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NICCOLO DA FERRARA, O.S.B., *Polistorio*, Books I and II.
In Italian, illuminated manuscript on paper.
Italy, Bologna, c. 1479.

187 ff., on paper (watermarks close to Briquet, no. 11711-11712, Bologna, 1480-1490 and 1482), complete (collation: i¹⁰, ii¹⁰⁺² [one blank leaf was later inserted, in order to fix the loosely added singleton f. 11], iii-xii¹⁰, xiii⁸, xiv-xv¹⁰, xvi⁸, xvii-xix¹⁰), quire signatures in the same ink as the text partly visible on the rectos, catchwords in the same hand and colour as the text, ruled in light ink, justification 287/292 x 198 mm, text on 2 columns (85/87 mm wide), written in an Italian humanistic bookhand in brown ink on up to 54 lines per column, chapter marks alternately in red and blue, numerous 3- to 5-line high painted initials throughout, alternately in red and blue, 14 decorative initials of varying heights between 5- to 13-lines high (ff. 12, 15v, 17, 19, 35v, 48, 55, 84, 88v, 99, 107v, 123v, 146v, 150v), with larger initials of Roman capitals in pink or blue highlighted in white tracery decorated with coloured ornaments of acanthus leaves, flowers, rinceaux, cornucopia (f. 12), dolphins (f. 19) on highly burnished gold grounds framed in green, pink with white tracery and smaller initials of burnished gold with parti-colored grounds and infills of green, blue, pink or maroon with white tracery, frontispiece (f. 12) with an 11-line high initial and a border composed of a framing gold baguette with coloured rings and foliate motifs, a pink unrolled pink banderol in its upper portion and the lateral borders ornamented with coloured pink, green and blue floral motifs and radiating hairline stems, lower border missing on ff. 1 and 11 with doubled margins, f. 12 cut along the edges of the text and pasted onto a passe-partout frame (where original shield or elements of ownership must have figured), fol. 188 cut around the text and pasted onto a paper leaf, ff. 14, 107, tears in the lower margin repaired. Bound in a nineteenth-century half binding of light brown calf over pasteboards, pink paper on boards, back sewn on 6 raised thongs, with title "Polistorio" gilt in second compartment, double blind filets in other compartments, pasted paper label "788" and "48" in 6th and 7th compartments respectively. Dimensions 440 x 290 mm.

One of only five extant manuscripts of this rare world chronicle, originally written in the fourteenth century for Niccolo II d'Este, this manuscript on paper but of an imposing format is the only known copy of Book II of the chronicle and one of only two copies of Book I. The present deluxe copy was made for Niccolo Rangoni of Bologna, its Bolognese origin confirmed by the watermarks and decoration.

PROVENANCE

1. As indicated by the rubrics (see Text below), this manuscript was copied for Niccolò Maria Rangoni from Modena. Niccolo Rangoni had been born into a wealthy Italian family, was Sire of Spilamberto and Cordignano and won his reputation as commander and condottiere. In 1479 he was given the title of "capitano del Popolo di Bologna": two years later he stayed in Bologna and

during these years he is likely to have commissioned the manuscript. According to the *Italian Biographical Index* (2002, vol. 9, 2923), he died in 1500, as stated by Argegni (1936-1937), II 495, 362). This Bolognese origin is corroborated by the watermarks and the style of the very elegant Roman capital decorated initials, some up to 13-lines high.

2. Engraved heraldic bookplate on upper pastedown of the prince of Rangoni Machiavelli. After the death of the last of the direct descendants of Niccolò Machiavelli, Francesco, in 1727, his nephew Giambattista Rangoni inherited his name and possessions.

3. Bookplate on upper pastedown. Swiss bibliophile Sergio Colombi (1887-1972), from the Ticino, who gave 100 incunables to the Biblioteca Cantonale of Lugano in 1962. (See A. Ramelli, "Der Bibliophile und Mäzen Sergio Columbi, 1887-1972," *Librarium* 15/1 (May, 1972, pp. 19-20); and information available on the library site, [Online Resources](#), below), to his heirs.

TEXT

ff. 1-11, Alphabetical table of the first two books of the *Polistorio*, rubric, *Qui comincia la tavola per alphabeto del primo e del secundo libro del polistorio*;

f. 11v, blank and ruled:

ff. 12-13, Prologue rubric (f. 12), *Incomença al prologo del primo del polistorio de lo illustro conte, conte Nicolo Rangono de la excelsa republica de Bologna capitano generale*; incipit, "Secundo la sentential de policrato a niuno huomo tanto si convene de sapere piu cose e migliore quanto se convene al principe et al signore de gli altri..."

ff. 13-15v, List of chapters of Book I, rubric, *Incomencia li capitoli del primo libro*; incipit, "Nel principio del mundo e de tute le creature. Capito primo..."; rubric, *Expliciunt capitula primi libri*;

f. 15v-105v, Beginning of Book I, rubric (f. 15v), *Qui comença pollistorio dello illustro conte, conte Nicolo Rangono della excelsa republica de Bologna capitano generale etc. Del principio del mundo et generalmente de tute le creature. Capitolo primo*; incipit, "D[e]llo altissimo e glorioso trino et uno creatore de tutto le cosse visibilie et invisibile celestiale e terrene...";

ff. 105v-107v, List of chapters of Book II, rubric (f. 105v), *Qui finisce el primo libro de pollistorio felicemente. Ad honore e stato dello illustro conte Nicolo Rangono capitano generale etc., Incomencia li capitoli del primo [sic] libro de polistorio. Rubrica*; incipit, "Capitolo primo del processo del populo romano per similitudine de quarto etade in uno homo e come hebbe et septe regi diversificato de ingiegni per divina dispositione..."; rubric, *Finiti li capitoli del secundo libro de pollistorio*;

ff. 107v-187, Beginning of Book II, rubric (f. 107v), *Qui comença il secundo libro de polistorio capitolo primo del processo del populo romano per similitudine de quarto etade in uno homo e come ebbe septe regi diversificadi de ingiegnio per divina dispositione. Rubrica*; incipit, "Narrate le prescripte ystorie orienta e greche il stillo de Justino e de Orosio ritorno dove lassai il processo del populo de Roma..."; explicit (f. 187), "[...] a Çenone tyranno de phyladelphia il quale era cognominato Rotila"; followed by final rubric (f. 187),

Qui finesse il libro di machabei. Ede segnitare le ystorie evangelice secondo la descriptione del maestro delle ystorie scolastiche il quale ebbe nome pietro mangiatore.

The *Polistorio* is a world history known until now only from four exemplars, and it was never printed nor edited. It has been attributed to the Dominican author, Bartolomeo da Ferrara (1368-1448) by Muratori (see below, pp. 697-848), who edited a small portion of the text, demoted by Creytens (1955). It has also been attributed to the Benedictine Nicolaus de Ferrara by Kaeppli, who unfortunately does not give his source (see Kaeppli [1970], no. 395, p. 150). However this attribution is confirmed in the present copy in the Prologue, which after a long discourse on princely virtues, states the following: "Et per tanto illustro et magnifico signore Misser Nicolo marchese da Est per la divina gratia signore de Ferrara e de Modena e de tuto el Modenese e de Adrie e de Comachio e de tuto el Polesene de Roigo de lugo de Bagnacavalo e de Codognola, io fra Nicolo da Ferrara dell'ordine de Sancto Benedecto maestro in la sacra theologia e per la divina gratia abate del vostro monasterio de sancta Maria da Gavello humile vostra creaura, volendo compire el vostro sancto proposito e il vostro summamento virtuoso desiderio et volendo obedire al vostro commandamento, ho compilato questo libro nome Polistorio, il quale nome e Greco et a dire in latino pluralitade de ystorie nel quale brevemente ho reducto in vulgare quasi de tute le cosse facte e dicte dalli principii passati et da molti altri digni de memoria, cominciando dal principio del mundo in sino al tempo della vostra illustra e magnifica signoria cioe in sino a l'anno della nativitate del Signore iesu christo mille trecento octanta tre..." (f. 12v). According to this hitherto unpublished Prologue, the author of the *Polistorio* appears to be a Benedictine abbot named Niccolo da Ferrara (not recorded in Kapsner, *A Benedictine Bibliography* [1962], but recorded as Nicolaus Ferrariensis, abbot of S. Bartholi Ferrariae, died after 1387, according to Potthast [1998], vol. VIII/1, pp. 207-208). The present Prologue states that the author was abbot of the abbey of Santa Maria di Gavello at the time he composed his *Polistorio*. The Abbazia di Santa Maria di Gavello, was a Benedictine abbey, diocese of Adria Veneta, near Rovigo, deserted early on in the 15th c. because of rising waters, and known as the place where Bede died in 883 (see Cottineau, I, 1261; *Dict. d'histoire et de géographie ecclésiastiques*, XX, 1984, 137).

Our manuscript confirms the author and original date of composition (1383) of the *Polistorio*, but also the dedicatee, none other than Niccolo II d'Este (1338-1388), nicknamed lo Zoppo (see Dedication contained in Prologue transcribed in paragraph above). The only manuscript that dates from the lifetime of the author is the manuscript made for Francesco Gonzaga after c. 1382 (Cambridge, Mass. Harvard University, Houghton Library, MS Typ 329).

There are four surviving manuscripts of the *Polistorio*; the present manuscript brings the total number of surviving copies to four. None of these preserve the text of Book II, which until the discovery of the present copy remained unknown. The first and earliest manuscript (last quarter of the 14th c.), containing only Book III (Harvard University, Houghton Library, Ms. Typ 329), a deluxe parchment copy, bears the arms of the count of Mantova, Francesco Gonzaga (1363-1407, count since 1382). On this manuscript see Wieck 1983, p. 132, fig. 40 as well as the Online Resources cited below. The second manuscript, containing only Books III and IV (the latter incomplete) is in Glasgow, University Library, MS Hunter 41. It bears the arms of the Strozzi of Ferrara and, according to A. de la Mare, is attributed to the scribe who also copied the Maffei Virgil (Chicago, Newberry Library, MS 95.5). On this manuscript, see Thorp, no. 79, and Online

Resource. On parchment, like the Harvard codex, it is illuminated, and it dates c. 1450. The third manuscript is on paper, like the present copy, and it contains only Book IV (Beinecke Library, Yale University, Marston MS 31). It was written in Venice in the 1470s and is attributed to the Workshop of the Master of the Putti. Evidently, it was a presentation copy for the Marcello family of Venice, whose arms appear in the frontispiece and on the binding. Perhaps it was presented to Niccolò Marcello when he was elected Doge of Venice in 1473 (see Shailor, pp. 53-56, and Online Resources). The fourth manuscript contains Book I, and it is dated 1481 (Venice, Museo Correo, MS 766) (See Kristeller, *Iter Italicum*).

The *Polistorio* originally consisted of four books: Book I, from the Creation of the world; Book II, biblical history, Book III, from the First Punic War to the Principate of Octavian; and Book IV from the accession of Augustus to the war between the Conte di Romagna and Ricardo di Manfredi da Faenza. The present volume unites the first two books of the *Polistorio* that are not otherwise documented, and was most certainly the first volume of a planned two- or three-volume set, since it announces in the Prologue the four books and their contents (f. 13: "El primo libro cominça dal principio del mundo... El secundo libro contene dal primo regimento di consuli di Roma... El terço libro cominça alla prima bataglia punica... El quarto libro cominça al imperio octaviano [...] et allanno della nativita de christo mille trecente octanta tre. Contene capitoli cerca ducento sexanta.") The alphabetical list of the chapters of the two books is followed by a prologue that includes the dedication to Niccolò d'Este, which has been conceived as a frontispiece. A blank space for a miniature was left in the upper portion of the page. This page had once been excised from the manuscript, most likely for the sake of erasing the arms of the owner in the bas-de-page. Niccolò Rangoni's ownership devices may originally have ornamented this place. As the only document known to contain the first two books of the *Polistorio*, and one of only two documents that firmly identify its author and dedicatee, the present manuscript constitutes an important contribution to Italian historiography of the Humanistic Age.

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ONLINE RESOURCES

Harvard University Library MS Typ. 329

http://ds.cul.columbia.edu:8080/ldpd/app/exist/scriptorium/ds.xq?querytype=advanced&stringtype1=phrase&field1=title_key&term1=title_x_166&queryecho=Polistorio,%20Book%20III&order=lo&operator1=and&field2=any&term2=&stringtype2=all&operator2=and&field3=any&term3=&stringtype3=all&begin=&end=&single=&DatedOrNot=&Document=&library=any&country=any

Beinecke Library, Yale University , Marston MS 31

<http://webtext.library.yale.edu/beinflat/pre1600.MARS031.htm>

Glasgow University Library, Hunter MS 41 (T.1.9)

<http://special.lib.gla.ac.uk/manuscripts/search/detaild.cfm?DID=32444>

On Sergio Columbi's gift to the Biblioteca Cantonale, Lugano

http://www.sbt.ti.ch/bclu/biblio/BCLu_LaBiblioteca.pdf

On Santa Maria di Gavello:

http://www.comune.gavello.ro.it/sommario_spiegazione_gavello_storia.htm