

parchment marvels

A very smooth, translucent parchment, similar to wove paper, was the material chosen by Giovanni Battista Bodoni (1740-1813) to print Horace's work in large format | The beauty of the publication, entirely devoid of decorative elements, lies solely in the balance of the layout and the perfect black ink used to print Bodoni's own fonts on parchment.

Milano, Archivio Storico Civico e Biblioteca Trivulziana, Triv. Atl. 158
Q. Horatii Flacci Opera, Parmae, in aedibus Palatinis, typis Bodonianis, 1791

The parchment is the writing medium for a French manuscript from the mid-15th century containing Cicero's oration *Pro Marcello* and *De senectute*, the latter in both the original Latin and the vernacular version by Laurent de Premierfait († 1418) | The white surface, soft and velvety like fabric, is also the canvas on which an anonymous miniaturist painted scenes inspired by the text, using a refined palette reduced to just a few colours.

Milano, Archivio Storico Civico e Biblioteca Trivulziana, ms. Triv. 693
15th century, second quarter
Marcus Tullius Cicero, Pro Marcello e De senectute,

The same solid and versatile material – obtained by calcining animal skin, usually sheep or goat, but also calf and sometimes sow – lends itself to various aesthetic and functional solutions, both in manuscript production and in typographic printing | A writing medium even before the advent of paper, parchment has also been used over time in bookbinding as a covering material for books.



unique encounters

A LIBRO APERTO

Sala del Tesoro
Archivio Storico Civico
Biblioteca Trivulziana
21 11 2025 - 15 02 2026

the book and its duplicate

Opened at the same page as the original, with which it can be directly compared, is the facsimile published in 2016 by Franco Cosimo Panini for Treccani | The copy was produced, in agreement with the Biblioteca Trivulziana, following careful observation of the manuscript and using innovative printing techniques to reproduce as closely as possible the colours and brilliance of the original gold leaf.

Milano, Archivio Storico Civico e Biblioteca Trivulziana, Riproduzione Codici 126
Facsimile edition of Trivulzio codex 2163
It is part of La Grammatica Sforza (Modena, Franco Cosimo Panini, 2016).

The original of a precious manuscript copied for the education of Ludovico il Moro's son, Ercole Massimiliano (1493-1530), is displayed here with a miniature depicting the prince's meeting with Emperor Maximilian of Habsburg in 1496 | Roberto Longhi attributed this work to the painter *Boccaccio Boccaccio* (c. 1466-1525), to whom the Museo Diocesano of Cremona is dedicating the first major monographic exhibition, *Il Rinascimento di Boccaccio Boccaccio* (10 October 2025 - 11 January 2026).

Milano, Archivio Storico Civico e Biblioteca Trivulziana, ms. Triv. 2163
Liber Iesus, late 15th century (c. 1496-1497)

The dissemination of knowledge concerning rare printed editions or manuscripts is now also entrusted to digital copies distributed online, but specialist publishers continue to publish facsimile editions in print | Highly sought after by collectors, they are also purchased by public libraries to offer their visitors an experience similar, though never identical, to that of viewing the original.

The exhibition **A LIBRO APERTO • THE BOOKS ARE OPEN n. 0**, the pilot edition of a series designed with an explicit educational purpose, is entitled **Incontri singolari • Unique encounters** | It is a brief journey through the history of books, with unexpected twists and turns designed to provoke surprise, curiosity and a desire to learn more | It is a call to examine and appreciate the book in its physicality, from its dimensions to the material it is made of, from imitations to the rarity of surviving copies of an edition | Some observations directed at visitors along the exhibition route are a further invitation to reflect on the relationship between the different aspects of the book throughout its history and evolution | **A LIBRO APERTO n. 0** closes with the *Onda di materia* artist's book featuring engravings by Alessandra Angelini and verses by Gilberto Isella | in dialogue with a backlit panel reproduction of the 1461 manuscript *Ars sive doctrina de transmutatione metallorum* – preserved in Pavia at the Biblioteca Universitaria, which we thank for its collaboration – opened at two significant pages of the text.

the big and the small

The choice of the size of a print run is usually the result of a preliminary assessment prior to the printing process, in which the publisher-printer takes into account a series of factors | These are both aesthetic and technical in nature, as well as economic and commercial, in order to capture the tastes and interests of the public and maximise the return on investment.

**Dante Alighieri, *Le terze rime*,
Venezia, Aldo Manuzio, agosto 1502**

Milano, Archivio Storico Civico e Biblioteca Trivulziana, Rari Triv. Dante 100

Aldo Manuzio (c. 1450-1515) was the first, in 1502, to publish Dante's *Comedy* in Venice in a reduced format, specifically in octavo | Without commentary, and printed in a minute italic font designed by engraver Francesco Griffo († 1518), it was conceived as a lightweight edition that would allow readers to carry Dante's verses with them at all times: a true pocket edition ahead of its time.

**Dante Alighieri, *La Divina Commedia*,
Milano, Luigi Mussi, 1809, 3 voll.**

Milano, Archivio Storico Civico e Biblioteca Trivulziana, Triv. Dante 1

When publisher Luigi Mussi released the *Comedy* in Milan in 1809, he chose to print the work in three large-format volumes | It was a deluxe edition, designed for an elite market of buyers who could appreciate its refined presentation | Here, the wide margins surrounding the text are the space in which the painter Giuseppe Bossi (1777-1815), owner of the copy on display and dedicatee of the same edition, sketched some decorative elements at the beginning of the *Inferno*, the first part of the *Divine Comedy* | The piece is printed on blue paper using a technique that is described in the panel *Azzurro come il cielo • Blue like the sky*.

new clothing

The cover chosen by the publisher, which is usually identical for all copies of the same edition, is now the most immediately recognisable feature of a book | In the past, at least until the early 19th century, books were produced in copyists' workshops and printers' workshops, mostly in loose sheets | It was therefore the buyers who had the volumes bound according to their own taste and personal financial means | Even today, however, owners can still decide to replace the publisher's cover with a custom binding.

**Luca Beltrami, *Indagini e documenti riguardanti
la Torre Principale del Castello di Milano ricostrutta
in memoria di Umberto I*, Milano, Tipografia Allegretti, 1905**
Milano, Archivio Storico Civico e Biblioteca Trivulziana, Triv. B 890

This copy of Luca Beltrami's edition features the original cover, simple in terms of the material used yet fully informative of the contents | This is thanks to the printing on the front cover of all the elements needed to identify the contents, even when the book is closed.

**Luca Beltrami, *Indagini e documenti riguardanti
la Torre Principale del Castello di Milano ricostrutta
in memoria di Umberto I*, Milano, Tipografia Allegretti, 1905**
Milano, Archivio Storico Civico e Biblioteca Trivulziana, Weil Weiss D 4

The same edition of the copy on display next to it is presented here with the allusive parchment binding that belonged to the collection of Giuseppe Weil Weiss, Baron of Lainate (1863-1939) | This personal library, bequeathed by its owner to the Municipality of Milan in 1936, is characterised by the presence of precious bindings commissioned from some of the most skilled and famous Italian and foreign bookbinders, such as Giovanni Pacchiotti (1856-1936), creator of the binding on display.

blue like the sky

Starting with the edition of *Libri de re rustica*, printed by Aldo Manuzio (c. 1450-1515) in 1514, the practice of using blue paper in printing – already in use by artists as a medium for drawing – became a simple but effective way during the sixteenth century to distinguish and give greater value – including market value – to part of the print run | It was a clever and elegant alternative to the use of parchment | It was only natural that the blue paper copies would later become the object of passionate collecting and a cultured revival in the nineteenth century, as was the case in Milan with the Trivulzio family.

***La Divina Comedia di Dante, di nuovo alla sua vera lettione ridotta con lo aiuto di molti antichissimi esemplari [...]*,
Venezia, Gabriele Giolito de' Ferrari e fratelli, 1555**

Milano, Archivio Storico Civico e Biblioteca Trivulziana, Triv. Dante 112

The copy of the edition of Dante's poem printed in Venice in 1555, which was acquired by the Trivulzio family, is on blue paper | It was the first edition to bear the title *Divina Comedia* (*Divine Comedy*) on the title page, chosen by the editor Ludovico Dolce and destined to become, with few exceptions, the definitive title for Dante's poem.

***Convito di Dante Alighieri ridotto a lezione migliore*,
Milano, Tipografia Pogliani, 1826**

Milano, Archivio Storico Civico e Biblioteca Trivulziana, Rari Triv. Dante 34/5
Milano, Archivio Storico Civico e Biblioteca Trivulziana, Rari Triv. Dante 34/6

The two copies on display from the same edition of Dante's *Convivio* bear witness to two distinct print runs characterised by the use of blue paper of different colours and production techniques | Perhaps intended as test prints to verify the final result of the printing process, or as provisional products awaiting delivery to expert bookbinders for final binding, they have been preserved in simple cardboard covers.

artistic alchemy

On 2nd September 1461, the transcription of the manuscript *Ars sive doctrina de transmutatione metallorum* was completed in Milan. This important illustrated document bears witness to the history of alchemy and chemistry in Renaissance Italy | Formerly belonging to the noble Oldani family of Milan, and later attested between the 17th and 18th centuries at the church of San Fedele, in 1840 it was added, together with most of the collection of the distinguished archaeologist Pier Vittorio Aldini (1773-1842), to the holdings of the Biblioteca Universitaria of Pavia, where it is still preserved under the shelfmark Ald. 74 | During the 20th century, many scholars, including Nobel Prize winners in chemistry, consulted the original manuscript to study the historical and scientific content of the treatise in depth | Now, recent cataloguing and digitisation campaigns have made it possible to extend its use to everyone, through online portals and exhibitions. Thanks to a project promoted by the Italian Ministry of Culture in 2023, the manuscript inspired the creation of an artist's book that combines different artistic and literary languages and printing techniques. In an innovative way, through the creativity of contemporary forms and materials, it evokes the centuries-old history of metalworking, from alchemy to modern chemistry. It offers the general public the opportunity to discover one of the most interesting testimonies of the past | The artist's book on display here in two copies – conceived and curated by Alessandra Angelini with a poem by Gilberto Isella – contains two chalcographic engravings by the artist, printed on Hahnemühle paper. It has been treated with gold, copper and silver leaf applied monotypically and is packaged in a cover produced using the embossing technique. The font was designed specifically for this project by type designer Riccardo Olocco, who drew inspiration from the script used in the Ald. 74 manuscript.

***Onda di materia*,
engravings by Alessandra Angelini, poetry by Gilberto Isella,
Milano, Ancora, 2023**

letterpress printing by Giovanni Turria at the tipografia Mono Officina in Vicenza; intaglio printing carried out in the artist's studio by Monia Pavone; binding produced by the Legatoria d'Arte Giovanni Codina in Milan; anodised aluminium case made by SIM Serigrafica in Busto Arsizio.

Two copies: *bon à tirer*; copy 9/30, private collection

The artist's book, in two original copies, engages in dialogue with a backlit panel reproduction of the manuscript *Ars sive doctrina de transmutatione metallorum* (Pavia, Biblioteca Universitaria, Ald. 74), opened at two significant pages of the treatise.