

SENECA, *De Beneficiis* (On Benefits)

In Latin, illuminated manuscript on parchment

Southwestern Germany or Switzerland (Upper Rhine, Basel, Constance?), c. 1200-1240

31 folios on parchment (well prepared, slightly velvety), modern foliation in pencil top outer corner recto, text is complete (i-iii^s iv^s [-8, one leaf at the end, text is complete so possibly cancelled]), quires 2 and 3 signed at the end with a small Roman numeral, ruled lightly in lead, single full-length vertical bounding lines, prickings top, bottom, and occasionally outer margins, ff. 11-14, middle two bifolia in quire 2, include long rows of prickings in the top and bottom margins showing that these leaves may once have intended for use in a different orientation in a larger volume (justification 108 x 65-63 mm.), written on the top line in a protogothic bookhand in thirty long lines, red rubrics, SEVEN ILLUMINATED INITIALS, three large initials, ff. 1 and 5, full-length of the page, and f. 19v, 16-line, four smaller 5-line initials, ff. 10, 14v, 22v, and 28, initials are blue or dull pink, infilled with vines, some inhabited by dragons or animals on brushed gold grounds, edged in black, and with heavy contrasting angular frames in pink or blue, top margin, f. 1, trimmed away, opening rubric on f. 1 slightly damaged (small loss of text), ink stains f. 1 and outer margins of ff. 29v-31v, very top of the initial f. 5 slightly trimmed, f. 25 damaged along the inner margin, unbound, quires are tacketed together at the top, enclosed (but not sewn into), a large document folded to serve as a cover, probably a transumpt, irregularly trimmed, but open measuring approximately 344 x 450 mm., from a convent of Franciscan nuns(?) in the diocese of Barcelona, incipit, "Beadissime Pador ut animam saluti deuotorum Iacobi Thoralles . . ."; not dated, but likely fifteenth century. Dimensions 156 x 107 mm.

An important work by Seneca, this text on the giving (and receiving) of benefits or favors was rediscovered in the twelfth century and remained popular for centuries as a guide to good government. Manuscripts of this text are extremely rare on the market; the last copy sold listed in the Schoenberg Database was in 1955. This is an early copy in an unusually small format. The three larger illuminated initials are particularly compelling and feature winged-dragons and other animals.

PROVENANCE

1. Written in the first half of the thirteenth century, probably c. 1200-1240, in Southwestern Germany or Switzerland. The evidence of the script alone would support a date earlier in the thirteenth century, c. 1200-1225. It is a small and very controlled protogothic bookhand, minims are usually finished with small upturned strokes, round 'd' is used frequently. There are, however, no letter unions, although round 'd' followed by 'e' or 'o' occasionally touch, "et" (and) is abbreviated with a tironian '7', with no cross stroke and a slightly heavy wavy head; the scribes begin the text above the top ruled line. The illuminated initials are closest in style to manuscripts from Southwestern Germany or Switzerland in the Upper Rhine region or in the diocese Basel or Constance, and suggest a later date, perhaps c. 1240. The famous Psalter from the Cistercian Abbey of Bonmont in Switzerland (Besançon, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 54), usually dated c. 1260 and assigned to Germany or Switzerland, perhaps the diocese of Basel, is certainly a much grander manuscript, but features similar motifs in its non-figurative initials, particularly the style of the biting winged dragons, and the shape of the leaves similar to those on f. 1 of this manuscript (see for example ff. 23 and 66, Enluminures, Online resources).

2. The manuscripts includes no added annotations, except an erased monogram (?), similar to a Greek omega, in the lower margin of f. 24, and numerous early nota marks in the far outer margins.
3. European Private Collection.

TEXT

ff. 1-31v, *Incipit liber <...> de beneficiis ad ebutium<..> anneau suum feliciter*, incipit, "Inter multos ac uarios errores ... magni animi perdere et dare," *Explicit*."

Seneca the Younger, *De beneficiis*; Divided into the usual seven books beginning on ff. 1, 5, 10, 14v, 19v, 22v, and 28; book vii begins on f. 28 (with the incorrect rubric, *incipit vi feliciter*), at vii.3, "Egregie mihi uidetur hec dicere Demetrius cinicus" Edited Hosius, 1914, and in numerous other editions; the textual transmission is discussed by Reynolds in Reynolds, ed., 1983, pp. 363-365. The modern translation by Griffin and Inwood (2011), and Griffin's recent study (2013), point to a renewed interest in a text which was traditionally overlooked by modern scholars and readers of the classics.

ILLUSTRATION

The larger initials all feature long-tailed winged dragons, found in Gothic illumination throughout Europe, but here interpreted in a particularly expressive manner:

f. 1, 'I', running full length of the text column, blue, pale pink and green winding foliage with leaves and dragons on a gold ground within a blue frame;

f. 5, full-length of the text, and f. 19v, 16-lines, with an extension into the lower margin, 'I', both with dragons extending the full-length of the initials in shades of brown with orange touches, outlined in black, on f. 19v, with additional small animals at the top and bottom of the initial, on yellow framed in bright blue, and on f. 5, and on gray framed only in black ink, ending with flamboyant bunches of leaves;

f. 22v, although smaller in scale (4-line 'Q' with the tail extending into the lower margin), also includes a long-tailed dragon in the tail of the initial; the body of the initial infilled with a blue fox or dog;

The initials, ff. 10, 14v, 28, are smaller, 5-lines, in blue or dull pink, with simple vines or animal hybrids on grounds of brushed gold, framed in the opposite color.

Seneca the Younger, or Lucius Annaeus Seneca (c. 4 BC-65 AD), was a Roman stoic philosopher. He was born in Corduba, Spain in a prominent family, and was educated in rhetoric and philosophy in Rome from an early age. He served first as Nero's tutor, and then as the emperor's advisor early in his reign (Nero reigned from 37-68 AD), but fell out of favor later, and was ultimately forced to commit suicide when accused of plotting to kill the emperor. His works include essays, numerous letters, and nine tragedies, and his thought was destined to influence philosophy from ancient to modern times.

Seneca's treatise, *De beneficiis*, on the exchange of gifts and services was one of his mature works, dating after AD 56, and before AD 64. Modern scholars have suggested various translations of the title; "On Benefits," is the simplest translation, but "On Gifts and Services" or "On Favors" may come closer to the way Seneca is using the word. The text is divided into seven books, and discusses giving and receiving benefits, as well as how to express gratitude (Seneca considered ingratitude to be the most common of the great vices). Popular in the Middle Ages from the twelfth century on, the work continued to be transcribed, read, and admired up through the eighteenth century. In the sixteenth century, it was edited by Erasmus (d. 1536) in 1515 and 1527-9, and cited frequently by Montaigne (d. 1592) in his essays. *De Beneficiis* was the first work by Seneca to be translated into English (1578).

The oldest extant manuscript of the text was copied in Northern Italy, possibly Milan, c. 800 (Vatican Library, MS Pal. lat. 1547); it had made its way north to the monastery of Lorsch in Germany by the middle of the ninth century. An early copy of this manuscript, Vatican Library, MS Reg. lat. 1529, made in Northern Italy in the second quarter of the ninth century, was destined to become the source for all future copies of the text. This second copy was present in one of the monasteries in the Loire valley in France by the second half of the tenth century. Two centuries later, *De Beneficiis* was rediscovered, and it survives in as many as 300 copies, either as a complete text or in abridgments (Reynolds, 1983, p. 364), all dating from the twelfth century or later. Reynolds considered the text of most of these later copies to be of little value, but he did point to the existence of a small family of manuscripts, also descendants of Reg. lat. 1529, that preserve a less corrupt text. The text of this relatively early copy awaits further study by a modern editor.

De Beneficiis was known to some early Christian writers; Tertullian (d. 240), Lactantius (d. c. 325), and Jerome (d. 420), for example, either quote it or seem to know it. It then was forgotten until late in the eleventh century when it was recorded in two library catalogues and it was quoted in a chronicle; in the twelfth century there is evidence of a much broader popularity, when it survives in twelve complete manuscripts, circulated in abridged versions and as excerpts in florilegia, and was frequently cited. In the Middle Ages it was read chiefly as a treatise on political ethics, and with *De clementia* (On Clemency) (with which it was often copied), was often cited in works giving advice to princes to present an ethical basis for governance.

LITERATURE

Griffin, Miriam T. *Seneca on Society: A Guide to De Beneficiis*, Oxford, 2013.

Griffin, Miriam T. and Brad Inwood, trans. Seneca, Lucius Annaeus. *On Benefits*, Chicago, 2011.

Hosius, C., ed. *L. Annaei Senecae De beneficiis libri VII, De clementia libri II*, Leipzig, 1914.

Lentano, Mario, "De Beneficiis," in *Brill's Companion to Seneca, Philosopher and Dramatist*, edited by Gregor Damschen, Andreas Heil, with the assistance of Mario Waida, Leiden and Boston, 2013, pp. 201-206.

Reynolds, L. D. ed., *Texts and Transmission: A Survey of the Latin Classics*, Oxford, 1983, pp. 363-365.

ONLINE RESOURCES

Seneca, *De Beneficiis*, ed. John W. Basore, in the Perseus Digital Library, Gregory Crane, ed.
<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A2007.01.0023%3Abook%3D1%3Achapter%3D1%3Asection%3D1>

Enluminures (Images and descriptions of manuscripts preserved in French municipal libraries)
<http://www.enluminures.culture.fr/documentation/enlumine/fr/>

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