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### BOCCACCIO, GIOVANNI, *L'Elegia di Madonna Fiammetta*

In Italian, manuscript on paper

[Italy, Lombardy or perhaps Tuscany, c. 1450-60]

90 leaves, on paper (watermark "fleur à trois pétales," close to Briquet no. 6306, Florence, 1452-53, crudely traced with pencil, perhaps by one of Sir Thomas Phillipps's children), originally in eleven gatherings each of 10 bifolio, lacking 18 leaves (collation i10 [lacking 1, 4, 9, 10], ii10 [lacking 9 and 10], iii10 [lacking 1, 7, and 10], iv10, v8 [? Only 4 leaves in first half but text is continuous], vi-vii10, viii10 [lacking 9 and 10, ix10 [lacking 5-10], x10 [lacking 9], xi8 +1), modern pencil numeration (although an inscription by Sir Thomas Phillipps states that one page is missing all the evidence suggests that the other losses predated the binding and were not noticed by Phillipps), written in dark brown ink in an elegant Renaissance semi-cursive script on 30 long lines within a scored column (justification c. 140 x 80 mm.) with vertical catchwords on ff. 31, 40, 50, 60, 81, chapter heading in faded red ink, chapter initials in four-line and section initials in two-line capitals, alternately red and blue with some clubbing decoration, lower margin of f. 1 carefully replaced, some worming along top edge of c. 20 leaves at the end, text not affected, paper and text in good condition. Bound in nineteenth-century marbled paper and half-leather over pasteboard, plain paper flyleaves, spine stamped gilt BOCCACCIO LA FIAMMETTA / M.S. CHART. Dimensions 200 x 142 mm.

A elegantly written manuscript of one of the most important of the humanist Boccaccio's lesser works of romance, found infrequently outside of Italian collections and recorded in only two copies in North America, this exemplar--certainly copied before the printed versions--also boasts a noteworthy provenance, coming from the collection of Sir Thomas Phillipps. Only two other manuscripts of the text appear to be still in private hands.

### PROVENANCE

1. The dialect suggests a Lombard origin, as there is a systematic tendency to use -u- for -o- (e.g. *cusi* / *cosi*) which is characteristic of Lombard dialect. Watermarks, however, point toward Tuscany, specifically Florence, before the first printed editions of the work

2. On f. 2 there is a seventeenth-century Italian inscription: *Donato mi da mio Compare(?) Tiralli(?)*, M, which suggests that the original first leaf and the lower margin of the present leaf 1 were already missing at this relatively early date, so perhaps the others were also.

3. Cheltenham, England [Middle Hill], Sir Thomas Phillipps Collection (1792-1873), MS 243, his collector's stamp on the first flyleaf. Sir Thomas, a self-described "vello-maniac," attempted a "frenzied quest to preserve every scrap of paper and vellum fragment he could locate." (see Basbanes, p. 120). In the fifty-plus years that he collected, Sir Thomas amassed over 50,000 books and 100,000 manuscripts, perhaps the largest private library ever. In doing so, he nearly bankrupted himself and drove his family deep into debt. The complete story of Phillipps's acquisitions and the dispersal of his library required five volumes to narrate (Munby, 1951-60).

## TEXT

f. 1, Incipit (begins incompletely), "... non fossi, o se dal tristo," lacking only five lines from the opening of Chapter 1, which together with the Prologue would have all fitted on one leaf of this manuscript. The second paragraph of the printed edition, beginning "Ma gia dalla fanciullezza," is not distinguished here and runs straight on. Lost leaves correspond to equivalent gaps in the text in comparison with the printed edition. There are many differences in spelling between this exemplar and the printed text but no substantive differences of content. Explicit "... Vive adunque nullo ti puo di questo privare & exemplo eterno alli felici & a misari dimori de le angoscie de la tua donna. Deo gratias finis." An explicit is added in another hand, "Finis libri fiammetta."

This has been judged the most effective of the minor works of Boccaccio, most famous for his epic *Decameron*, a collection of tales that became the model for Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. The *Fiammetta*, which relates the fluctuating anguish of Fiammetta abandoned by her lover Panfilo, has been described as the earliest psychological novel, in which the author demonstrates his ability to portray subjective feelings. It is also thought to reflect Boccaccio's own relations with the woman he called La Fiammetta in Naples.

Giovanni Boccaccio lived from 1313 to 1375. He was probably born in Florence, son of a businessman, and after a stint in the family business he was sent by his father to study law in Naples. Abandoning law, he turned to writing, and he moved back to Florence in 1340. During his Florentine period he became involved in government. He also met Petrarch, upon whom he modelled some of his works and along with whom he is considered one of the first Renaissance humanists.

While first in Naples as a young man, here he encountered Lady Maria d'Aquino, the natural daughter of King Robert of Naples, adopted by the family of the Count d'Aquino and married to a Neapolitan nobleman. Little is known of her real character, and it is

unclear whether he ever really had an affair with her (she was married when he would have met her), or whether this was a dramatic fiction that he adopted in the style of Dante's apotheosis of a childhood acquaintance, Beatrice. However, she certainly provided inspiration for three works, in which she appears as Fiammetta. The youthful *Filocolo* begun in 1336 is a version of the romance of Flor and Blancaflor, here Florio and Biancofiore, and includes as chapter four the section "Fiammetta reina della corte d'amore," a dialogue in which Fiammetta judges the complaints of the lovelorn Filocolo. In 1343, she occurs in the prose *L'Elegia di Madonna Fiammetta*, which is also a dialogue, but this time between Fiammetta and her faithless lover Panfilo. It is packed with allusions to classical mythology. Her third appearance is in the *Decameron*, composed around 1349 to 1353, where she is one of the ten storytellers.

There are only two other manuscripts of the *Fiammetta* in private hands. In 1983 (see Delcorno, pp. 5-7), there were 70 known manuscripts of the *Fiammetta*, of which only 15 were outside Italy, namely in Baltimore, Basle, Brussels, Chicago, Cape Town, Copenhagen, London (2), Madrid, Oxford (3), New York, Paris, and an Austrian private collection. Neither of the privately held manuscripts is similar to the present manuscript. (see Delcorno, 1983-84, esp. pp. 128-29, on the manuscript in private hands in Austria). Only two of these are in North American collections (see De Ricci, listing three manuscripts: University of Chicago, MS 540, DeRicci I, p. 590; Baltimore, Walters Art Gallery, W490, DeRicci I, pp. 842-43; and ex-Cortland Bishop Collection [now dispersed], DeRicci II, p. 1658).

The *Fiammetta* was first printed in Padua in 1472 (Goff B-733) and was thereafter printed frequently before 1500 in Italian, as well as in Spanish and German. There is a modern edition by M. P. Mussini Sacchi, 1987, and another by C. Segre, Milan, 1963.

## LITERATURE

Boccaccio, Giovanni. *Fiammetta, saggio introduttivo, commento e note di Guido Parazolli*, Milano-Affori, Casa editrice Auria, 1944.

Boccaccio, Giovanni. *The Elegy of Lady Fiammetta*. edited and translated by Mariangela Causa-Steindler and Thomas Mauch, with an Introduction by Mariangela Causa-Steindler, Chicago, 1990

Boccaccio, Giovanni. *Tutti le opere*, Milan, 1963.

Branca, V. *Tradizione delle opere di Giovanni Boccaccio*. Rome, 1958-1982.

Delcorno, Carlo. "Studi sulla tradizione manoscritta dell'Elegia di Madonna Fiammetta," *Studi sul Boccaccio* 14 (1983-84), pp 4-129.

Quaglio, A. E. "Per il testa della *Fiammetta*," *Studi di filologia italiana* 15 (1957), pp. 5-205;

Quaglia, A. E. "Un nuovo codice della *Fiammetta*," *Studi sul Boccaccio* 5 (1968), pp. 19-27.

#### ONLINE RESOURCES

E-text of L'Elegia di Madonna Fiammetta in Italian

<http://www.liberliber.it/biblioteca/b/boccaccio/>

<http://www.classicitaliani.it/boccacc/fiamma0.htm>

E-text of L'Elegia di Madonna Fiammetta in English

<http://www.gutenberg.net/etext/10006>

The Decameron Web: On Boccaccio

[http://www.brown.edu/Departments/Italian\\_Studies/dweb/boccaccio/index.shtml](http://www.brown.edu/Departments/Italian_Studies/dweb/boccaccio/index.shtml)