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LEON BATTISTA ALBERTI, *Ecatonfilea* and *Deifira*

In Italian, illuminated manuscript on parchment

[Northern Italy (Ferrara ? c. 1460s)]

101 folios, unnumbered, the last blank (fol. 102, also blank, lacking), complete (i-ix¹⁰ x¹¹ (12-1)), written on 18 long lines (justification 40 x 75 mm.), in a humanist script by a single scribe in brown ink, signatures usually legible in the outer lower margins, horizontal catchwords in the lower margins on the right, rubrics in blue capitals, two- and three-line initials in goldleaf on green or reddish-ochre grounds with penwork and floral extensions in the gutter margins executed in a Ferrarese manner, alternating blue and gold capitals, the names of the interlocutors Pallimacro and Filarco in alternating blue and gold capitals, FULL ILLUMINATED BORDER WITH MARGINAL HISTORIATED ROUNDELS SIGNED BY THE PAINTER "MAN/V.S.A/HIER/ONIM" [the illuminator Girolamo da Cremona (active 1451-83)?]. NEAR-CONTEMPORARY EARLY SIXTEENTH-CENTURY BINDING of brown morocco over boards, covers tooled in gold with a floral motif in the border and an intertwined rope around a central panel, in which appear a burning torch between two flames (the frieze symbolic of love and devotion), probably made in Bologna. Dimensions 76 x 110 mm.

Extremely rare, previously unrecorded, and illuminated copy of two of Alberti's youthful works, known in very few manuscripts, even fewer illuminated and on parchment, and of considerable philological and art-historical interest. This copy presents important textual variants, and it emerges as a signed work by a major Ferrarese artist, Girolamo da Cremona, most likely produced in the humanist circle of the Ferrarese ducal court. It is the only extant manuscript to contain both works and is in a near-contemporary binding.

PROVENANCE

1. Written and illuminated in northern Italy in the region of Ferrara in the 1460s, based on the style of the illumination and linguistic peculiarities of the text.

2. On f. 51r, in a rounded archaic script, recalling a fifteenth-century style, in brown ink *Ioannes Baptista Tacchinus Vtriusque Iuris Doctor*.
3. On f. 101v in a seventeenth-century cursive script, in pen, *Augustinus de G[?]lis utriusque iuris Doctor*.

TEXT

ff. 1-51, *Ecatonfilea*, without the dedication to Nerozzo Alberti, rubric, "Incomincia el libro chiam(a)to Echatonfilea conposto per messer baptista degli Alberti da Firenze"; incipit, "Parmi officioif di pieta & de humanita ove io in una et unaltra di voi bellissime fanciule"; f. 51, line 3, explicit, "Deponete isospecti, sdegni et gare et cosi viverete amando felicissime et contentissi(m)e AMEN. Finis";

ff. 51v-100v, *Deifira*, without the Appendix, beginning with the Prologue, rubric, "Proemio della Deiphira"; incipit, "Leggetemi amanti et riconoscendo qui meco i vostri errori diventerete o più docti ad amare"; f. 52, explicit, "impararete qualche utilità a vivere amanti e pregiati da vostri cittadini; f. 52, rubric, "Incomincia la Deiphira per lo sopradecto messer Baptista"; incipit, "Pallimacro. et quanto stimi tu sedere dentro a me grave quel dolore il quale ancora tanto prema chi da lunghi il mira"; explicit, "stesso amava, ama et sempre amarà. adio deifira mia. Explicit Deifira."

The career of Alberti:

Leon Battista Alberti (Genova 1404-Rome 1472) is considered the embodiment of the Renaissance ideal of the universal man: he was a writer, painter, architect, art theorist, and mathematician. Born in Genoa, the second son of an exiled Florentine, Lorenzo Alberti, and the Bolognese widow, Bianca di Carlo Fieschi, Battista came from a prosperous Florentine family engaged in banking, although for political reasons they had been exiled from Florence in the fourteenth century. Battista (he only later took the name Leo or Leon) attended university in Padua, where he received a classical literary education, then in Bologna from 1421 where he studied canon law. On the death of his father in 1421 he refused to enter the family business, and he did not receive an inheritance, but instead he continued to devote himself to a study of the Greek and Latin classics. Without a position and lacking family money, Alberti struggled in poverty during these years. However, in 1432, he accepted a position as secretary in the papal chancery in Rome. In 1435, when the sentence of banishment was lifted, he went to Florence with the pope. Then, in 1447, he became architectural advisor to Pope Nicolas V.

Although many of Alberti's writings—*On Painting* (1436); *Ten Books of Architecture* (1449; printed 1485); *The Family in Renaissance Florence*—(1433-39) are world renowned, frequently edited, and translated into many modern languages, his youthful work is less well known. Around the age of 20, he wrote a Latin comedy, *Pilodoxeos*, which he successfully passed off as the work by a classical Roman poet named Lepidus. Ten

years later, rightly attributed to Alberti, the work was dedicated to Lionello d'Este. He also wrote, around 1430, *De commodis et incommodis literarum* ("The Pains and Pleasures of a Man of Letters"). It is this theme, how the individual as a man of letters—a humanist—can rationally participate in society, that Alberti revisits under different guises in nearly all his writings, even in his youthful oeuvre.

The place of *Deifira* and *Ecatonfilea* in Alberti's youthful work:

Written c. 1430 around the same time as "The Pains and Pleasures of a Man of Letters" and, like it, probably based on personal experience, the vernacular dialogues *Deifira* and *Ecatonfilea* treat the vagaries of love from different perspectives. In *Deifira* Filarco counsels Pallimacro, hopelessly in love with Deifira, on the dangers of love, on how the humanist—the ideal lover—should experience the intensity of love as a young man, without abandoning the road that leads to "dottrina." or study. In *Ecatonfilea*, a woman, expert in matters of love, counsels her youthful listeners how to secure and keep love. The ideal lover is prudent, modest, and virtuous; above all, he is a man of letters, a humanist. Both works demonstrate Alberti's study of the ancient classics, transforming the Ovidian model, the former as a humanist rewriting of the *Remedia amoris*, the latter as an *Ars amatoria*. For the young Alberti, the ideal lover is above all a man of letters, who is able to maintain his reason and avoid the debilitating bonds of passionate love.

The philological evidence and the manuscript tradition:

Edited in modern times with a study of the manuscript tradition (see especially Grayson) these two works are extant in an extremely rare incunable edition of 1471 (without place or printer) and in two Parisian editions of 1534 and 1547 respectively. They have been frequently studied (e.g., Cecere, Ponte) and transcribed as e-texts (e.g., Intra Text and LiberLiber), but no English translation exists.

The text of *Ecatonfilea* presents readings characteristic of both families of the manuscript tradition as defined by Grayson: family *alfa*, in particular the manuscript F1 in Florence (Bibl. Nazionale, Cod. II.IV.38), which Grayson uses as the basis of his edition, and branch *beta*, with which the similarity is more marked, especially the manuscript M in Mantua (Bibl. Comunale, Cod. A. I.15) (see Grayson, III, p. 367, n. 7).

Also the text of *Deifira* offers a variant known only in manuscript F1 (Firenze, Bibl. Nazionale, Cod. II.IV.38) although elsewhere it appears to be close to particular branches of the tradition omitted by Grayson.

The spelling and Latinised words (*pecto*, *theatro*, *havere*, *aspectate*, *docta*, *prudencia*, *experte*, *da notarsi altunmo* probabilmente per reazione, su cui vedasi A. Castellani, *Grammatica storica della lingua italiana*, I, Bologna, Il Mulino, p. 299); there appear besides certain foolishnesses (*apellano*, *abiamo*, *sollaçi*, *dolçeça*, *vezi*) and some words use endings for the future tense (*amarà*, *impararete*) which point to northeastern Italy (especially Lombardy and the Veneto).

Manuscripts of the youthful works of Leon Battista Albert are rare. Grayson lists only 10 manuscripts of *Ecatonfilea* (in addition to one incomplete copy) from the fifteenth century, all of which are modest copies on paper except for one in Oxford (Bodleian Library, Cod. Canon., Ital. 76). The manuscript in Oxford is one of only two exemplars preserved in libraries outside of Italy; the other is in New York at Columbia University Library (Cod. Plimpton MS 180), a miscellany of various writings, not exclusively by Alberti. Grayson identifies only 13 manuscripts of the *Deifira* from the Quattrocento, of which only one in Cambridge, Mass. is on parchment (Harvard College Library, Cod. Typ. 422). This one in Cambridge and Cod. Plimpton 180 of Columbia University Library are the only two manuscripts from the fifteenth century that exist outside of Italy.

The manuscript is unedited, unknown to the editors of Alberti, and it is evidently unique in being the only one that includes the texts of both the *Deifira* and the *Ecatonfilea*. The text, probably copied in northeastern Italy, as the orthography and illumination suggest, presents from the point of view of reading one of the better readings of the manuscript tradition known.

ILLUSTRATION

f. 1, illuminated initial *P*(*armi officio*) of 5 lines and an illuminated floral border of reddish-violet, blue, and green, with three illuminated vignettes, in the right center a roundel with a bird on a branch, in the lower center also in a roundel a seated virgin against a landscape background, and in the upper margin a violet banderole on which the illuminator has signed "hieronimus."

Although it is difficult to be certain because of the absence of substantial figural decoration, an attribution to Girolamo da Cremona can nevertheless be advanced with some confidence. The signature is similar, if not identical, to that on the signed cutting ("Ieronimus f") of the *Dispute of Saint Justina* now in London in the Victoria and Albert Museum (MS 1184; see Levi d'Ancona, 1970, fig. 10; and for the revised dating, see Mariana Canova). A recently discovered initial in Chantilly is similarly dated c. 1461, that is during the Paduan sojourn of Girolamo, and, like the one in London and another in the Wildenstein Collection of the Musée Marmottan, it comes from a Choir Book made for the Benedictine Abbey of St. Justina (Chantilly, 2000, no. 8, pp. 32-35). For a recent review of Girolamo's career and oeuvre see Toniolo, 2001.

The attribution of our illumination to Girolamo can be sustained by comparison with the pages attributed to Girolamo in the Bible of Borso d'Este, on which he collaborated with Taddeo Crivelli, Giorgio d'Alemagna, et al. While working in Ferrara, Girolamo learned certain decorative devices more characteristic of these artists, such as the mode of doing the flowers and the construction of regular articulated penwork in the ornamentation. In the present manuscript, the typology

of the decoration, the initial *P*, and the scrollwork in the upper margin suggest that Girolamo was in contact with the workshop of the Bible of Borso d'Este, with whom he collaborated on the second volume between 1458 and 1461 and on the first quinternion of the first volume from 1460-61 (see Toniolo, 1997, vol. 2, pp. 433-447). Both the content of the work and the style of the illumination are thus consistent with an attribution to Girolamo and with his activity in Ferrara during the 1460s.

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Online resources

Text of Ecatonfilea in Italian from the IntraText Digital Library

DisplayText cannot span more than one line!

Text of Deifira in Italian from LiberLiber, a digital library

<http://www.liberliber.it/biblioteca/a/alberti/deifira/html>

On Alberti, links to online electronic texts and a biography

<http://ftp.unina.it:21005/home/index.asp>