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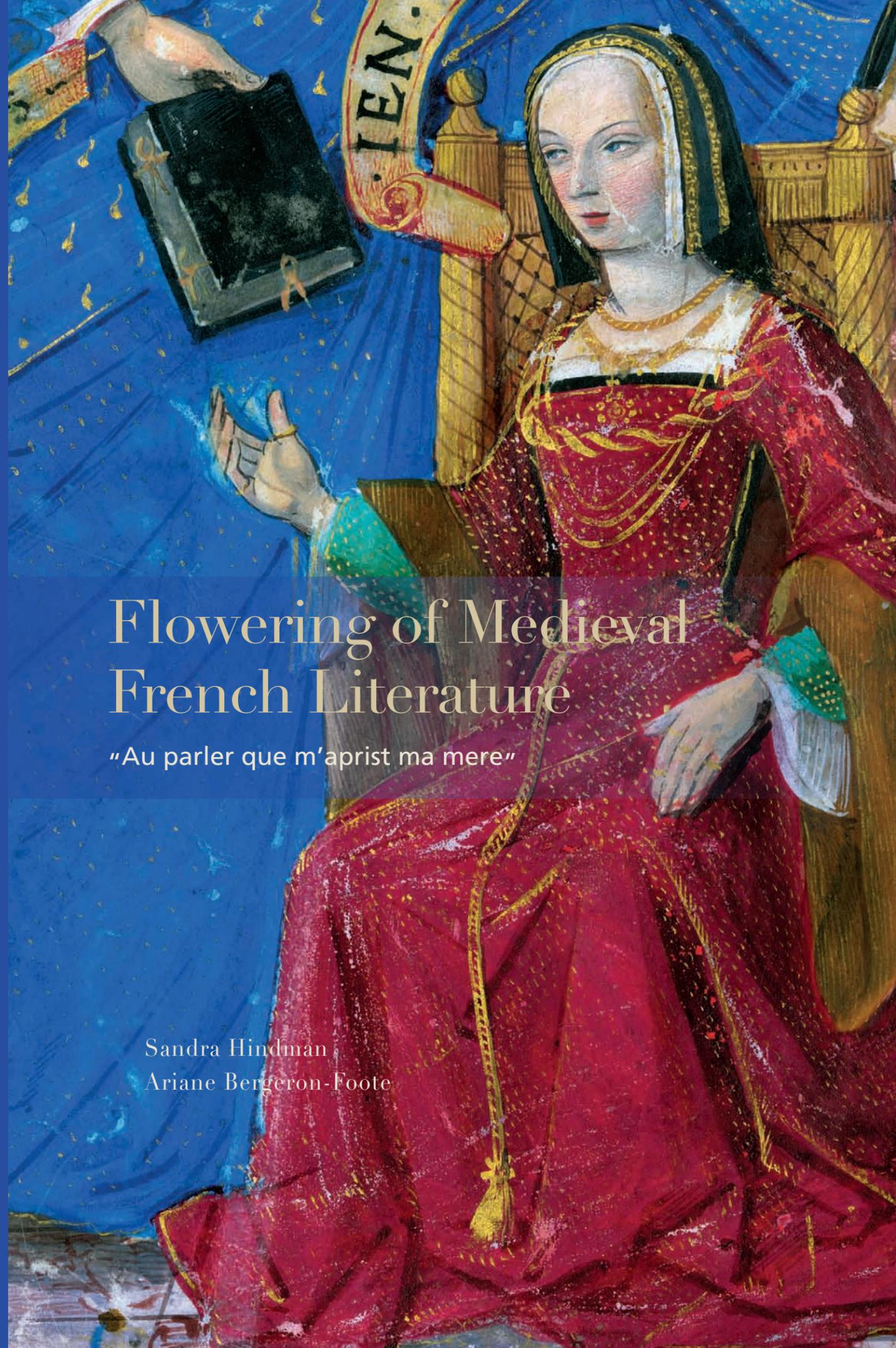
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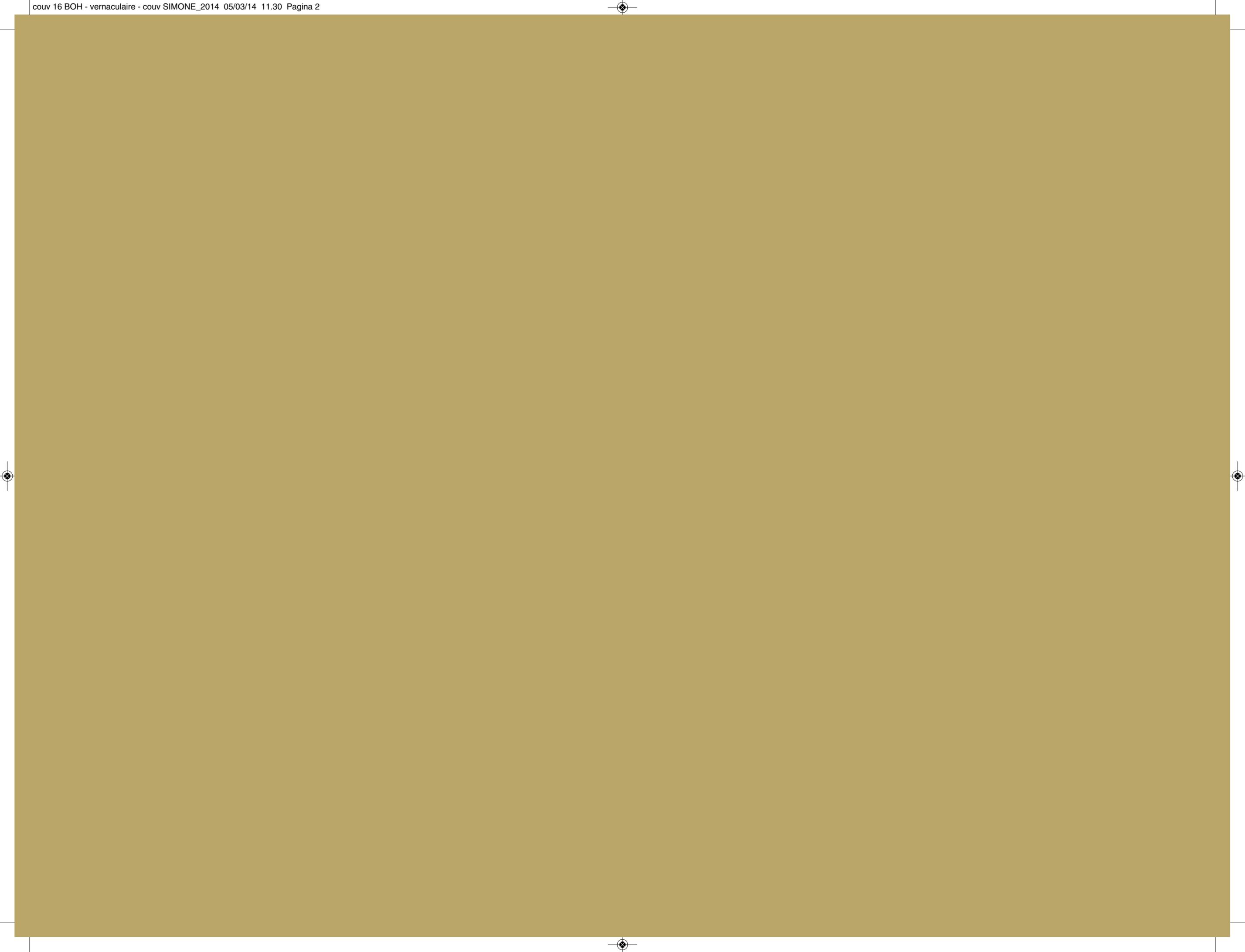
catalogue 18 | Flowering of Medieval French Literature "Au parler que m'aprist ma mere"

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Sandra Hindman
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“Speaking in my mother tongue”

Au parler que m’aprist ma mere

Jean de Meun, who with Guillaume de Lorris wrote the *Roman de la Rose*, the very bedrock of medieval French literature, described written French in his late thirteenth-century prologue to Boethius’s *Consolation of Philosophy* as “the speech my mother taught me when I took milk from her breasts” (Au parler que m’aprist ma mere / A Meun, quant je l’alaitoie). We might say now “speaking in my mother tongue.” Although the earliest records of written French date from the ninth century, it was not until the thirteenth century that French became widespread as a written language. Even then, for writers such as Dante, Latin remained the sovereign of the vernacular (“sovrano del volgare,” *Convivio* 1:7). Many early references to written French refer to it, like Jean de Meun did, as the “langue nutritive,” relying on the dual meaning of *nourrir*, to be like mother’s milk and mother’s speech (Cerquiglini-Toulet, 2011). In his prologue, Jean de Meun was actually distinguishing his French dialect (“rough, uncouth, and barbarous,” for which he apologized) from what became known as Parisian French or the “langue du roi” of which there was “no speech more subtle.”

Many factors influenced the shift from Latin to the “mother tongue.” The change from an agrarian economy based on the land to a commercial economy in the towns and cities imposed a need for the middle classes to understand each other in written as well as oral forms. The centralization of French government and the rise of a nation state with the reign of King Philip Augustus (reigned 1180-1223) dictated a need for a language through which the court and the nobles could wield power far and wide. And, not least of all, women played a major role in the rise and evolution of medieval French as women readers, writers, and collectors. By the fifteenth century, vernacular language was well established as the language of literature, historical record, and personal expression. From the mid-fifteenth century, the technology of the press no doubt provided greater access to the mother tongue and contributed to its standardization.

This catalogue focuses on a group of sixteen manuscripts all written in the French language between about 1300 and 1535. Mostly illuminated, the manuscripts are widely diverse. They are written in verse and in prose. Some are translations from the Latin, others new compositions entirely in French. They

treat a wide variety of subjects ranging from literature and science, to philosophy and theology, and to history and government. There are some unique texts that exist only in the manuscripts included here. A significant number of the volumes boast royal provenance. There are signed and dated works by newly identified scribes, as well as works by famous calligraphers. Some of the manuscripts still have their original bindings. So rare on the art market are illuminated manuscripts in the French language of this period that this project would not be possible without the purchase of a substantial group of mostly unpublished manuscripts from the Collection of Joost R. Ritman (born 1941), the Amsterdam businessman and founder of the Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica. To the ex-Ritman manuscripts, we have added manuscripts acquired over a period of time to assemble the group studied here.

Because many of these manuscripts are virtually unknown and previously unpublished, first-hand study of them offers a special opportunity to reassess certain approaches to later medieval French literature. Now, some thirty years after S. Nichols coined the “new medievalism,” it is well recognized that a “new” history of medieval French literature depends less on the editions and re-editions of texts, the study of genres, or attempts at periodization. Rather, a “new” history of French literature evolves out of a consideration of the impact of historical and social phenomena, scientific advancements, and linguistic and cultural singularities (Bloch et al., 2014). Cerguiglini-Toulet’s work (2007, 2011), among others, insists on the “materiality of the book,” to which the study of the manuscripts provides direct access. Considerable recent research also acknowledges the importance of women – as authors, subjects, patrons, and collectors – not only in the rise of the vernacular but in its persistence through the French Renaissance (Legaré, 2007; Brown, 2011). Other studies underscore the complex relationships between text and image in manuscripts and as they shaped communal and individual identity at the dynamic intersection of the history of literature and the history of art (Coleman, et al., 2013; Hériché-Pradeau and Pérez-Simon, 2013). If there is one essential point of departure for the study of this group of manuscripts it is that the “manuscript matrix,” as coined by Nichols, provides the springboard for further research. Each manuscript is here explored in depth for the unique testimony it contributes to a variety of historical issues (Nichols, 1997).

The structure of the catalogue into five sections sheds new light on many of these issues discussed above: I, Literature and Science: the Rise and Affirmation of the Vernacular; II, Philosophy and Theology: Translations and Adaptations of the Classics; III, History and Genealogy: the Nation and the Individual; IV, Women Writers and Women Bibliophiles: Memory and Self-Assertion; and V, From Manuscript to Print: the Circulation of Texts and the Triumph of the French Vernacular. Although there is some overlap between categories, with manuscripts from one section informing on the theme of another, the structure nevertheless enables us to consider certain basic themes in a roughly chronological fashion.

I. Literature and Science: the Rise and Affirmation of the Vernacular

The rise and affirmation of the vernacular are to be sought in the explosion of texts in French that occurred in the thirteenth century. Although Cerguiglini-Toulet (2007, 2011) reminds us that “medieval French literature” is in certain respects an anachronism because the word *littérature* referred exclusively to Latin literature of the period, there can be no doubt that various genres written in French that we now consider “literature” sprang up during this period. Three mid-fourteenth-century volumes comprising a total of seven texts, all but one composed in the thirteenth century, open the catalogue and introduce the subject. First there is the anonymous *Fontaine de toutes sciences* or the *Livre de Sydrac* (cat. no. 1). Next there is an anthology that includes the *Pèlerinage* by Guillaume de Deguileville, Gautier de Metz’s *image du monde*, and a little-known work, the *Histoire du riche homme et du ladre* (cat. no. 2). Last and by far the most famous of the three is the *Roman de la Rose* by Guillaume de Lorris with the continuation by Jean de Meun, combined with a copy of Jean de Meun’s *Testament* (cat. 3). Together these three manuscripts offer a fair synopsis of some of the genres of works composed for the first time in the vernacular: romances and allegorical romances, encyclopedias (a word that did not exist in French until 1522; they were called *traité*, *livre de clergie*, or *roman*), and religious and moralizing treatises.

With one exception, all these texts are in verse (*Sydrac* is in prose), a phenomenon that calls attention to the verse-prose controversy of writings in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Early writers of French verse, such as Chrétien de Troyes and Marie de France, insisted on the verb “to hear,” calling attention to the orality of early vernacular writings. Several of the texts in the manuscripts included here – specifically, the *Pèlerinage* and the *image du monde* – existed in prose versions translated from the original verse, that is, they were de-rhymed in the thirteenth or fourteenth centuries. Yet in each case, it was the verse version that enjoyed by far the greater popularity. Audience must have played a role in the predilection for verse over prose. Aristocratic culture, women as well as men, is thought to have supplied the early audiences for the vernacular, and there are enough references in Old French texts to reading aloud for us to assume that spoken (and sung) verse was favored over silent reading of prose. With regard to the three manuscripts in this section, little is known directly about their original audience, with the exception of *Sydrac*, which was commissioned by a woman. But all three volumes are sufficiently deluxe for us to assume that they would not have been written for a public of educated burghers, who mastered the art of reading only by the fifteenth century.

One final observation emerges from a consideration of the materiality of our manuscripts: two of the three are “miscellanies” (French, *recueils*), the Deguileville et al. and the *Rose*. There has been a great deal of attention in recent years mostly by literary scholars to the phenomenon of the miscellany (Nichols, 1997; van Heymelrych and Thiry, 2010). The company a text keeps in a man-

uscript can surely inform us on its production and reception alike – what exemplars were available to the copyist, for whom did the copyist work, how does the miscellany reflect the taste of a reader, how are certain texts read differently in conjunction with one another, what relationship does the whole have to the parts? That the *Rose* includes Jean de Meun's *Testament* is not in itself unusual, since at least half of the 118 extant manuscripts of the *Testament* are found with the *Rose*. The question of why is more interesting: do these volumes represent relatively early examples of the phenomenon of the "Collected Works," found slightly later in works by Guillaume de Machaut and Christine de Pizan? Or is the *Testament*, with Jean de Meun's mature reflections on his career as a writer and his practical and moral advice to prelates and all men and women of a certain social standing, seen as a sort of gloss on, or sequel to, the *Rose*? In the case of the other miscellany, the three texts – the *Pèlerinage*, the *image du monde*, and the *Histoire du riche homme et du ladre* – never occur together except in our manuscript, and rubrics confirm that they were conceived to follow each other in the volume. Nevertheless, the first two are often anthologized, just not with each other. And, the third text is a unique exemplar. Is this because the material just happened to be available to the scribe? Or desired by the patron? Are we facing alternative readings of the *image du monde*, transformed here by being sandwiched between two more strictly speaking moralizing works? These are the questions that study of the actual manuscripts can help address.

II. Philosophy and Theology: Translations and Adaptations of the Classics

Not every medieval vernacular text was created from scratch, albeit relying on diverse sources; many were instead translations or adaptations of other writings, be they Latin, Greek, Arabic, Hebrew, or even other European vernaculars. This is the subject of the present section on philosophical and theological works, which includes four manuscripts that span two centuries. The earliest is an early fourteenth-century translation of the Pseudo-Aristotelian *Secretum Secretorum*, ultimately going back to an Arabic source, and translated from the Latin (cat. no. 4); this is followed by Guillaume de Tigonville's early fifteenth-century translation of a Latin translation known as the *Ditz des philosophes* of an Arabic text, the French probably descending from a Spanish version (cat. no. 5); then one of many anonymous French translations of Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*, this one including the important prologue by Jean de Meun (cat. no. 6); and finally, an original work of the early sixteenth century by an otherwise unknown author Mellon Preudhomme, *Le lustre des temps*, that combines historical, genealogical, and hermetical poetry adapted from a wide variety of sources – scriptural, patristic, classical, and medieval – to retrace the notable moral feats of past characters with passages clearly influenced by the pseudo-epigraphical writings attributed to Hermes Trismegistus (cat. no. 7). It is noteworthy that every one of these translated versions is unique and exists only in the manuscript included in this catalogue.

Translation, or *translatio*, has recently received much attention that is relevant here (Chavy, 1988; Anderson, 2004; Thiry, 2007, Galderisi 2011). The Latin word



translatio refers not only to the transfer of languages and cultures but also to the transplantation of letters from one world to another giving a sense of the present to the past. Fully two-thirds of the extant translations occur between the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (Chavy, amended by Thiry, counts nearly 400 translations by the fifteenth century, the majority from Latin into French). However, those who study translation have found that, when individual manuscripts become the focus of research, it becomes apparent that every transcribed text is to a certain extent distinctive; thus there exist many versions, emendations, revisions of translations, revealing that there is no such thing as a “stable” translation. Where and for whom a text was made influenced how the translator rendered it.

Our manuscripts present compelling evidence to support the idea of translation as an author’s interpretation of a text, his or her individual creation. The *Secret des secrets* emerges as one of eleven different French versions, five of which exist only in a single manuscript, and this one is previously unrecorded; instead of focusing on governance, the text focuses on the physical well-being of the ruler. The text of the *Ditz des philosophes* (cat. no. 5) is likewise highly individual with its adaptations and rearrangement not recorded elsewhere by modern scholarship. So too the French translation of Boethius is reworked (by David Aubert?) to reveal a number of readings unique to this exemplar. And finally, although not a translation *per se*, the *Lustre des temps* (cat. no. 5) assembles a vast variety of sources adapting them to a hermetical model. In each of these cases, the alterations should probably be traced to the audience: a special (though unknown) patron for the *Secret*, the orbit of King René d’Anjou for the *Ditz*, the Burgundian court for the Boethius, and the shadowy figure of Guillaume Preudhomme for the *Lustre*. Manuscripts in other sections of this catalogue also preserve unique translations from the Latin into French such as Berosus’s *Chaldean History* perhaps by Pierre Balsac (cat. no. 12), Jerome’s letter to Furia by a hitherto unrecorded translator Charles Bonin (cat. no. 13), and Colard Mansion’s *Penitence d’Adam* (cat. no. 15, extant in one other copy), leading us to question whether these creative modifications of an original might be the norm rather than the exception among translated works.

III. History and Genealogy: the Nation and the Individual

Historical writing too responded to the desire for works written in the French language, and writers again turned to Latin models fit for translation. The development of vernacular history takes place at the same time as the centralization of French authority and its growing power under Philip Augustus, who sowed the seeds for a “nation state.” Studies have shown that the translation of the official Latin history of France, as originally compiled by the monk Primat at the Abbey of St.-Denis, into the vernacular, known as the *Grandes Chroniques de France*, was generated by the northern French nobility’s desire to assimilate a royalist model of the kingdom’s past into a readable form (Spiegel, 1984). The adoption of prose as the language of vernacular history was founded in the anxieties of

contemporary aristocratic culture, for verse contained “lies” while prose was “natural” and therefore true. Copies of the *Grandes Chroniques* over the next two centuries are widely diverse, incorporating additions and continuations intended to personalize and contemporize the text – not only for each new monarch and his special political contingencies but also for the aristocratic constituency that constituted a natural audience for manuscripts of French history (Morrison and Hedeman, 2012).

Two of the manuscripts in this section stress the role of the individual, as well as the community, in the writing of history. The first, a copy of the *Grandes Chroniques* made for Jacques d’Armagnac, includes an interpolated copy of an abridged chronicle with a genealogical tree of the Armagnac family (cat. no. 8). Perhaps it was Jacques d’Armagnac’s enmity for the monarchy, which he opposed and for which he was twice pardoned and eventually imprisoned and executed by Louis XI, which led him to boast of his descent from Philip VI of Valois. The manuscript later entered the personal library of Francis I, as is evident from a recently identified early shelfmark. The second manuscript, a copy of the *Chronique anonyme universelle* newly compiled from diverse sources during a critical moment of the Hundred Years’ War in c. 1415, was certainly intended for a noble audience for whom it served to validate the ruling houses of one country (France) while simultaneously negating the royal claims of another (England). The earliest copy with its anti-British rhetoric may have originated in the Bourbon court for the use of Duchess Marie of Bourbon, whose husband was captured at Agincourt and whose duchy she led without him for nearly twenty years. In text and image, our copy for an unknown patron reinforces the rhetoric during the years just following the war as France sought to assert an upper hand.

Closely allied with historical writing, genealogy constituted another strategy to tie the past to the present (and influence the future) through family structures (see Radulescu and Kennedy, 2007; Bouchard, 2001). In an unusual manuscript – the only illuminated copy of a rare text extant in four manuscripts (with a restricted circulation in the family?) and by an unknown author (cat. no. 11) – the author presents his work not so much as a genealogy *per se* but as a summary of the rights and claims to the lands and titles of the House of Orléans-Longueville. The presence of an extra-textual prefatory illumination glorifies a specific fiefdom by asserting its descent from Julius Caesar and championing its place in the exalted kingdom of France. We are reminded that images do not always operate in direct relationship with their text, but they often “reread” the text, offering another level of interpretation for readers (Hériché-Pradeau and Pérez-Simon, eds., 2013). The power of imagery in genealogy is differently underscored by the hierarchical rules of heraldry (cat. no. 10). Included here is a miscellany of heraldic treatises with an armorial that probably served a herald who went about his day to day tasks at tournaments, jousts, and pageants and who was charged with verifying the credentials of combatants and listing their coats-of-arms. A classification of colors and their significance accompanies a chromatic chart, reminding us that no visual sign is meaningless: gold refers to the emperor,

silver to a king, blue to a count, brown to a viscount, purple to a bachelor, and so forth; further gold relates to the virtues of nobility, the age of adolescence, the sun, and Sunday.

IV. Women Writers and Women Bibliophiles: Memory and Self-Assertion

The impact women had on the rise of French vernacular literature is undeniable. As early as Chrétien de Troyes in the twelfth century, male writers sought to feature women, who constituted a natural audience for their romances. From Marie de France (late 12th century) to Christine de Pizan (d. 1430) to Catherine d'Amboise (d. 1550), women writing in French struggled to carve out a place for themselves within a largely male literary canon. And, certainly by the Renaissance if not earlier, women – particularly aristocratic women – also built important collections that they used not only for pleasure but to make statements about their lineage, power, and cultural heritage. Discussed earlier in connection with the *Chronique anonyme universelle*, Marie de Bourbon is relevant here, for – rather unusual for a woman of her era – she owned a library of around forty volumes that included a large number of historical chronicles (Beaune and Lequain, 2006). There can be no question that women, especially women writers but also women collectors, were aware that they were flying counter to the norm (Christine even invents a metaphorical gender transformation in order to navigate a man's world in the *Mutación de fortune*), but for them French vernacular literature was empowering, giving them a voice and enhancing their self-status.

By the time Christine de Pizan died in 1430, it was no longer so startling to encounter women writers and women bibliophiles. Indeed, Legaré has recorded some 370 references to female-owned collections of books in the fifteenth century (1996, p. 209). In this catalogue, the three manuscripts owned or written by contemporary aristocratic women of the Renaissance – Anne de Graville (1490-1544), Anne de Polignac (c. 1495-1554), and Catherine d'Amboise (1482-1550) – take their place in a slightly later era when it was more common for aristocratic women to write and collect (cat. nos. 12, 13, and 14). The copy of Berosus's Chaldean History that Pierre de Balsac gave his wife (or future wife) as a "love book" became part of Anne's library, which eventually numbered some two hundred volumes. Inscriptions dated 1518 in her manuscripts added when she inherited her father's collection show her taking this opportunity to review the contents of her entire library. Just what these libraries were, how they were housed, how women bibliophiles used them is worthy of further study (see Bohler, 2006). Catherine d'Amboise speaks of her "petit cabinet," a phrase that conjures up the private nature of women's reading experience, and Anne de Graville (perhaps?) describes reading in bed in an inscription in her Berosus. The binding of their books, often modest in format and in lush velvet, contributes to this sense that reading by women was very personal and private (cat. nos. 13 and 14). Until recently, much of the literature on women as bibliophiles has focused on religious women and on queens and princesses, but this relatively coherent group of Renaissance women opens a window onto the reading habits and attitudes towards collecting by another category, members of the aristocracy.

These three manuscripts also raise the question of subject matter: What did women read and write? Were their tastes and interests different from those of their male counterparts? Is there a female literary canon? Each of the three manuscripts sheds light specifically on women's literature as consolation. Directly inspired, it would seem, by the death of her nephew, Catherine d'Amboise's allegorical "complaint" provides her and members of her family with a means of dealing with grief. Anne de Polignac's copy of Jerome's letter of advice to an early Christian widow offered her a moral and spiritual framework to confront her own twice-widowed state. And, the strange "love gift" Anne de Graville's husband offered her is in dialogue with the troubling circumstances of their love affair and marriage, which provoked her disinheritance. Of course not all vernacular literature for and by women fits this theme, but McCash reminds us that "throughout the centuries many women turned to literature to express their pain and suffering and their beliefs and visions" (1996, p. 53). We still have much to learn about women readers and collections, a subject to which the ongoing study of the manuscripts themselves as expressive artifacts can contribute.

V. From Manuscript to Print: the Circulation of Texts and the Triumph of the French Vernacular

At least for a century after the beginning of printing in c. 1455, manuscripts continued to be transcribed and illuminated because they must have still held significance for their audiences. Often such exemplars were intended for select circulation (e.g., no. 14), whether destined for noble patrons or copied for the scribe's own use. A study of the manuscript in the age of print constitutes an investigation in its own right, and each surviving volume can contribute valuable evidence toward the reconstruction of that history. Whereas fully two-thirds of the manuscripts in the present catalogue postdate Gutenberg's invention of printing, and we could examine each one of them from the perspective of the confrontation of manuscript culture with print culture, two examples in particular stand out as especially revealing on the subject: Colard Mansion's *La penitence d'Adam*, and Guillaume Alexis, *Le passe temps de tout homme et toute femme* (cat. nos. 15 and 16).

It is evident that the invention of printing, for the enterprise to be economical, expressly favored the circulation of texts in large numbers, but some works continued to be aimed at a select market and were thus not good candidates for early printers. Such is the case with Colard Mansion's *La penitence d'Adam*. The three extant manuscript copies (and there is no evidence that any more ever existed) were dedication copies, two made for one of the greatest bibliophiles of his day, Louis of Bruges, who owned a deluxe library of about two hundred volumes (the same size as that of Anne de Graville) nearly all of which were illuminated manuscripts. Within the Burgundian milieu, Louis emerges as the most significant patron and bibliophile after Philip the Good. His patronage must have been very hands-on: he employed the same team of scribes, illuminators, and

binders, and he even had a special way of binding his books with Renaissance gauffered and decorated gilt edges that were not at all common in book production in Bruges. This manuscript reveals him working with his favored team, and it still bears evidence of the individualistic gilt edges. Of course Colard Mansion was also a printer, not only a calligrapher, and he was the working partner of William Caxton. But, Mansion never printed either of the two recensions he translated (and transcribed) of *La penitence d'Adam*. Rather, this manuscript reveals how scribes and stationers, simultaneous with the practice of the new technology, also perfected the scribal arts in the production of tiny numbers of exceedingly high quality books for special audiences.

In marked contrast with Colard Mansion's *penitence*, the manuscript of Guillaume Alexis's text exists in a single copy clearly modeled after an earlier printed book issued by the famed Parisian printer Antoine Vérard in c. 1505. The manuscript remains a bit of an enigma. Copies by Vérard may have been expensive and scarce in Rouen, where the present book was transcribed and illustrated. Could this be the reason why a scribe copied the present exemplar? For his own use? For an exigent buyer? If this copy does indeed epitomize the widespread phenomenon of a manuscript copied from a printed book for one's own use, it was undertaken by someone unusually skilled. The *bâtarde* hand-writing is proficient (and probably professional), and notably the spontaneously drawn pen-and-ink illustrations, while directly modeled on the woodcuts in Vérard's edition, display considerable aplomb in their free-hand style and execution.

Conclusion: From *Sydrac* to the Académie française

Quickly, the technology of the press provided greater access to the mother tongue and contributed to its standardization. Statistics of publications in French are indeed astonishing. Whereas in 1501 only 10% of books published in Paris were in French, by 1575, 55% of all books published in Paris were in French. The triumph of the French vernacular was also promoted by King Francis I, who in 1539, deemed French the official language of his kingdom. Then, in 1635, Cardinal Richelieu founded the Académie française whose mission was "to codify the French language, to give it rules, to make it pure and comprehensible to everyone." And, the rest, so they say, is history. The medieval and Renaissance manuscripts discussed here endure as vibrant reminders of the linguistic, historical, and cultural legacy of modern-day France and the French language.

Sandra Hindman

