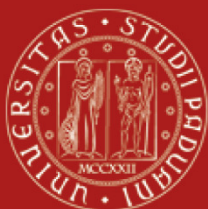


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The Columbia Western 24
and the *Mort Artu* in Italy

LAURA MORREALE
(Center for Medieval Studies – Fordham University)



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Dipartimento di Studi Linguistici e Letterari
Piazzetta Gianfranco Folena, 1
35137 PADOVA

info@francigena-unipd.com

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Questo numero raccoglie, tra gli altri contributi, alcuni interventi presentati nell'ambito del *Seminario sul franco-italiano*, svoltosi a Padova il 24 e 25 ottobre 2016.

The Columbia Western 24 and the *Mort Artu* in Italy

Laura Morreale
lmorreale3@fordham.edu

(Center for Medieval Studies – Fordham University)

ABSTRACT

The mid-thirteenth- to late fourteenth-century witnesses to the Italian tradition of the French-language work, *La Mort le Roi Artu*, appear both textually and geographically integrated. Adding a seventh manuscript into this repertoire, the New York CRMBL Western 24, does little to change this perception of textual and geographic cohesion. However, disparities in the material presentation of the work across the seven witnesses to the corpus reveal the range of expectations for the final consumers of these copies of the *Mort Artu* in the northern Italian francophone context.

KEYWORDS

Medieval French Language and Literature – Arthurian Literature – Communities of reception
– *La Mort le Roi Artu*

A comparison of the established northern Italian manuscript corpus of *La Mort le Roi Artu* with a newly-categorized fourteenth-century copy of the same text now housed as Western 24 of Columbia's Rare Books and Manuscripts Library (New York CRBML Western 24, hereafter CRBML Western 24), indicates how this prose romance was received by various kinds of consumers in the historical and social contexts in which it circulated¹. *La Mort le Roi Artu*, a French-language romance initially composed in the kingdom of France but subsequently copied, recopied, and circulated in Italy over a period of at least a century, narrates the death of King Arthur after he was betrayed by his son Mordred, and concludes with a description of the reduced state of Arthur's kingdom after his demise². The CRBML Western 24 manuscript, created in Italy and not in France as was initially indicated, is a humble witness to the *Mort Artu* narrative, a story that circulated widely throughout western Europe and is currently found in over fifty extant manuscripts³. In both its materiality and its construction, the CRBML Western 24 *Mort Artu* offers clues about an Italian

¹ Cf. Frappier 1950. It was classified as French, and remained so at least until the late eighties, as in Stones 1988: 88, 94.

² Cf. *La mort du roi Arthur*.

³ This witness to the *Mort Artu* tradition in Italy has escaped previous scrutiny in the context of French of Italy studies, largely because it was only recently reattributed to Italy. It appears so in the library catalog and according to the digital scriptorium website at http://ds.lib.berkeley.edu/WesternMS024_20 [accessed 18.02.2017]. The reattribution of this witness to Italy was noted in Allaire 2014a: 225, n. 5.

francophone textuality that existed in tandem with the elite reception of the work most often associated with this type of writing. The characterization of Arthurian literature as an elite-only phenomenon is now contested, and since much is known about the *Mort Artu* tradition in Italy, introducing this new example into the interconnected traditions of the individual text, the *matière de Bretagne* generally, and the larger French-language repertoire adds to our knowledge of how French texts were consumed in Italy across a range of classes and receptive contexts⁴.

In total, seven witnesses to the transmission of the *Mort Artu* were copied in Italy or by the hand of an Italian scribe⁵. Several characteristics of these seven examples are listed below, in order of decreasing production value according to the inclusion or exclusion of illustrations, the breadth of the scribal program, and manuscript provenance, if known (table 1). Comparison among the seven witnesses highlights the consistencies within Italian manuscripts, particularly in terms of circulation of the *Mort Artu* texts on the Peninsula, but also the ways these witnesses differed in execution. When taken together, they represent a spectrum of manuscripts that share some similarities but also vary in the quality of materials used and how the text was presented to the reader⁶.

Shelfmark, date, dimensions (mm) ⁷	Manuscript contents	Scribal program	Program of illustration	Complete text?	Provenance or production notes
Paris BNF fr. 343 (1380-1400) 390 x 275	<i>Queste del saint Graal, Post Vulgate Queste, Mort Artu</i>	Partially rubricated	Yes; incomplete (122 images total)	No; incomplete	From library of Dukes of Milan

⁴ Cf. Delcorno Branca 2010: 156-157.

⁵ Leonardi 2006: 885, places the production of Copenhagen KB Thott 1087 in Piedmont and argues for the addition of an eighth witness, the Paris BNF fr. 12573, which should be relocated from France to Italy. Delcorno Branca 2010: 169 adds a ninth, Vatican City BAV Vat. lat. 14740, although this manuscript was created by a French scribe and then circulated in Italy.

⁶ The six other witnesses copied in Italy or by Italian scribes are as follows, in alphabetical order according to institution: Bologna AS fragment; Chantilly MC 649 (1111); Copenhagen KB Thott 1087 (copied by an Italian scribe, though perhaps not in Italy); Oxford BL Douce 189; Oxford BL Rawlinson D 874; Paris BNF fr. 343. Full bibliographic information for each manuscript can be found in Delcorno Branca 2004 and Delcorno Branca 2006.

⁷ Dimensions for the Paris BNF fr. 343, Oxford BL Rawlinson D 874, and Oxford BL Douce 189 cf. Fox 1933: 18-20; for the Copenhagen KB Thott 1087 and New York CRBML Western 24 manuscripts, cf. Leonardi 2006: 884-888; for the Chantilly MC 6049 manuscript, cf. Chantilly 1900: 38; for the Bologna AS fragment, cf. Longobardi 1987: 121, n. 4.

THE COLUMBIA WESTERN 24 AND THE *MORT ARTU* IN ITALY

Oxford BL Rawlinson D 874 (14 th c.) 365 x 260	<i>Queste del saint Graal, Post Vulgate Queste, Mort Artu</i>	Partially rubricated	One initial; nine inches left at lower edge of text	Yes	From library of Dukes of Milan
Chantilly MC 649 (1288) 255 x 210	<i>Mort Artu</i> only	Red and blue initials	Historiated initials	Yes	For podestà of Modena; <i>Zo. de Gualandis</i>
Bologna AS fragment (mid 14 th c.) 345 x 455	<i>Mort Artu</i> only (ch. 89-90)	Brown ink; red and blue filigree	One miniature	No; 1 bifolium	
Oxford BL Douce 189 (late 13 th c.) 310 x 210	<i>Mort Artu, Death of Tristan</i> (13 ff.)	Ornamented capitals; epilogue in red	Painted initials; one in <i>Mort Artu</i>	Yes	Copied in western Tuscany?
Copenhagen KB Thott 1087 (c. 1225-1250) 217 x 135	<i>Mort Artu</i> ; 5 ff. of Occitan verse	Red and blue initials	No	Yes	Coscio de Cezane, copyist; perhaps in Cesana (Piedmont)
New York CRBML Western 24 (14 th c.) 243 x 166	<i>Mort Artu</i> only	Incomplete; red and blue filigreed initials	No	Yes	

Table 1. French-language *Mort Artu* manuscripts produced in Italy or by an Italian scribe, in order of decreasing production value based on inclusion of illustrations, breadth of scribal program, and manuscript provenance.

Consistencies among the witnesses from the table above were highlighted by Daniela Delcorno Branca in 2004, who considered five of the seven manuscripts in the corpus in her landmark analysis of the *Mort Artu* tradition in Italy⁸. Delcorno Branca observed that, unlike other French-language works from the *matière de Bretagne*, the *Mort Artu* frequently circulated independently from

⁸ Cf. Delcorno Branca 2004. Her analysis excludes both New York CRBML Western 24 and the manuscript most closely resembling it materially, Copenhagen KB Thott 1087.

other Arthurian texts in Italy and often resisted the tendencies towards *entrelacement* so common in other works of the same *matière*⁹. As can be seen in table 1, both the Copenhagen KB Thott 1087 (hereafter KB Thott 1087) and the CRBML Western 24 conform to this trend, since both preserve the *Mort Artu* independently from any other Arthurian material¹⁰. This was also the case with the slightly more deluxe manuscript catalogued as Chantilly MC 649 (hereafter MC 649), produced for the podestà of Modena in 1288, in which the *Mort Artu* was the sole text. Although a fourth manuscript, the Oxford BL Douce 189 (hereafter BL Douce 189), couples the *Mort Artu* with the *Death of Tristan* in the same manuscript, the second text occupies only thirteen of the seventy-eight folios so that the *Mort Artu* represents the dominant, though not the sole, text in the manuscript¹¹. The two final complete manuscripts in the corpus that defy this trend and contain multiple Arthurian texts along with the *Mort Artu* are those catalogued as Oxford BL Rawlinson D 874 (hereafter BL Rawlinson D 874) and Paris BNF fr. 343 (hereafter BNF fr. 343), both of which were created for the library of the Dukes of Milan, one of the most elite environments for textual production and consumption in late fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Italy¹².

In a related trend, the *Mort Artu* often circulated in Italy as a cohesive whole and less frequently in fragmented, incomplete, or even abridged versions as was the case in other locales where the work was copied¹³. And indeed, as is indicated in the second column of the chart, CRBML Western 24 conforms to this practice, as do four of the five other complete codices (the sixth is only a two-page fragment), since the CRBML Western 24 features the *Mort Artu* text in its entirety. The outlier in this trend is one of the two manuscripts known to have been created in an aristocratic context, the BNF fr. 343, although the version of *Mort Artu* found in BNF fr. 343 should be characterized as truncated rather than incomplete. Since the story of Arthur's death was placed, logically, at the end of the collection of Arthurian stories, the full text may have at one

⁹ Cf. Delcorno Branca 2004: 327. For the relationship among textual witnesses, including Italian witnesses, cf. Leonardi 2003: 133-163.

¹⁰ Physical description of KB Thott 1087 at *Medieval Francophone Literary Culture Outside France*, <http://www.medievalfrancophone.ac.uk/browse/mss/320/manuscript.html> [accessed 04.08.2016]. This site notes that, like the CRBML Western 24, the manuscript is of «lower grade vellum, many holes, stitches and instances where the folio has been cut near the edges of the skin». This site also designates the place of production to France, contrary to Leonardi 2006: 885.

¹¹ Earlier assessments of the manuscript suggest that the second text was copied fifty years after the *Mort Artu*, a claim that is refuted in Cigni 2000: 88.

¹² Ottolenghi 2001: 281-299; Busby 2014: 13. The present-day BNF fr. 343, a collection of several Arthurian stories, was also called the *Liber Galasii ystoriatii*; Alliare 2014b: 192. For the BL Rawlinson D 874, cf. Bogdanow 1991: 347 and n. 6, and Lloyd-Morgan 1985.

¹³ Cf. Fox 1933: 2-23.

time been copied into the manuscript but subsequently lost if the final section became separated from the first part of the codex.

Although the question of textual kinship among the Italian *Mort Artu* exemplars remains an open one, scholars who have described the individual versions have often highlighted the close textual ties that link examples from the Italian corpus to each other, at times without reference to or acknowledgement of the geographic connections¹⁴. In her study of the BL Rawlinson D 874, Fanni Bogdanow stated plainly that the text «is of the same origin as ms. B. N. fr. 343»¹⁵, and the earliest mapping of the entire *Mort Artu* tradition put forth by Jean Frappier in 1936 noted a close affinity between the BL Rawlinson D 874 and the BL Douce 189 as well¹⁶. Following the assessment of Bogdanow, David Hult also placed the KB Thott 1087 version in the same textual family as both Oxford manuscripts¹⁷. Early classifications of the Columbia manuscript placed this version into a textual family related within one degree of these three witnesses, although Lino Leonardi's recent study of the tradition concludes only that the Western 24 is «tra i manoscritti da esaminare»¹⁸. Moreover, as Delcorno Branca notes, evidence from five of the seven manuscripts indicate a close geographic connection to northern Italy¹⁹. Aside from the Douce 189, which Fabrizio Cigni has localized to western Tuscany²⁰, five remaining manuscripts have certain ties to the following areas: northern Italy (Bologna AS fragment),²¹ Milan (BNF fr. 343 and BL Rawlinson D 874), Modena (MC 649), and Piedmont (KB Thott 1087)²². Even if the watermark in the paper from the last quires of the Western 24 manuscript suggests a tie to Padua, more work needs to be done before a firm location is assigned.

What we see, then, is that the French-language *Mort Artu* tradition in Italy appears both cohesive and integrated, since at least four of the seven witnesses demonstrate textual similarities and most of the versions circulated within a geographically restricted area and independently of other Arthurian works, usually in complete, unabridged formats. But even as we acknowledge these

¹⁴ Leonardi 2003 calls for a reassessment of the *Mort Artu* textual tradition; Hult in *La mort du roi Arthur*: 126-127 makes connections among three Italian manuscripts, even though he does not affirm the Italian provenance of KB Thott 1087; Delcorno Branca 2004: 329 notes the textual affinities of four of the witnesses in the corpus.

¹⁵ Bogdanow 1991: 347. Delcorno Branca 2004: 329 reaffirms the textual links among the Visconti-owned manuscripts.

¹⁶ For Frappier's stemma cf. Leonardi 2003: 139; *La mort du roi Arthur*: 126.

¹⁷ Cf. *La mort du roi Arthur*: 128-129. Hult places both Oxford and KB Thott 1087 manuscripts into what he calls the δ family, as seen in his stemma on p. 126.

¹⁸ Leonardi 2006: 889.

¹⁹ Cf. Delcorno Branca 2006: 68. This localization is opposed to other areas of Italian francophone production, including Venice and the Veneto, Tuscany, and Naples.

²⁰ Cf. Cigni 2000: 88.

²¹ Cf. Delcorno Branca 2004: 321.

²² Cf. Leonardi 2006: 885.

consistencies, the wide variation in how these witnesses were executed, particularly in reference to the material evidence introduced by the CRBML Western 24 manuscript, suggests that these texts were understood by their end-users in multiple ways. Each of the seven witnesses to the *Mort Artu* transmitted a similar text, yet each was accompanied by a unique set of informational cues or mediating techniques that signaled how that copy should be received and interpreted by the audience for which it was created. The range of mediating techniques in the Italian *Mort Artu* repertoire included complex illustration programs, visual markers of divisions within the text, and even the unadorned mention of a scribe's name at the close of the document. When seen together, these cues expose how each individual witness to the French-language text conditioned the way it was received by its users²³. As with other examples of French-language writing in Italy, the variations found within the *Mort Artu* corpus reveal some of the many modes of interaction that took place when Italian readers confronted the French-language texts they so eagerly sought out²⁴.

Although mediating techniques are common in many manuscript traditions, their presence or absence in the French of Italy corpus is especially informative for the medieval Italian literary environment, since Italian audiences could at times be linguistically challenged by the French-language works they encountered. The language was still viewed as a foreign tongue at the time the *Mort Artu* was in circulation, even if natives were exposed to multiple expressions of medieval French at home and in the French-speaking locales where Italian merchants, bankers, and diplomats regularly travelled²⁵. Despite the great deal of proficiency in French that many Italian writers and copyists enjoyed²⁶, the foreignness of the language was explicitly noted in several French-language texts created in Italy, and the use of French by Italians presented a case unique from the other areas where the language was spoken and written outside of the kingdom of France²⁷. Except for the kingdom of Naples after 1268 (and even there, for less than a century thereafter), French was not the native tongue of any large percentage of Italian society as it had been in England or the Holy Land, for example.

²³ For the location of these techniques within the repertoire, see Table 1 and the detailed discussion below.

²⁴ Cf. Delcorno Branca 2010: 160.

²⁵ For example, see the activities of Brunetto Latini and his compatriots in France in Holloway 2015: 422. In his memoirs, the merchant Filippo dell'Antella describes how his early professional career took him to Acre, Paris, and Naples, and other areas where French would have served as the common tongue; cf. Filippo dell'Antella, *Ricordanze*.

²⁶ Cf. Allaire 2010: 145-148.

²⁷ Cf. Cigni 2010: 188. In one of the earliest French of Italy manuscripts, the Paris BNF Arsenal 3645, f. 4r written in Verona in 1251, the author claims that he retrieved the text from Rome, but that he wrote it in French because he was from France and knew that language best. Cf. Kastner 1906: 32.

Nevertheless, Italians wanted access texts like the *Mort Artu*, in French, for many reasons. At the time the Western 24 manuscript was created, Arthurian texts in French were highly prized among wealthy book producers and collectors. The Visconti family who came to power in Milan in the early 1330s for example, first moved to secure their hold on the region of Lombardy through political and military means but then subsequently by projecting a princely profile through building campaigns and other forms of artistic patronage. Especially after the 1370s, the Visconti turned to the collection and manufacture of costly books as a demonstration of their wealth and status²⁸. Perhaps in imitation of the court of Charles V, French-language Arthurian works like the *Mort Artu* were frequently borrowed, loaned out, and copied by the Visconti, who amassed a large number of deluxe manuscripts over the course of the next seventy years, including the two Arthurian collections cited above²⁹. When the Visconti library was inventoried in 1426, nearly ten percent of the books held in the magnificent library were written in French, and many of these contained Arthurian texts³⁰. A similar story can be told about the Gonzaga and Este families, who also collected and copied French-language texts, and Arthurian stories to include in their libraries³¹.

But the influence gained by referencing Arthurian stories in the language of original composition was not limited to the courtly sphere. In an event that may have found its source in popular myth³², Galvano Fiamma reports in his history of the acts of Azzo Visconti, written before 1344, that when the tomb of former Lombard King Galdan de Turbet was unearthed by a windstorm in the year 1339³³, the departed monarch's left hand grasped the gilded pommel of a sword inscribed with a verse identifying the weapon as the very same used by Tristan to kill the Irish knight Morholt. «Cel est le spee, de meser Tristan», it reads, «un li ocist Le Morholt de Yrlant»³⁴. Furthermore, the king's right hand clasped a set of verses written in a highly irregular French that provided the sovereign's name and his title as King of the Lombards.³⁵ Writing primarily for a northern Italian audience, Fiamma called upon the power of a French-language Arthurian reference, accompanied by verses in the same language, to substantiate the royal authenticity of the unearthed Lombard King. No matter the source for this Arthurian reference, Fiamma's allusion to French-language writing about

²⁸ Cf. Black 2009: 41-42. For the dates of Visconti book acquisitions, cf. Sutton 1989: 110-139.

²⁹ Cf. Sutton 1989: 118.

³⁰ Eighty-seven of 988 manuscripts were designated as French. Cf. Ottolenghi 2001: 282.

³¹ Cf. Delcorno Branca 2010: 157; Allaire 2014b: 191-192.

³² Graf 1893: 353 argues that Galvano copied these verses from the fourteenth-century work of an unknown author of the *Flos Florum*; cf. Muret 1887: 295.

³³ Cf. Galvano Fiamma, *Opusculum de Rebus Gestis*.

³⁴ Ivi, chapter XLV, column 169.

³⁵ Fiamma records the verses as follows: «Zesu. Saldi de Turbigez | Roy de lombars incoronez | Soles altres barons apriexiez | Zo che uos ueez en portez | Por Deo uos pri no me robez».

the *matière de Bretagne* attests to its cultural power as a legitimizing technique in mid-fourteenth-century northern Italy.

If French-language versions of the Arthur story retained and transmitted political and cultural authority within the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century northern Italian context, accessing those stories was not always a simple matter for native Italian-dialect speakers. Throughout the time the *Mort Artu* circulated in Italy, French was a language that required at least the occasional intervention of a francophone reader or a textual technique that would allow Italian-speaking audiences to comprehend what they read individually or heard spoken aloud in French³⁶. To this end, Franco-Italian, a hybrid linguistic form that maintained many elements of French and flourished at the same moment the *Mort Artu* and other French-language works circulated on the peninsula, incorporated Italian words and structures into the texts to allow native readers and listeners to grasp the story's meaning while maintaining the impression of accessing that text in French³⁷. Even with facilitating techniques such as these, many Italians were unable to understand the stories in the original French, so that Arthurian works were often translated into Italian-dialect versions. Italian versions of the *Mort Artu* appeared in Tuscany as early as the last quarter of the thirteenth century, and additional versions created thereafter, as was the case with many other Arthurian works such as the *Tristan en Prose*, a work that was both translated into Italian and further adapted to suit the needs and expectations of its Italian audiences³⁸.

The variations within the *Mort Artu* repertoire demonstrate that the techniques employed by Italian copyists to facilitate comprehension of French-language texts could range from the simple and straightforward to the elaborate and complex. One technique found in the two Visconti-owned *Mort Artu* manuscripts, for example, is the incorporation of an intricate illustrated program, a practice found in many manuscripts containing unaccompanied copies of the *Mort Artu*³⁹ as well as those that transmitted works from the *matière de Bretagne* in Italy and more generally⁴⁰. Scenes from Arthurian narratives would have been familiar to inhabitants of northern Italy and would have helped them follow along with the plot line as they read the text or heard it read to them, since Arthurian artistic and architectural representations were introduced into the Italian territory as early as the twelfth century. Though they were especially

³⁶ Much of the background for the term 'Franco-Italian' is known to the readers of this journal. For a current discussion of the parameters of the question, with extensive citation, cf. Andreose 2015: 263-264.

³⁷ Cf. Putter – Busby 2010: 11.

³⁸ Cf. Delcorno Branca 2006: 69; Heijkant 2014.

³⁹ Cf. Meuwese 2007.

⁴⁰ For a full discussion of the role of illustrations in the *Mort Artu* tradition, cf. Stones 1988: 5; she notes that illustrative cycles were introduced into *matière de Bretagne* manuscripts starting only in the thirteenth century. For Arthurian illustration in Italy, cf. Meneghetti 2015 and Segre 2014. For an articulation of the role of illustrations as tools of textual mediation, cf. Camille 1985.

present in the north, artistic representations of the Arthurian story could be found throughout the whole of the peninsula both prior to and during the time that works from the *matière de Bretagne* circulated⁴¹.

The creators of both *Mort Artu* manuscripts from the Visconti library had anticipated that a series of illustrations would form a part of their recounting of the storyline⁴². The BNF fr. 343 manuscript, which contains 122 illustrations, demonstrates scribal expectations of what the images might accomplish, since much of the illustrated program is complete or at least roughly sketched out⁴³. Although illustrations of similar quality are not found in the BL Rawlinson D 874 manuscript, nine inches were left blank at the bottom of each text block, a common placement for images found in many contemporaneous Italian manuscripts, indicating that this space was reserved for program of illustration⁴⁴. The combination of image and text presented in the more complete BNF fr. 343, however, demonstrates that the creator of this elaborately conceived and executed French-language manuscript expected his Italian audience to experience the work both visually and aurally⁴⁵. In the first twenty-five pages of the BNF fr. 343, two separate yet complementary mediating techniques were put to work, one which varied the placement of images on successive manuscript pages, and the other which included a series of folios that alternated between illustrated and non-illustrated pages. Although these techniques are less consistent in the later sections of the manuscript, they do remain in place throughout its 112 folios.

As the BNF fr. 343's images interact with the text, they do so to such an extent that the images at times encroach upon the text block, intertwining or overlapping with the words⁴⁶. Over half (fifty-three percent) of the pages in the BNF fr. 343 contain some sort of illustration or space for a future illustration,

⁴¹ Cf. Allaire 2014a. Because of the wide-spread knowledge of the Arthurian plotline in Italy, the images in the elite copies of the *Mort Artu* discussed here may have served illiterate or non-Francophone audiences as reminders of a story that was already known to them. Verkerk 1999: 74, who relies on the work of Mary Carruthers, argues for the interplay between illustrations and memory in many manuscript contexts.

⁴² For a discussion of the relationship between text and image in another French-language Arthurian work from Italy, cf. Molteni – Wahlen 2014: 113-117. Neither of the manuscript examples, however, presents a complete program of text and image. The Paris BNF fr. 343 can be accessed online at <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b84584343/f1.item.zoom> [accessed 04.09.2016].

⁴³ BNF fr. 343, *Medieval Francophone Literary Culture Outside of France*, <http://www.medievalfrancophone.ac.uk/browse/mss/222/manuscript.html> [accessed 05.08.2016]; Avril – Gousset 2005: 65-71.

⁴⁴ Macray 1898: 54-55. A similar placement of bas-de-page illustration can be found at BNF fr. 343, f. 32r.

⁴⁵ Cf. Ottolenghi 2001: 288-290.

⁴⁶ At ff. 27r-v, for example. <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b84584343/f57.item.zoom> [accessed 04.09.2016]; in the *Mort Artu* section, see f. 111r. For a discussion of the interplay between text and image in a later Italian text, see Izzo 2014.

seven percent contain only an ornamented capital (in two instances to introduce a new text in the collection)⁴⁷, and forty percent contain no images nor any space reserved for an image on the page⁴⁸. In the more complete first quarter of the manuscript, the images migrate from one locale to another on successive pages of the codex. On [folio 1r](#), for example, a quarter-page illustration is inserted half-way through the left-hand column, while on the same folio's recto, an image covering the full width of the page is placed roughly three-quarters of the way down the text block, above four full lines of narration. Illustrations on the following pages are located across the bottom of the page ([f. 2r](#)), the top of the page ([f. 3r](#)), at the top left ([f. 3v](#)), then bottom left ([f. 4r](#)), then at the top right in conjunction with a full *bas de page* ([f. 4v](#)). This technique introduces visual interest but also compels the viewer to re-engage with the *mise en page* each time a new configuration appears. By varying the page formatting, the work's creators required viewers to first confront the images, and then locate and reorient themselves in relation to the text's placement amid illustrations that moved from place to place on consecutive pages.

Text and image continue to work in tandem across the manuscript folios even on the pages where no images are present. Often in the BNF fr. 343, a series of pages filled with colorful and detailed illustrations alternate with a run of two to three sheets that include no illustrations, only a text block containing filigreed initials or the occasional ornamented capital⁴⁹. Whether the technique of alternating illustrated with non-illustrated pages is employed to allow the narrative to catch up with what is depicted in the images, or to permit audience members to digest what is presented visually, the text-only pages assume that a literate individual – one who also was comfortable enough with the French idiom to decipher the stretch of word-centered narrative – would be on hand to interpret the textual portions of the manuscript⁵⁰. These text-only pages are interspersed throughout the whole manuscript, not isolated to one work or another, so that a dialogue between visual and aural presentation continues from the manuscript's first text, *the Queste del saint Graal*, to its truncated *Mort Artu* in the final folios.

The varying placement of images on the page and the practice of interspersing illustrated and non-illustrated folios are but two ways the copyists of the BNF fr. 343 manuscript facilitated the audience's aural and visual engagement with the French-language text. Like other manuscripts in the *Mort*

⁴⁷ As at BNF fr. 343, f. 61r, which introduces the *Post-vulgate Queste*, and at 105r which introduces the *Mort Artu*.

⁴⁸ These percentages remain consistent for the *Mort Artu* section as well; in the *Mort Artu* section (BNF fr. 343, ff. 105v-112v) 9/16 pages are illustrated (56%), 4/16 contain no illustrations (25%), and 3/16 contain space for an ornamented capital (19%) but remain otherwise unillustrated.

⁴⁹ See, for example, the run of text-only pages at BNF fr. 343, ff. 50v-55v.

⁵⁰ This assertion follows Camille 1985: 32.

Artu corpus, the BNF fr. 343 also contains ornamented or illuminated initials that help introduce the topic of the chapter and provide additional interpretive cues to readers. The MC 649 manuscript, for example, includes several historiated letters, along with red and blue filigreed initials that serve as signposts within the text block⁵¹. Although the Bologna AS fragment does not provide enough evidence for a full analysis, the single bifolio does contain one very ornate miniature, a scene with a monk and a blond-headed person in conversation, although how that relates to the text is unclear⁵². The less deluxe witnesses integrate fewer illustrations into the text itself and feature chapter headings that are merely decorative, not interpretative. The BL Douce 189 contains one painted initial at the head of the *Mort Artu* section and puzzle initials of six lines in height, in red and blue, as well as alternating red and blue chapter headings, which measure two lines in height⁵³. The KB Thott 1087, like the CRBML Western 24, contains only red and occasionally blue chapter heads that allow readers to parse the text in a meaningful way but do not offer interpretive guidance⁵⁴.

The accumulation of these mediating techniques, more copious in some copies, demonstrates that certain Italian versions of the *Mort Artu* were created in a way that encouraged *viewing* or *seeing* that version of the text, as opposed to other instances that favored individual or private consumption, or simply hearing the text read aloud⁵⁵. Indeed, the larger size of the deluxe copies – which at times measure more than twice the size of the humbler exemplars – enabled users to display the pages containing their sumptuous images to the intended audiences⁵⁶. Moreover, the absence of images on several consecutive folios within the manuscript assumes intervention from a practiced reader of French, so that what emerges from the BNF fr. 343 example, and to a lesser degree in the other copies made with elite audiences in mind, is the expectation of a collective as opposed to individual reception of the French-language *Mort Artu* within the northern Italian context.

The expectations built into the more elaborate witnesses to the *Mort Artu* tradition in Italy are absent from other exemplars, including the KB Thott 1087,

⁵¹ MC 649; *Medieval Francophone Literary Culture Outside France*, <http://www.medievalfrancophone.ac.uk/browse/mss/264/manuscript.html> [accessed 03.09.2016] notes a confusion in the number of historiated initials; three different sources have placed the count at 4, 5, or 6.

⁵² Cf. Longobardi 1987: 120, n. 4.

⁵³ BL Douce 189, f. 1r; *Medieval Francophone Literary Culture Outside France*, <http://www.medievalfrancophone.ac.uk/browse/mss/316/manuscript.html> [accessed 03.09.2016].

⁵⁴ KB Thott 1087; *Medieval Francophone Literary Culture Outside France*, <http://www.medievalfrancophone.ac.uk/browse/mss/320/manuscript.html> [accessed 03.09.2016].

⁵⁵ Cf. Camille 1985.

⁵⁶ Thanks go to Heather Hill for her astute comments concerning comparative manuscript size.

which some have argued was copied in France at the hand of an Italian scribe and others have localized to Italy⁵⁷. This is also the case with the Western 24 manuscript, to which we will now turn, whose production can be more securely placed on the Italian peninsula⁵⁸. Compared to the six other Italian witnesses to the *Mort Artu*, the production value of the CRBML Western 24 is among the most modest, and its humility is visible in several ways, from the inexpensive nature of the material to the moderate scribal program undertaken by the text's copyist. A version of the *Mort Artu* is copied into a total of eighty-four folios, first on poor quality parchment and palimpsest in quires one through eight, then on paper in the final three quires⁵⁹. The inferiority of the manuscript materials is evident from the very first folio [fig. 1]⁶⁰, as the lower right hand corner of the page is diagonally cut, and uneven pages recur throughout the manuscript [fig. 2]⁶¹.

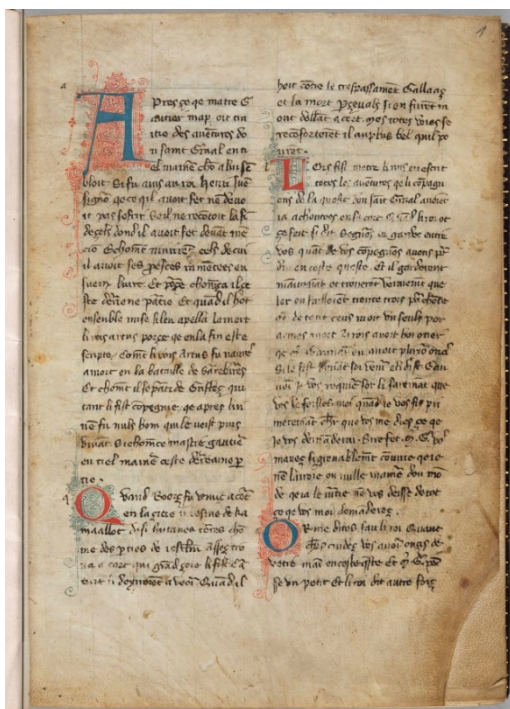


Fig 1. New York CRBML Western 24, f. 1r

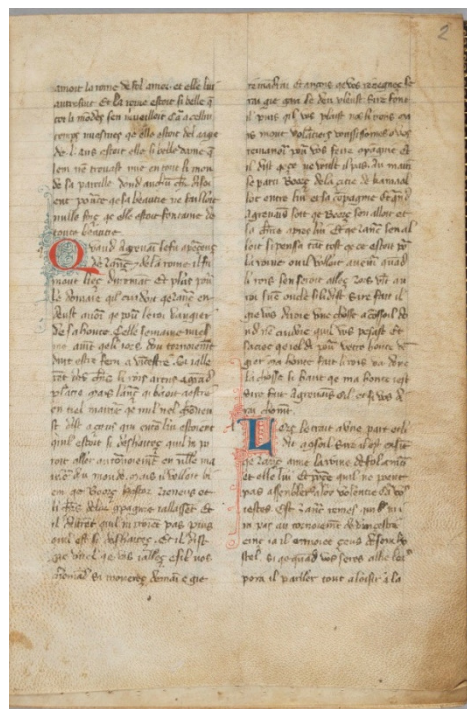


Fig 2. New York CRBML Western 24, f. 2r.

⁵⁷ Since the KB Thott 1087 is usually located to Piedmont, an area heavily influenced by French linguistic and cultural norms, the variable nature of the attribution is understandable.

⁵⁸ Leonardi 2006: 885 argues that the KB Thott 1087 should be added to the list of Italian witnesses.

⁵⁹ The use of palimpsest in CRBML Western 24 is not unique among Arthurian French-language texts copied in Italy. Cigni 2010: 194 notes that the copy of Rustichello's *Compilation arturienne* found in Paris BNF fr. 1463 is also on palimpsest.

⁶⁰ CRBML Western 24, f. 1r.

⁶¹ Ivi, f. 2r also unevenly cut.

Folio 30 is constructed of two pieces of parchment sewn together to make a whole, and the parchment quality throughout is often blotchy and irregular, contrasting sharply with the creamy vellum pages upon which other witnesses to *La Mort Artu* are found, including the BNF fr. 343 as well as other non-Italian specimens [fig. 3]⁶². Additionally, the parchment of CRBML Western 24 features multiple gaps and tears [fig. 1]⁶³. There are, for example, two holes in the first folio, one in the margin and the other roughly one third of the way through the first column of the text. The second of these clearly pre-dates the copying of the text, as an attempt to write around the hole is evident on the verso of the page. Similar write-arounds appear throughout the manuscript, including at folios 7r, and 19r, among others [fig. 4]⁶⁴.

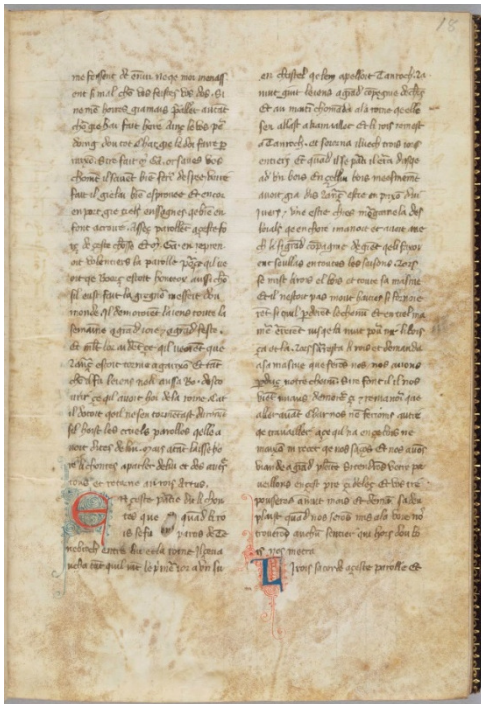


Fig 3. New York CRBML Western 24, f. 18r.

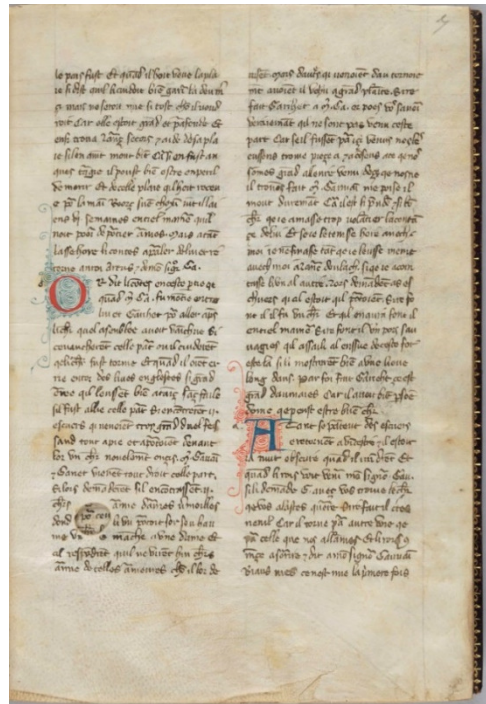


Fig 4. New York CRBML Western 24, f. 7r.

Looking through the pages of the manuscript and picking up on the palimpsest images further distances the CRBML Western 24 from its more

⁶² Ivi, f. 18r.

⁶³ Ivi, f. 1r.

⁶⁴ Ivi, ff. 7r, 19r.

deluxe counterparts. Images of folios 48r [fig. 5]⁶⁵ and ultraviolet images of 60v [fig. 6]⁶⁶ provide a clear view of the residual script from earlier use of the parchment. In particular, the alternating red and blue pilcrow scribes erased from this parchment to produce folio number 48r [fig. 5] come into sharp focus⁶⁷, and a page of what appears to be cancelled accounts on folio 60v [fig. 6] can also be discerned.

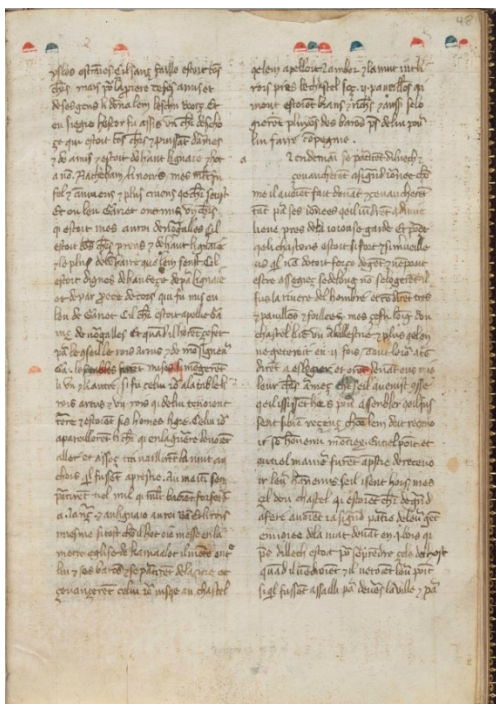


Fig 5. New York CRBML Western 24, f. 48r.

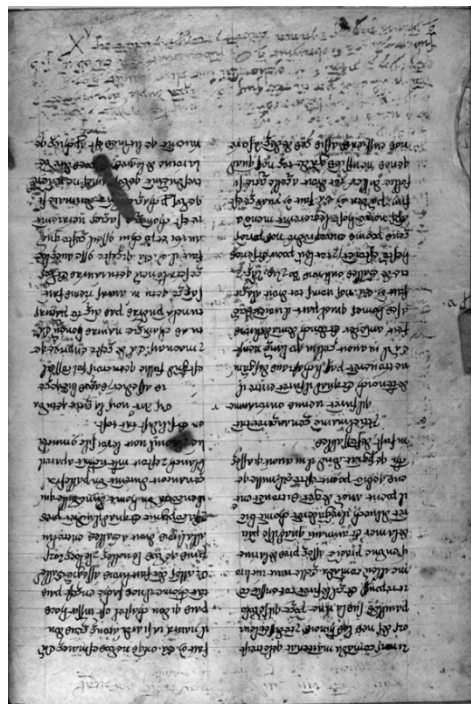


Fig 6. New York CRBML Western 24, f. 60v.

The visual formatting of the palimpsest text on 60v resembles other pages of cancelled accounts commonly found in northern Italy at the same time, such as those from mid-fourteenth-century Florence, now housed at the Plimpton collection at Wellesley, for example [fig. 7]⁶⁸. The palimpsest text at the top of

⁶⁵ Ivi, f. 48r.

⁶⁶ Ivi, f. 60v [uv image].

⁶⁷ Ivi, f. 48r.

⁶⁸ Wellesley CL SC Plimpton 167, fragment. Permission of Wellesley College Library Special Collections, Plimpton 167.

the text block is in an Italian dialect, as the words «Yho», and «negotio», are both faintly visible [fig. 8]⁶⁹.

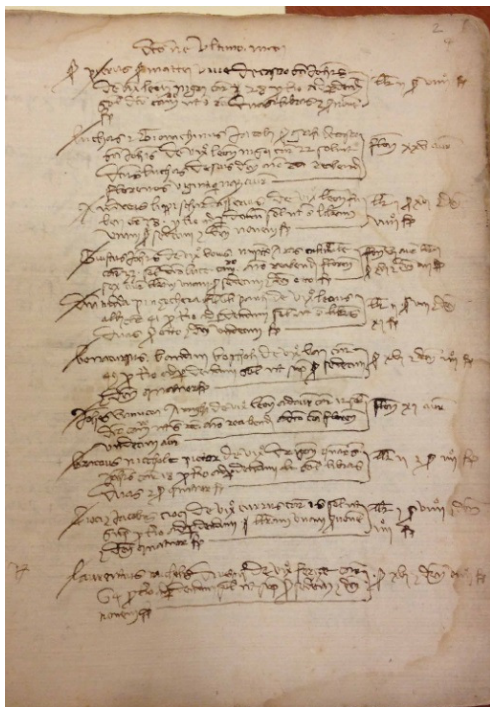


Fig. 7 Wellesley CL SC Plimpton 167, fragment

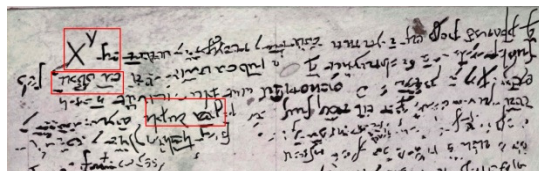


Fig. 8. New York CRBML Western 24, f. 60v.

The final three quires of the manuscript are on paper, and the watermark on folio 89v (here digitally enhanced and enlarged for clarity) [fig. 9]⁷⁰ greatly resembles a «wagon wheel» catalogued as Briquet 13221, which gives mid-fourteenth century Padua as its date and locale of production⁷¹. Each of the final three quires are made of paper and contain ten folios each, all with identical watermarks.

⁶⁹ CRBML Western 24, f. 60v [uv image].

⁷⁰ CRBML Western 24, f. 89v, enhanced. Photoshop enhancement courtesy of David Smigen-Rothkopf.

⁷¹ *Ibid.* [Photoshop enhanced]; cf. *Briquet online*:

<http://www.ksbm.oeaw.ac.at/scripts/php/loadRepWmark.php?rep=briquet&refnr=13221&lang=fr> [accessed 03.09.2016].

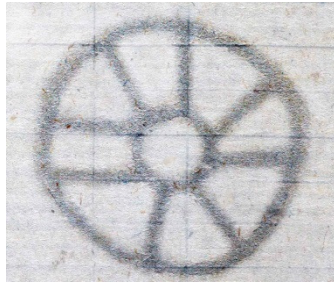


Fig. 9. New York CRBML Western 24, f. 89v, Photoshop enhanced

The scribal program of the CRBML Western 24 is limited in both what was copied and how it was copied. Although this is less significant in the context of the Italian *Mort Artu* tradition, it is worth re-iterating that the manuscript contains only one text, not a collection of two or more Arthurian works as was the case for roughly half of all the *matière de Bretagne* texts that circulated in Italy during the most prolific period of Italian French-language textual production, and in contrast to two examples from the Italian *Mort Artu* corpus cited above⁷². Moreover, once the copyist had completed the text, the final folios of the last quire (ff. 89r-94v), were left blank, which suggests that the copyist's primary goal was to transmit the *Mort Artu* text and not to simply fill the pages with other kinds of textual material.

Unlike several of the other manuscripts from the repertoire, the CRBML Western 24 contains neither images nor ornamented capitals⁷³. The scribe began his work by incorporating some visual interest within the text block itself, since the first thirty-two folios feature flourished penwork initials in alternating red and blue [fig. 2]⁷⁴. This decorative element, however, is abandoned in the remaining folios, replaced only with a small indication of the initial in the space reserved for the rubricator [fig. 5]⁷⁵. The plan for how the text would be copied into the manuscript pages – the scribal program – appears largely haphazard, as the number of lines per page varies from twenty-eight to thirty-four, depending

⁷² In a survey of ninety extant French-language Arthurian texts known to have been copied and circulated in Italy, forty-two appeared in a collection of one or more texts; forty-eight circulated as individual texts or alongside non-Arthurian texts (as is the case with the KB Thott 1087 manuscript described above). Delcorno Branca 2006: 330 suggests that this might be because many of the *Mort Artu* manuscripts can be located to northeastern Italy, and notes that, according to Fabrizio Cingi, the one witness to the *Mort Artu* which may have been produced in western Tuscany, the BL Douce 189, does appear in tandem with other Arthurian texts.

⁷³ For a listing of illustrations found in the entire corpus of *Mort Artu* manuscripts, cf. Stones 1988: 87-101.

⁷⁴ CRBML Western 24, f. 2r.

⁷⁵ Ivi, f. 48r.

on the folio⁷⁶ and scoring for these individual lines is still visible⁷⁷. Although the text is complete, there is no colophon or any mention of the production process for the text as can often be found in other works from the Italian *matière de Bretagne* repertoire⁷⁸.

Even without an elaborate illustration program or techniques for reader engagement, assumptions about how the end-user might access the text were embedded into the CRBML Western 24 presentation of the *Mort Artu*, just as they were in the other manuscripts from the same textual corpus. The dissimilarities that emerge by juxtaposing the more ornate specimens with those of a lower production value highlight the skills that were required of each set of readers as they accessed a very similar set of words that made up the *Mort Artu* text in Italy. Unlike their illustrated counterparts, the presentational norms found in the CRBML Western 24 manuscript emphasize the transmission of the *Mort Artu* text above any other form of interaction with the Arthurian storyline. Many of the manuscript's features, including the multiple textual write-arounds found throughout the folios, the extra lines of text inserted at the bottom of certain pages, and the inclusion of a full version of the *Mort Artu* text that circulated independently from other Arthurian works, all support a focus on transmission of the story and which privilege an individual rather than communal reception.

Since the manuscript includes the entire *Mort Artu* and only the *Mort Artu*, it appears that textual transmission was a high priority for those commissioning and creating the CRBML Western 24 manuscript, particularly when compared to the concerns of those fabricating elaborate *objets d'art*, as was often the goal with deluxe book-makers. The drive to produce a complete copy of the work, despite the challenges presented by the deficiencies of the materials at hand, is evident in the write-arounds found throughout the manuscript and by the varying number of lines per page, suggesting either scribal imprecision (not a prominent feature in the copying of the text itself) or that extra lines were added as uncontaminated parchment space would allow. This is evident at f. 60v, with its intruding palimpsest images; this page contains only twenty-eight lines, while the page before contains twenty-nine, the page after twenty-eight, and at folio 69r, a considerably cleaner page, the scribe has included thirty lines. Even when parchment was no longer an option, the copyist persevered in his task, continuing to transcribe on paper, a much cheaper material, until the text was complete.

⁷⁶ Most of the folios contain pages with between 28 and 30 lines, but quire 6 represents the greatest amount of variation, from 30 to 34 lines. Information on the number of lines per page comes from the anonymous manuscript description found in the CRBML Western 24 folder at Columbia Rare Books library, which I subsequently verified.

⁷⁷ The varying number of lines on the following folios demonstrates this trend: CRBML Western 24, f. 59r, 28 lines; f. 60r, 29 lines; f. 60v, 28 lines; f. 61r, 28 lines; f. 69r, 30 lines.

⁷⁸ Cf. Allaire 2014b.

The practice of consistent rubrication at logical breaks in the text (in this manuscript, at the chapter heads), and even the use of alternating red and blue initials, recalls the textual norms found in both elite and commonplace writing practices from Italy. These common techniques also served to break up text or to signal a change from one item to the next. The parchment that was re-used by the creator of the Western 24 manuscript for folio 48r, for example, with its alternating red and blue palimpsest pilcrow, relies on a commonly-used writing and reading practice that was echoed in the alternating red and blue chapter heads of the *Mort Artu* text, copied onto previous pages of the very same manuscript. The chapter heads, changing from red to blue, are features of textual production that added structure to the text and provided a guide as the reader made his or her way through the storyline. Even if this technique also appears in manuscripts from elite contexts, its use in the CRBML Western 24 contrasts functionally with the decorative visual signposts found in other *Mort Artu* examples and illustrated Arthurian texts from Italy that worked to accomplish presentational, ornamental, and interpretive tasks. By relying solely on the alternating red and blue chapter-head technique, the assumption was that the primary consumer of the CRBML Western 24 version was accessing the narrative by reading the words, not by relying on other visual cues that could also communicate meaning.

And although it is always dangerous to argue from a lack of evidence, what is not present in the CRBML Western 24 manuscript as compared to the more deluxe versions also indicates the anticipation of French-language reading proficiency, an emphasis on textual transmission, and a prioritization of individual as opposed to communal reception of the work. Along with the absence of images, no translation or other interpretive notes appear in the margins, a practice which appears with some frequency in other contemporaneous Italian francophone texts⁷⁹. Moreover, the reduced size of the folios and the script itself allowed for nothing more than individual access to the text, as the letters were only large enough for one person to interact with the page at any one moment. Finally, the overall physical format of the manuscript, realized in smaller, more portable dimensions than the unwieldy illuminated examples, would have allowed the CRBML Western 24 copy to be easily transported from one locale to another.

The lack of a colophon in the CRBML Western 24 also anticipates that the end-user would have understood how to approach this kind of text as opposed to other kinds of writing practiced in northern Italy at the time, such as the account registers found in the manuscript's palimpsest images [fig. 6]. Although not present in the CRBML Western 24, two of the manuscripts in the *Mort Artu* collection, those now housed in Chantilly (MC 649) and Copenhagen (KB Thott 1087), contained a brief colophon that noted either who the copyist

⁷⁹ Cf. Delcorno Branca 2010: 164.

was or the conditions of manuscript production. Although this detail seems to serve no other purpose than to allow the copyist to take credit for work done, the colophon acts as another type of mediating technique, one that separated the fantasy world of the narrative from the reality of the circumstances in which the text was copied. The colophons indicated, if only obliquely, the shift in genre from the Arthurian prose narrative that was written in French, to a production note linguistically marked as either Italian or Latin. The Italian nature of each colophon emerges because the scribe's name is Italian, as in the KB Thott 1087⁸⁰, or because both the scribe's name and the place of production were Italian, as was the case in the MC 649⁸¹. Both end-notes marked the main, French-language text as separate from the Italian nature of the manuscript's context of production, a distinction not found in the CRBML Western 24. All the characteristics of the CRBML Western 24 noted above point to an expectation that the reader of this manuscript was a proficient user of French, knowledgeable enough about the prose romance genre to appreciate the story by accessing the words of the text only. In the creation of the CRBML Western 24, it was assumed that the end-user could seamlessly negotiate the romance genre and read the entire text in French, independently of other readers, listeners, or visual cues.

Because the seven witnesses to the Italian *Mort Artu* are so closely related textually and geographically, the material and visual dissimilarities found within the corpus are helpful tools to reveal the different ways that users might interact with French-language text, and the attendant expectations of these variations that formed part of the fabric of thirteenth- and fourteenth-century northern Italian francophone culture. The multiple mediating techniques built into certain copies of the *Mort Artu* promoted a communal reception of the French-language work through both visual and aural facilitation. When present, these techniques helped Italian readers or listeners negotiate the complications that arose when they confronted the foreignness of the French-language text, untangled the complexities of the Arthurian storyline, or separated the fantasy world of the narrative from the reality of the circumstances in which the text was copied. Although the presence of such mediating techniques does not prove that individual audience members who had access to these copies could not understand French or negotiate the prose romance genre on their own, a great

⁸⁰ KB Thott 1087, f. 103v. The colophon reads «Explicit liber mortis regis | arturi. Coscio da cezane», *Medieval Francophone Culture Outside of France*, <http://www.medievalfrancophone.ac.uk/browse/mss/320/manuscript.html> [accessed 03.09.2016].

⁸¹ MC 649, f. 74r. The colophon reads «liber domini Brexiani de Salis. Qui scripsit Zo. de Gualandis existens cum eo in regimine mutinensi», *Medieval Francophone Culture Outside of France*, <http://www.medievalfrancophone.ac.uk/browse/mss/320/manuscript.html> [accessed 03.09.2016].

deal of expense and effort was invested to provide multiple avenues of access to the storyline for such an audience. The opposite is true for other witnesses to the corpus, and especially the newly-relocated CRBML Western 24 example. No linguistic, textual, or generic mediation, nor any option for communal reading was included in the CRBML Western 24 version because, presumably, none was required. The absence of mediating techniques in the CRBML Western 24 example suggests a high level of competency with the French language for this receptive context, one that demanded that the individual reader interact directly with the words that formed the *Mort Artu* narrative. Those from the elite context promoted a collective, and, at times, adjacent reading-and-viewing of the Arthurian material, thereby permitting a lower baseline of French-language proficiency.

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Oxford BL Douce 189	Oxford	Bodleian Library	Douce	189
Oxford BL Rawlinson D 874			Rawlinson	D 874
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