light on historical manuscript production, scribal practices, and the intellectual traditions of different time periods.

By mislabelling a recently excised leaf as a “fragment” we risk misrepresenting its historical context, obscuring the fact that these leaves were deliberately severed from manuscripts, and potentially disregarding the ethical and legal implications associated with their removal. Hence, it is essential to use accurate terminology that reflects the intentional withdrawal of a leaf for commercial purposes, acknowledging that it is a distinct entity separate from genuine fragments that have undergone natural historical processes of damage or decay.

This distinction allows for different approaches to the preservation, cataloguing, and study of these materials, considering the diverse motivations and implications associated with each situation, promotes ethical practices in the field of manuscript studies, encourages responsible collecting and stewardship of cultural heritage, inspiring a deeper understanding of the historical processes that shape the surviving material and highlights the importance of preserving manuscripts in their original context whenever possible.

We must confront the issue of manuscript dismemberment even in the language we use, taking a strong stance against those who engage in this destructive practice. Rather than turning a blind eye or inadvertently enabling these actions, we should actively expose and challenge the individuals and entities involved in the deliberate shattering of manuscripts for profit.

This necessitates fostering awareness among scholars, collectors, and the general public regarding the adverse repercussions of manuscript dismemberment. It entails enlightening certain individuals about the historical and cultural significance of intact manuscripts and the detrimental consequences of separating their constituent parts.

Through the promotion of principled guidelines and the dissemination of best practices, we can establish a robust framework that safeguards the integrity and unity of manuscripts, discourages their dismemberment, and guarantees their enduring preservation for future generations. It is imperative that we embark on a resolute crusade against unscrupulous merchants who, despite being members of the ILAB (International League of Antiquarian Booksellers), violate one of its fundamental policies. This policy (see point 22) unequivocally states that "Members are committed to the preservation of historical materials and should not break complete and intact copies of books or manuscripts".

In the following pages of this study, I will refer to intentionally dismembered manuscript leaves for profit as "excised leaves", and I will use the term "digital fragment" to refer to those images that often depict only details of an excised leaf being sold online.

To fully grasp the gravity of the situation and the formidable power wielded by the lobby of biblioclasts, particularly their aggressive stance against those who dare to expose them, I find myself compelled to share a personal anecdote. This account is necessary to illustrate just how powerful and aggressive the organised market for these kinds of artefacts can be in defending its business interests. As an academic deeply involved in the study and protection of mediaeval manuscripts, I have personally encountered the formidable aggression of the organised market trading in such artefacts. This experience of mine serves as a stark reminder of the serious nature of this issue.

In October 2022, I reported a network of biblioclasts to the Carabinieri Cultural Heritage Protection Command (TPC) in Italy. [4] These individuals, often in collusion with compliant freelance collaborators of auction houses and antiquarian galleries who act as intermediaries, with immense profits, between dealers and buyers, were disassembling manuscripts to sell the illuminated leaves at inflated prices in the antiquarian book market. Such actions are a direct violation of Articles 20, Paragraph 1, and 30, Paragraph 3, of the Italian Cultural Heritage Law. Alongside this, I filed several reports with the TPC's foreign division concerning the dismemberment of French and German manuscripts. One notable report involved the Book of Hours of Louis de Roucy, a manuscript disassembled in Germany in the autumn of 2009 and subsequently sold as individual leaves in the United Kingdom.

Following these reports, on December 20, 2022, I published an exposé on AboutArt (source: https://www.aboutartonline.com/manoscritti-mediaevali-

europei-a-prezzi-stracciati-sul-web-un-appello-per-la-tutela-di-beni-culturali-tra-i-piu-preziosi/) to garner support from colleagues and interested parties. The article notably highlighted the dismemberment of an Italian manuscript that was still bearing labels from an Italian library when sold in Germany.

However, just two days after the publication of my article, an independent collaborator of auction houses and biblioclast merchants launched an extremely virulent campaign against me, my family, my colleagues, and my students.

On Christmas Eve 2022, we became victims of a violent hate and defamation campaign, comparable to the one suffered by Giovanni Mazzarelli[5]. The research centre that I co-direct was also subjected to multiple attacks, often anonymous but equally infamous, on social media. These attacks included daily death threats, two mock obituaries published on a funeral website, false information spread by self-styled journalists online, my Wikipedia page being saturated with defamatory content to the point where Wikipedia had to protect it, and delusional emails sent to my friends and acquaintances. Some pseudo-scholars from the United States also participated in this campaign, perhaps unwittingly becoming accomplices in these criminal acts. In the tangled web of academia and artefact trading, I found myself ensnared in an unexpected and unsettling drama.

Behind the veil of anonymity, a shadowy network of dubious characters, known only by their pseudonyms, launched a calculated assault on my professional integrity. This was no ordinary skirmish; it was a direct attack on the reputation I had painstakingly built over three decades of scholarship.

Their strategy was insidious. Armed with counterfeit evidence, they fabricated allegations of plagiarism in my published works — articles and books that I had openly shared on Academia.edu. These writings, long regarded in university circles as reservoirs of rich philological and historical insights, have been cited for years by other scholars as sources for new research works. Yet, they became the targets of this bizarre campaign of defamation.

In the world of philology, where I had established my name, the reaction to these events was swift and unequivocal. Colleagues and readers, familiar with my work's integrity, saw through the charade. The aggression directed at me was not only perceived as dangerous but also deeply unbecoming of the dignified academic discourse we cherished. The nature of the attack,

brimming with a hostility foreign to scholarly circles, was a jarring aberration.

Far from being isolated in this storm, I found myself supported by a community that valued truth and scholarly rigour. They extended their solidarity not just in words but in actions. Invitations to deliver lectures and academic articles poured in, providing me with a platform to not only defend my work but also to shine a light on a broader issue: the ruthless dismemberment of mediaeval manuscripts for profit.

In these forums, I took a stand, articulating in detail the nefarious practices plaguing our field. More significantly, I broke the silence on the identities of those orchestrating these crimes — not just against me, but against our collective cultural heritage. It was a moment of truth, a confrontation with the dark underbelly of the world where history, academia, and commerce uncomfortably collide.

In essence, those orchestrating this campaign of hate and defamation treated me with the same disregard as the manuscripts they callously dismember.

"Fragmentology" vs. Reconstruction

As noted by Virgil Cândea in a 1974 publication edited by UNESCO, "illustrated manuscripts represent a unique and deeply troubling case in the unfortunate history of dismembered artworks. The challenges associated with their reconstitution are among the most formidable, and the achieved results thus far have been rather limited and frequently unsatisfactory" (Candea, 1974, 188). Cândea suggested the creation of what today we would call *databases*, which (he wrote) "will help us in carrying out future reconstitutions. First of all, full documentation on these works is of course indispensable ... we must prepare directories of dismembered illuminated manuscripts".

This is exactly what the Research Centre for European Philological Tradition, and the French Organisation pour la Protection des Manuscrits Médiévaux (OProM) are doing. They are collaborating, scrupulously following Cândea's wise indications, and working with associations and libraries involved in the protection of mediaeval manuscripts.

Since Cândea's observations, significant advancements have been made, thanks to the extensive possibilities afforded by digital technology. However,

acts of vandalism against Western Mediaeval and pre-Renaissance manuscripts have intensified, if anything.

"Such directories would have the merit of hastening the reconstitution of dismembered manuscripts ... Furthermore, they would be excellent tools for research workers, librarians, antiquarians, and collectors who have to deal with unlisted fragments which are still not permanently housed. The directories would also help in the tracking down of fragments that were reported a long time ago in public or private collections but which have since changed hands. Finally, they might give a list of the publications required to publish all the fragments of an entire work which had been discovered, this being the most usual means of reconstituting dismembered illuminated manuscripts" (Candea, 1974, 191).

I have extensively contemplated the prospect of rescuing these exquisite works from the obscurity imposed upon them through acts of vandalism. Throughout numerous years, my commitment has been directed towards formulating and enhancing a rigorous scientific methodology founded upon a philological approach to scattered leaves, aimed at digitally reconstructing dismembered manuscripts and restoring their original form and context.

This technique, known as the WayBack Recovery Method (hereafter referred to as WBRM), enables researchers to digitally reconstruct dismembered manuscripts with remarkable ease.

Currently, I am sharing this method with selected groups of post-doctoral students as part of an international university specialization course offered by the Research Centre for European Philological Tradition. This course aims to cultivate the next generation of experts in the field, providing them with the necessary skills and insights to navigate the intricate realm of dismembered manuscripts.

At the heart of the WBRM lies its emphasis on *digital fragments*, a particular type of image that holds immense potential for reconstruction. I have delved into this aspect in a handbook, currently published in Italian.[6]

By harnessing the power of digital fragments, we unlock new avenues for restoration and analysis.

As we delve deeper into this method, our aim is not only to salvage these cultural treasures from the clutches of vandalism but also to breathe new life into their scattered existence. In the case of manuscripts, as well as other dismembered artefacts to which the same reconstructive technique can be

applied, digitisation and virtual restoration offer interesting opportunities for scientific publishing as well. These approaches allow for peaceful work on the documents and the exploration of multiple restitution hypotheses, easily archiving them. Digital facsimile editions of these types of manuscripts, no longer existing in reality, can thus create products that have both an aesthetic value and a scientific function.

Digital reconstructions

When discussing the approach to digital reconstructions, it is important to provide a brief theoretical contextualisation, drawing inspiration from Cesare Brandi's theory of restoration, and Walter Benjamin's discourse on *aura*.

Brandi (1906-1988) was an Italian art historian and conservation theorist who developed a comprehensive framework for the practice of restoration. His theory, outlined in his book “Theory of Restoration” (1963), emphasises the importance of respecting the historical and aesthetic integrity of an artwork during the conservation process. He proposed that restoration should aim to achieve a "dynamic conservation" where the artwork is not frozen in time but allowed to maintain its vitality and historical context while addressing any damage or deterioration it may have suffered, almost, we might add, as the Japanese art of *kintsugi* does, finding beauty in imperfections.

The restoration process should be guided by a deep understanding of the artwork's original context and artistic intent, ensuring its meaningful transmission to future generations.

In this sense, we also have to reckon with some of Walter Benjamin's observations, presented in his essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (1936) that highlighted the *aura*, unique presence, and authenticity that emanates from a work of art in its original form. It is an intangible quality that arises from the artwork's historical context, its singular existence, and its connection to tradition and ritual. *Aura* creates a sense of reverence and awe, drawing the viewer into a direct and immediate encounter with the artwork.

Therefore, the first methodological questions to which we are obliged to provide a practical answer are the following:

- How should we act if the artwork we are digitally reconstructing no longer exists in reality because it was intentionally destroyed for economic purposes?
- As European scholars and custodians of Western culture, do we have an ethical responsibility to transmit to future generations the "aura" of an object that human greed has shattered into pieces? Do we not bear a profound responsibility for both the past and the future entrusted to us?

The affirmative answers lead to further reflection on respect for the past and full awareness of the historical *discontinuum*, as highlighted primarily by Benjamin himself.

The barbarism of biblioclast dealers, who intentionally destroy cultural artefacts, becomes especially significant.

The destruction of mediaeval manuscripts represents a violent rupture in the transmission of cultural heritage, depriving future generations of access to important sources of information and insights. We could define it, with a neologism, as a persistent "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?

While we cannot undo the damage fully, the digital realm provides fertile ground for reconnection and remembering. As layers of annotations, commentaries, and marginalia accrue over time in the virtual space, it creates a collective memorial in which many can pay tribute to and interact with the remnants of vandalised artefacts. The manuscripts take on new life as dynamic texts evolving through the ages but never forgetting their origins.

When assessing digital restoration efforts, Brandi and Benjamin's theoretical frameworks offer critical guidance. Brandi advocates for understanding the historical context and original sociocultural purpose of the artwork pre-restoration. This allows for dynamic yet responsible conservation that respects the artefact's essence over time. With manuscripts specifically, their prior physical handling etches echoes of those interactions which digital recreation can make audible again.

However, Benjamin cautions us - mechanical reproduction may resurrect semblances of lost originals but rarely captures their singular aura. This aura encompasses the entire lifespan and all sociocultural relations interwoven through the physical artwork. Restoration via digitisation risks criticism as inauthentic recreation. The powerful antiquities trade lobby already diminishes cultural heritage but may further delegitimise these reconstructions.

Thus ethical questions emerge surrounding utilising technology this way. The initial impetus for restoration is preserving artwork for posterity based on its historiographical and aesthetic value. Digital restoration provides reproducible access but frequently utilises fragments dismembered through vandalism or plunder. Does this constitute complicity in the initial desecration? Can decentralised digitisation sufficiently provide context for future generations?

Brandi and Benjamin offer principles, not prescriptions here. Understanding context and aura leads towards responsible recreation echoing the resonances of the original. Prioritising ethics and access can produce breathing digital replicas nurturing cultural memory if guided by the quest to meaningfully reconnect rather than replicate artefacts. The new whole synthesised from fragments will differ from any hypothetical original. Yet lovingly rendered digital manuscript reconstructions can still manifest pathways to the past otherwise lost entirely to blunt vandalism.

Aligned with Brandi's ethos of preserving an artwork's tangibility and historic context, digital reconstruction endeavours to rekindle a manuscript's

visual and textual vitality whilst upholding its integrity and authenticity. This requires an ocean of scholarly research into the original production techniques, scriptorium customs, sociocultural milieu, and linguistic nuances giving rise to the manuscript.

By synthesising Brandi's conservation tenets with Benjamin's cautions around reproduction, a cohesive approach crystallises for safeguarding our cultural patrimony. This perspective compels holistically analysing the work's substance, diction, setting, and materiality to meaningfully resuscitate the manuscript.

Sophisticated technologies like image processing and machine learning may assist in illuminating damaged segments by postulating educated extrapolations, yet still celebrating each creation's individuality. "Dynamic conservation" in digitised editions champions a fluid, iterative methodology for manuscript reconstruction, assimilating emerging discoveries as new fragments come to light. By continuously rejuvenating the digital portrayal, researchers can nurture a living testament to the manuscript, enriching comprehension of its legacy.

The ultimate ambition is bequeathing the restored manuscript to posterity, enabling its ideas, aesthetics, and history to still stir hearts and minds even lacking the original. By honouring Brandi's principles, digital restoration can conjure the manuscript's quintessence back into view and enable its scholarly and cultural appreciation to endure.

In conclusion in this brief introduction, which aims to provide an overview of the challenges posed by the issue of profit-driven dismemberment of European mediaeval manuscripts, I wish to highlight several key milestones. In 2006, I launched the "Biblioclasm & Digital Reconstruction" project, with a commitment to Open Access principles. Subsequently, in collaboration with the Research Centre for European Philological Tradition, I developed a specialised program to facilitate this endeavour. Beginning in 2016, and with the generous support of numerous teams over the years, we have achieved the successful restoration of approximately five hundred fragmented manuscripts. It's important to emphasise that all of these efforts have been carried out pro bono and in the spirit of Open Access, with no personal gain or profit derived from these reconstructions.

In the wake of the disturbing defamation campaign, our response had to be equally strategic and unified. This campaign, perpetrated by a freelance collaborator closely aligned with antiquarian booksellers and auction

houses, along with certain "fragmentologists," was not just a personal attack on me. It was a broader assault on the Research Centre for European Philological Tradition as a whole. Their tactics, designed to discredit and undermine our scholarly work, inadvertently became the catalyst for a significant counter-movement.

This adversity galvanised the centre's members, prompting us to establish an association in France with a focused mission: the Organisation pour la Protection des Manuscrits Médiévaux. It was not just an act of defence but a proactive step towards safeguarding a heritage that was under threat. The Organisation emerged as a beacon of hope and resilience in the face of concerted efforts to dismantle our cultural history for profit.

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.

What began as a focused project for the digital recovery of dismembered manuscripts has since blossomed, receiving substantial endorsement from the academic community. This initiative has transformed into a collective crusade, one that not only seeks to preserve but also to hold accountable those involved in the trade of these artefacts, including members of the ILAB (International League of Antiquarian Booksellers). Our efforts resonate with the core principles of ILAB, particularly the emphasis on preserving historical materials and opposing the disassembly of complete and intact books or manuscripts.

Despite the challenges posed by the ongoing defamation campaign, our dedication to the digital reconstruction of fragmented manuscripts remains unwavering. The website www.oprom.eu/fac-similes stands as a hub where several reconstructions, including the reconstitution of the disassembled Book of Hours discussed in this book, are made accessible. Each digital reconstruction on the platform is not just a scholarly resource; it is a symbol of our defiance against the forces that seek to fragment our shared cultural heritage and a beacon of our resolve to preserve and disseminate knowledge.

Notes to the Introduction

[1] As an example, you can consult this link https://fol48.omeka.net/exhibits/show/fol48/item/7 (visited on 13.06.2023) to witness the absurd Latin transcription carried out as part of an American project on the leaves of the Ege collection, where the text "mortis suscipe" is transcribed as "fusus est". This mistake demonstrates a blatant lack of understanding of the language and underscores the lack of scientific rigor.

[2] Link visited on 13.06.2023.

[3] https://www.receptioacademic.press/deponthieuhours

[4] Article 20, paragraph 1, expressly states that "cultural objects may not be destroyed, deteriorated, damaged or used in a way that is incompatible with their historic or artistic character, or that is likely to prejudice their conservation".
Consequently, Art. 30, paragraph 3, obliges "the possessor, holder or private owner to ensure the conservation of the property".
With regard to sanctions, both administrative and criminal, Art. 169 states that "anyone who, without authorisation, demolishes, removes, alters, restores or carries out work of any kind on the cultural property referred to in Article 10" is punishable by a prison sentence of between six months and one year and a fine of between 775 euros and 40,000 euros.

[5] At the end of the 1970s, Giovanni Mazzarelli, an Italian engineer in Russia and a passionate collector of manuscripts, acquired in a private transaction at Sotheby's in London a gold-decorated missal worth £6 million, which later turned out to have been stolen from the Archdiocese of Trani, along with an evangelist's book and other manuscripts stolen from the Girolamini library in Naples.
In 2000, Mazzarelli approached the same London auction house to resell this collection, and on this occasion something totally unexpected happened.
In the face of undeniable evidence of the manuscripts' illicit origin, rather than admitting their complicity in dealing with stolen goods, the auction house vehemently denied selling the codices to the Italian collector. For an extensive period of eleven years, they launched a campaign to defame Mazzarelli, falsely accusing him of being the thief. Only after a protracted legal battle in the United Kingdom, which exacted a significant toll on the collector both financially and emotionally, did Sotheby's finally produce the documentation pertaining to the sale of the manuscripts. Mazzarelli not only succeeded in proving his innocence regarding

the theft but, more importantly, he exposed the deceit and defamation he had endured. As a result, Mazzarelli voluntarily returned the manuscripts to their original institutions.

[6] Rossi, Carla, 2022, WayBack Recovery, Manuale metodologico per la ricostruzione digitale di manoscritti smembrati, London, Receptio Academic Press.

CHAPTER 1

SCATTERED HERITAGE: THE ART MARKET OF DISMEMBERED MANUSCRIPTS LEAVES ETHICAL AND CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS IN THE DISMEMBERMENT OF MANUSCRIPTS

Europe's mediaeval manuscript heritage currently confronts grave threats largely arising from particular art merchants dismembering these works for financial gain. Beyond historical relics, these manuscripts signify vast repositories of sociocultural insight across generations. Their illuminated *folios* frequently exhibit intricate artistry and profound historical import, selling for staggering sums when disassembled into individual leaves devoid of context. This reduction of cultural heritage into commodities risks irrecoverable losses of coherence and meaning.

Moreover, voracious competition between private collectors and institutions to obtain singular leaves compounds the dismemberments, especially among nations lacking mediaeval heritage of their own. For such collectors, acquiring exclusive leaves promises not merely coveted ownership but an elusive tangible tether to alluring past eras seemingly beyond reach. Thus cultural deprivation intensifies market demand for leaves stripped of original integrity.

Ambitions manifest differently among varying collector demographics yet unite around profoundly valuing tangible connection across ages through manuscript heritage otherwise lacking. However, colonially inherited asymmetries of economic influence and cultural stewardship allow well-resourced actors to potentially reshape entitlement over Eurocentric heritage for personal gain yet global loss. Thus ethical urgency compels intervention to balance equitable access with safeguarding fragile manuscript coherence from corrosive commodification.

The ramifications of this trend are deeply concerning. As these manuscripts are dismantled and their leaves scattered, the collective narrative they offer — an invaluable insight into the mediaeval era — is lost. Each *folio*, while a work of art in its own right, loses a part of its meaning and context when separated from the whole. This loss is not just a matter of historical interest; it's a loss of a shared cultural heritage, a diminishing of the rich tapestry that forms our understanding of the European past.

Confronted with such a dire situation, the need for a collaborative response from scholars, cultural institutions, and governments becomes ever more pressing. There is a critical need to establish and uphold ethical and responsible practices in the acquisition and sale of mediaeval manuscript leaves. This is not merely a matter of regulating the art market; it's about safeguarding a significant part of human history for future generations.

The statistics surrounding this issue paint a grim picture. Each year, only a fraction of these leaves — about 20% — are identified and documented by researchers. This stark figure implies that the vast majority, around 80%, are from manuscripts that have been recently dismembered. This ongoing destruction of manuscripts not only hinders academic research but also continues to erode the cultural heritage these manuscripts represent.

These figures underscore the urgency with which this issue must be addressed. It's a call to action for preserving what remains of the mediaeval manuscript heritage, a heritage that once lost, cannot be reclaimed. The challenge lies not only in curbing the destructive practices of disassembly and sale but also in fostering a global appreciation and respect for these artefacts. It is a task that demands a concerted effort, one that spans legal, academic, and cultural domains, to ensure that these relics of the past continue to enlighten and inspire future generations.

Ethical and Cultural Considerations in the Dismemberment of Manuscripts

The practice of dismembering historical manuscripts to obtain individual leaves, particularly those recently excised, presents a complex array of ethical and cultural challenges. This issue straddles the fine line between the preservation of cultural heritage and the varied interests of collectors, academia, and the art market.

When we consider the dismemberment of manuscripts, it’s important to recognise that these are not mere collections of parchment and gold. Each

manuscript is a cohesive artefact, a cultural and historical narrative bound together in a physical form. The act of removing individual leaves from these manuscripts is akin to erasing chapters from a historical narrative. What is lost is not just the physical integrity of the manuscript, but the contextual richness that it embodies.

From a cultural standpoint, these manuscripts are more than historical documents; they are embodiments of the intellectual and artistic endeavours of past civilizations. The removal of leaves from these manuscripts can be seen as a disservice to the cultural heritage of the society that produced them. This issue becomes even more pronounced when such leaves are traded or exported, effectively stripping historical artefacts from their cultural and geographical roots. This raises significant concerns about the rights to cultural property and the ethical implications of heritage ownership.

For scholars, the impact of manuscript dismemberment is profound. Academic research relies heavily on the integrity and completeness of historical sources. With the extraction of individual leaves, crucial elements such as bindings, folio sequences, and annotations are lost. Interdisciplinary studies that rely on the intact nature of these manuscripts, spanning areas like art history, literature, theology, and codicology, are particularly affected.

There's also an ethical dimension to consider, especially for scholars working with these excised leaves. Engaging with these materials might inadvertently signal a tacit endorsement of their dismemberment. Furthermore, scholarly reliance on these leaves could potentially stimulate market demand, leading to more dismemberment.

While digital technology offers some respite through projects aimed at virtually reconstructing dismembered manuscripts, this is not a complete solution. Digital reunification is beneficial but cannot fully replicate the insights offered by a physically intact manuscript. Moreover, these digital endeavours are often intricate, resource-intensive, and not always possible, especially for rarer works.

The market for dismembered manuscript leaves, while a topic of considerable debate, is undeniably shaped by a complex interplay of demand and supply, each influenced by a myriad of factors ranging from historical significance to the practicalities of the modern collecting world.

On the demand side, the primary driver is the deep historical and cultural fascination with these artefacts. Collectors and institutions often seek these leaves for their inherent historical and cultural value, representing a direct link to the past. The aesthetic qualities of mediaeval manuscripts, with their detailed illuminations and calligraphy, also play a crucial role in their appeal. These elements are not just artistic expressions; they are historical documents that offer insights into the artistry and craftsmanship of a bygone era.

Academic and educational use in nations such as the United States or Australia constitutes another significant aspect of this demand. They provide academics and students alike with tangible connections to historical narratives, enriching their understanding of the past.

Investment interest and the perceived rarity of these leaves further drive their demand. Viewed as rare commodities, their value is often seen to appreciate over time, making them attractive to collectors seeking financial as well as historical value. The uniqueness of certain manuscripts, particularly those with distinctive features or originating from notable historical periods, intensifies this demand.

Beyond the realms of scholarship and investment, there's also a market driven by the decorative appeal of these leaves. They are sought after by interior decorators and private collectors for their aesthetic qualities, serving as ornate and historical additions to personal and public spaces.

On the supply side, the sources of these leaves are diverse.

The deliberate dismemberment of manuscripts by contemporary collectors and dealers, aiming to profit from the sale of individual leaves, continues to be a source of supply, albeit a controversial one. The activities of figures like Otto Ege, or Bruce “Scissorhands” Ferrini, known for their systematic disassembly of manuscripts, exemplify this aspect of the market.

We must underscore the fact that today's leading sellers of these leaves are galleries that initially emerged through collaboration with Ferrini. While we will not name them here, they have since gained significant fame in cities like Paris, Basel, and Akron, and are well-known entities within the market.

A prime example of dismemberment regards the so-called Hildesheim Psalter, a splendidly illuminated psalter from 1554, produced in Germany (but most likely not in Hildesheim itself. See www.oprom.eu/fac-similes) for a member of the Mansfeld family.

The manuscript was still intact on 23 June 1987 when Sotheby's auctioned it off as Lot 100. Sotheby's catalogue provides some useful information: it states that the date 1524 appears in two folios (ff. 61v and 74r) and that at fol. 45v an angel holds a shield with the Mansfeld coat of arms. Additionally, the only unusual saint depicted is St Godehard (†1038), Bishop of Hildesheim, a notable centre of artistic activity located about 75 miles northwest of Mansfeld Castle in Prussia, between Magdeburg and Merseburg.

The manuscript was then brought to Belgium where all rubrics in French were added. In the mid-16th century, the arms of Adrienne de Louvignies were added at fol. 1. Finally, in the 19th century, the Count d'Aspremont-Lynden added his ex libris.

In 1987 the manuscript was purchased at Sotheby's auction by one "Pairvel" for £60,000 plus 10% commission. Pairvel was the pseudonym for one of the greatest biblioclasts of the last century. A decade later, the still intact codex was again put up for auction by the dealers Jörn Günther of Basel and Bruce Ferrini of Akron, Ohio. Unsold, the manuscript was then cut into individual leaves and folios gradually started appearing on the market. Some of these illuminated folios are still for sale today from one of Ferrini's spiritual heirs at very high prices (£4,100 for an illuminated folio).

In the shadowy corners of the art market, there exists a clandestine network, predominantly orchestrated by certain German operators, whose dealings in mediaeval manuscripts blur the lines of legality. Their modus operandi is as intriguing as it is dubious. These individuals initially acquire manuscripts, in their complete and unblemished form, from reputable industry fairs scattered across Germany, Italy, and Switzerland. However, their ultimate marketplace is far from these European cultural centres. Operating primarily out of America, they have turned to the digital world for their sales, with eBay serving as a prominent but unconventional platform.

The intrigue deepens as they bend the rules of eBay to their advantage. These dealers don't just use the platform for its intended purpose. Instead, they initiate contact with potential buyers directly through eBay's eCommerce system. What follows is a crafty bypass of the usual auction process. Prospective clients are lured away from the public eye, and invited to participate in auctions conducted via email. The cloak-and-dagger element is heightened as these sellers distribute their auction catalogues clandestinely, utilising services like Dropbox to evade detection.

But the plot thickens with the pivotal role played by freelance consultants in this underground saga. These consultants are the experts in this shadowy market. With their extensive networks, they help authenticate, appraise, and sometimes discreetly navigate the acquisition of these leaves for collectors who prefer to remain anonymous. They are the key intermediaries, treading the thin line between the legal and the questionable, often serving as the crucial link between the underground sellers and the final buyers.

In this murky realm, where the thrill of the chase is as important as the catch, the names of these players are whispered secrets, known only to those within the inner circle. Yet, the seriousness of their activities is not lost on authorities. We, aware of the delicate nature of this issue, have refrained from publicising names. Instead, these have been provided to the Carabinieri in Italy, leading to a series of substantiated complaints that could potentially unravel this intricate web of illicit trade.

Institutional releases, such as those from archives or libraries, also contribute to the supply. These institutions sometimes release manuscript leaves, often driven by financial needs or strategic decisions, adding another layer to the market's complexity.

The rise of online marketplaces and auctions has transformed the accessibility and distribution of these leaves, facilitating a wider reach and a more diverse buyer base. This digital expansion, while increasing availability, also raises questions about the provenance and legality of the leaves.

The supply of manuscript leaves is not free from legal and ethical complications. The market also sees a share of leaves sourced from illicit activities, including theft and unauthorised sales, complicating the ethics of ownership and trade.

To shed light on the intricate workings of the market, I am poised to share a particularly telling example. However, before delving into this illustration, let me briefly introduce you to the innovative method I've developed for digitally salvaging dismembered mediaeval manuscripts. This approach, born out of both necessity and passion, demands considerable patience. It involves meticulously tracking the auctions of individual leaves from a dismembered manuscript over many years. But patience is just one part of the equation; it's also about possessing a profound understanding of the texts embedded within these manuscripts. This knowledge is crucial, as it guides the intricate process of piecing together what was once whole, turning

fragments back into a narrative, and in a way, resurrecting a piece of history that was thought to be lost.