

LES ENLUMINURES, LTD

2970 North Lake Shore Drive 11B
Chicago, Illinois 60657

tel. 1-773-929-5986

fax. 1-773-528-3976

chicago@lesenluminures.com

LES ENLUMINURES

Le Louvre des Antiquaires
2 place du Palais-Royal
75001 Paris

tél : 33 1 42 60 15 58

fax : 33 1 40 15 00 25

info@lesenluminures.com

STEFANO FIESCHI DA SONCINO, *Synonima sententiarum*

In Latin and Italian, illuminated manuscript on parchment and paper

[Northeastern Italy, perhaps Verona or Venice?, after 1437, circa 1440-1450]

169 ff. (ff. 91, 148, 159, 160, 161 blank), complete, mostly in quires of 10 (collation i-xvi¹⁰, xvii⁹ [last blank folio cancelled or pasted down]), on parchment and paper (watermarks close to Briquet nos. 11704 or 11728: *trois monts surmontés d'un trait en croix*: both Vérona, 1443), with outer bifolium of first quire written on vellum, all other leaves written on paper with bands of vellum around spine and inner fold of each quire, early foliation (not followed here), horizontal catchwords in radiating cartouches, ruled in pale red ink, written in dark brown ink in a small rounded gothic bookhand (justification 103 x 77 mm), headings in red, two 3-line high initials painted in blue with penwork in pale red ink (ff. 1 and 83), ILLUMINATED INITIAL AND BORDER on first page, the initial 4-line high painted in light pink with colorful leafy infill on a burnished gold ground with colored acanthus leaves extending into the margin (pink, green, and blue) with hairline stems adorned with gold besants and flowers, a coat of arms in the bottom margin of first page painted within a ring of flowering branches and flanked by the letters "h" and "p." CONTEMPORARY BINDING of wooden boards, beveled on their inner edges and sewn on 3 red-stained leather thongs pegged into tunnels and grooves in the edges of the boards, traces of tawed leather covering (doeskin), stub of clasp lined in red silk on edge of upper cover, lozenge-shaped metal catch on edge of lower cover stamped with a lamb and flag and a Gothic letter S (binding worn, slightly defective but nonetheless in its sound unrestored condition; edges of first leaf slightly frayed and some light internal waterstains never affecting legibility; generally in fine condition). Dimensions 169 x 120 mm.

The text of the present bilingual manuscript witnesses the interest in rhetorical composition in the vernacular in the Quattrocento; whereas a number of copies are extant (only one in North America), the present finely decorated and written copy stands out for its important provenance, probably made for a poet active at the court of Lionello d'Este, for its early date of execution, not long after the text was first composed, and for its original unrestored binding. It has yet to be published in a modern critical edition.

PROVENANCE

1. The date of composition of this text is Venice, 15 October 1437 (f. 167v). Judging by the script and illumination, corroborated by the watermarks dated 1443, the present manuscript is closely contemporary to its date of composition. The arms painted on the first page are those of "Pisani," of Venice, flanked by the initials *H* and *P*. The original owner may have been Hugolino Pisani of Parma, lawyer and humanist poet at the court of Lionello d'Este, author of the Latin comedy *Philogenia et Epiphebus* (c. 1440).
2. Dr. André Rooryck, his MS. 25.

TEXT

ff. 1-1v, Stefano Fieschi, *Synonima sententiarum*, Dedicatory epistle: rubric, *Stephanus Flisbus de Soncino juveni peritissimo Iohanni Melioratio ornatissimo civi et vicentino cancelario paduano plures et salutatem dat*; incipit, "Cum superiora verborum sinonima tibi breviter absolvissem michi in mentem venit non esse incomodum ut aliquas etiam et tibi variationes inscriberem que perfecto variationes sinonima non indecente...";

f. 2, Stefano Fieschi, *Synonima sententiarum*, Prologue: rubric, *Prohemia pro sinonimis exordior que sequuntur*; incipit, "Quoniam mi studiosissime Johannes quotiens a nobis dicendum est...";

ff. 2v-169, Stefano Fieschi, *Synonima sententiarum*: heading in red: *Dicta convenientia exordio*; incipit, "Dio sia in nostro aitorio [in Italian, in red] / Deus nos adjuvet / Deus sit nobis adiumento..."; heading in red: *Conclusioni convenientia*; incipit, "Io fazo fine [In Italian, in red] / Sed iam his finem inpono / Finem igitur dicendi facio...";

f. 169v, Stefano Fieschi, *Synonima sententiarum*, Final dedicatory remarks with place and date of composition: rubric, *Stephanus Flisbus Suncinensis suo Iohanni Melioratio viro celeberrima eloquentia perditio p. d. s.*; incipit, "In summis perfecto occupationibus [...] (?) pauca sententiarum sinonima tibi absolvi..."; explicit, "[...] Valde ergo et me mutuo fac diligas ex Veneciiis idibus octobribus 1437".

This text is the *Synonimia Sententiarum* sometimes called the *Sententiarum Variationes* by the grammarian Stefano Fieschi (Stephanus Fliscus) of Soncino, made up of a collection of moral, ethical, and rhetorical phrases or *formulae* in Italian, with their variant translations or forms into Latin. The collection was intended as a guide to letter writing, teaching readers how to vary their expression and style. Popular in the later fifteenth century, it was printed up to 37 times with adapted versions in Italian, French, Spanish, German and Dutch (for the incunable tradition, see *Gesamtkatalog der Wiegendrucke*, nos. 10000-10037, cols. 479-496). Various editions were apparently adjusted to local and regional differences by supplying synonyms in the appropriate vernacular language. It should be pointed out that this work

was most useful to students due to its bilingual nature. Since the understanding and mastery of the Latin language was beginning to wane, this bilingual collection of rhetorical and epistolary formulae was much appreciated. On this text see Mazzuconi (1981), pp. 276-277, who gives a preliminary list of some 30 localized manuscripts, of which only one is in a North American collection: Chicago, Newberry Library, 42 (97.1) [see Bond and Faye, *Census... Supplement* (1962), p. 154, no. 42]. To this list, another 17 manuscripts cited in Kristeller, *Iter Italicum...*, and in Bursill-Hall (1981), p. 370, should be added.

Born in Soncino (near Cremona) towards the end of the fourteenth century, Stefano Fieschi spent some time as the secretary to Zenone Castiglioni, bishop of Lisieux (see Foffano [1967], p. 454). As secretary, he was concerned with the rhetorical formulae and letter-writing aids such as those contained in the present collection. Fieschi followed the courses of Gasparino Barzizza around 1429-1430, and further research would allow a better understanding of their mutual influence. In 1460, Fieschi is said to be "rector scholarum S. Marine" in Venice. The text in this manuscript is dedicated to Giovanni Melioratio or Miglioranza, vice-chancellor of Padua and ends with a letter to the dedicatee, dated Venice, October 1437. This dedication is also confirmed in another copy of the text (Bibl. Vaticana, Vat. lat. 6870), but a different dedication to his sons Giovanni, Bartolomeo and Francesco is found in a manuscript in Bergamo (Bibl. Civica Angelo Mai, Δ. I. 17).

LITERATURE

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