

Newly discovered royal manuscript to join Bodleian collection

17 March 2025

The 13th-century Duke Humfrey New Testament will go on public display for the first time after 300 years of private ownership.

Image



The Duke Humfrey New Testament.

The finely decorated manuscript is an Old French translation of the New Testament and is thought to have been produced by the artist known as the Cholet Master.

It was owned by Jean le Bon, who was King of France from 1350–1364 and later passed into the hands of the English royal family.

Royal ownership revealed

Previously unknown to scholars, ultraviolet light has revealed a series of erased inscriptions showing the manuscript was owned by three members of the English

royal family in the 1400s: Thomas of Lancaster, Edmund Beaufort, and Duke Humfrey.

It is not yet known how the manuscript came into English hands, but the ownership and gift-exchange of this French royal book suggests a political agenda, perhaps being used to boost the English claim to the throne of France.

Duke Humfrey gave the University of Oxford a priceless collection of books, but this New Testament was not included. Now this manuscript can finally join the university's collections.

Image



The manuscript features exquisite decoration.

Secured for the public

With support from the National Heritage Memorial Fund the manuscript was acquired by The Bodleian Libraries following an export bar by the UK Government. Other funders included Art Fund, The Wolfson Foundation, Friends of the Nations' Libraries, Friends of the Bodleian and private benefactors.

March 2025 marks the 10th anniversary of the Weston Library, the home of The Bodleian's special collections. To celebrate, visitors will be able to see the Duke Humfrey New Testament on public display for the first time over the weekend of 22 and 23 March 2025.

The manuscript will also be available to read on Digital Bodleian following an academic symposium revealing new information about its provenance.

Outstanding heritage significance

Dr Simon Thurley CBE, Chair of the National Heritage Memorial Fund, said:

“Owned by French and then English aristocrats at a time of conflict between the nations, the Duke Humfrey New Testament is of outstanding heritage significance and a rare survival of the library of Humfrey, Duke of Gloucester, the greatest English bibliophile of the Middle Ages.

“The National Heritage Memorial Fund exists to save the UK's most outstanding heritage and make it publicly accessible, in memory of those who have given their lives for the UK. We are delighted to count the Duke Humfrey New Testament as part of the growing and timeless collection of UK heritage that belongs to all of us.”

Saving the UK's Heritage

The National Heritage Memorial Fund (NHMF) was set up to save some of the UK's most outstanding at-risk heritage. [Find out more about NHMF.](#)

Related News

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Now known as the Lyghfield Bible, after the 16th-century Cathedral monk who once owned it, the 690-leaf volume has returned to Canterbury Cathedral after 500 years

[13th-century Mostyn Psalter-Hours saved for the nation](#)

A rare and beautiful Psalter – a volume of psalms – produced in 13th-century London has been acquired by the British Library. The Mostyn Psalter-Hours was acquired for the nation with a grant of £390,000 from the National Heritage Memorial Fund (NHMF) and funding from other generous supporters.

Bodleian acquires rare works by 17th century greats

Bodleian acquires rare works by 17th century greats Donne, Locke and Aubrey from Robert Pirie collection, returning national treasures to the UK