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**BENEDICTUS MAFFEI, *Epitoma in libros Plinii historie naturalis* [on Pliny's Natural History]  
In Latin, illuminated manuscript on parchment  
Italy, likely Rome, after 1483, c. 1485-1490**

60 ff., on parchment, preceded and followed by 2 modern parchment flyleaves, complete (collation: i-vi10), vertical catchwords, in an elegant humanistic italic script, in dark brown ink, on up to 17 long lines (justification: 112 x 65 mm), ruled in light brown ink, initials in red set off slightly to the left, 20 burnished gold initials on either pink or bright green grounds with white tracery, illuminated frontispiece with full-page composition with elaborate borders composed of colored acanthus leaves and flowers, classical devices, winged putti, jewels and pearls, and coat-of-arms set in a laurel wreath flanked by two winged putti with lower parts of the body ending in swirling colored acanthus leaves, text on first page copied on free-standing parchment drawn in trompe l'oeil, descender of decorated initial Q piercing the parchment in an illusionistic manner, first word of text traced in Roman capitals and set in a green carthouche above the text, dedicatory heading in pale red ink, also set in a cartouche framed in gold. Bound in 19<sup>th</sup> c. pigskin, back sewn on 5 raised bands, with vellum pastedowns lined with a gilt filet and four gilt deployed eagles placed at angles, signed Trautz-Bauzonnet (Upper board detached, a few internal stains of little consequence, else in very good condition). Dimensions 190 x 130 mm.

This *epitoma*—a sort of commentary or reading aid—on Pliny's Natural History, widely read in the Italian Renaissance, is one of three known copies of this work by Benedictus Maffei, an understudied humanist author who was a member of the influential Maffei family established in Verona and Rome. With a beautiful illuminated frontispiece and fine calligraphy, perhaps by Ludovicus Regio who copied, annotated, and signed a number of works for the Maffei family, this deluxe copy was made in Rome for Cardinal Francesco Todeschini-Piccolomini, future Pope Pius III.

**PROVENANCE**

1. Written by an Italian scribe and equally illuminated in Italy, likely in Rome given the style of illumination and script, corroborated by provenance. The dedication to Cardinal Oliviero Carafa (1430-1511), already Archbishop of Naples since 1458, suggests a date of composition and thus of copy after 31 January 1483 date on which Carafa became Cardinal-bishop of Santa Sabinia (Rome), as per the heading opening the dedicatory Prologue: "Amplissimo patri et domino D. Oliverio episcopo Sabinensi cardinali neapolitani benedictus maffeus salutem d[at]." The arms painted in the lower margin of the illuminated frontispiece are not those of Carafa, as suggested in the pasted French catalog entry (pasted on the verso of the first flyleaf). The arms suggest rather that the manuscript was commissioned by a member of the influent Piccolomini family (*d'argent, à la croix d'azur, chargée de cinq croissants d'or*). This manuscript is thus not a

dedication copy to Carafa but rather a presentation copy to a Cardinal of the Piccolomini family. Given a date of copy after 1483, the likely candidate would be Francesco Todeschini-Piccolomini (1439-1503), nephew of the famous Aeneas Silvio Piccolomini, elected Pope Pius II (1458-1464). Francesco Todeschini-Piccolomini was made Cardinal of Siena in 1460 (the arms here represented are indeed surmounted by a red Cardinal's hat; see L. Borgia, "L'araldica dei Piccolomini," in M. Sodi and A. Antonutti ed., Rome, 2007, p. 235, fig. 29: "Stemma del cardinale Francesco Piccolomini, futuro papa Pio III"), and after was elected as the short-lived Pope Pius III (1503). To honor the memory of his uncle and protector Pope Pius II, he founded the Piccolomini Library, next to the cathedral of Siena: it housed Pius II's library and was decorated by Pinturicchio (see Settis and Toracca, ed., *La libreria Piccolomini nel Duomo di Siena*, 1998). Francesco Todeschini-Piccolomini was also an important bibliophile and patron of the arts, for whom quite a number of extant manuscripts were copied and illuminated (see for instance, New York, NYPL, Spencer MS 29, in *Splendor of the Word*, 2006, pp. 152-154, Gospel Lectionary with overpainted arms of Francesco Todeschini-Piccolomini; on the Piccolomini as bibliophiles, both the uncle and nephew, see J. Ruyschaert, 1968, p. 249 and sqq.).

Notably, the collections of the Renaissance papacy were well supplied with authoritative works on botany and *materia medica*. The present manuscript contains many references to herbals and diseases, suggesting an interest on the part of its papal patron in healing and *materia medica* (see R. K. French, "Pliny and Renaissance medicine" (1986), pp. 252-281).

2. Apparently once part of the Collezione Maffei (?), of the Maffei of Verona-Rome. An armorial stamp is found on the recto of the first flyleaf. The stamp is faintly visible, but one discerns nonetheless the heraldic shield of the Maffei family (coupé, au 1 d'azur au cerf issant d'or; au 2, bandé d'azur et d'or, une fasce d'argent recouvre la partition). On the Maffei and their manuscripts mostly preserved in the BAV (Vatican City) amongst the Ottoboni Latini, see esp. B. Ullman, 1973, "Codices Maffeiiani," pp. 373-382 and J. Ruyschaert, "Recherche des deux bibliothèques romaines Maffei des XVe et XVIe siècles," 1958, pp. 333-355. The later armorial stamp might have been apposed by a later collector and antiquarian, perhaps Cardinal Orazio Maffei (died 1609) or Scipione Maffei (1675-1755) who would have been particularly attentive to a work composed by one of their ancestors.

3. Former Sessoriani Collection, Cistercians of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, in Rome. The Cistercian monks of Santa Croce were the first owners of the famous collection "Sessoriana," founded by their abbot Ilarione Rancati (1594-1663), theologian, jurist and Orientalist. At the death of the abbot, the Fondo Sessoriano counted 171 manuscripts, all of great rarity. The collection was later entrusted to and increased by Gioacchino Besozzi (1679-1755, cardinal in 1753), who also described the manuscripts in a catalogue. The manuscripts of the Fondo Sessoriano left the Cistercian foundation of Santa Croce in 1810 for the Biblioteca Vaticana, then were housed in another Cistercian house, that of S. Bernardo alle Terme. It is in this last depository that an important theft took place, circa 1821, an inside job probably tied to the Roman antiquarian G. B. Petrucci. Eventually, the remaining Sessoriani manuscripts were transferred to the Biblioteca nazionale di Roma between 1875 and 1885, where they are still housed today (on the Fondo Sessoriano, see Palma, 1980, "Cenni di storia dei codici sessoriani," pp. XIX-XXXII; see also Jemolo and Palma, 1984, "Sessoriani dispersi"). The

present manuscript is one of the manuscripts included on the list of "membra disiecta" of the Fondo Sessoriano, which records those manuscripts that were once part of the Cistercian collection of S. Croce in Gerusalemme, before they went astray (this particular manuscript is included amongst the "codici non localizzati" in V. Jemolo and M. Palma, *Sessoriani dispersi*, 1984, p. 40, no. 27). Over the years, certain of the Sessoriani manuscripts have been reintegrated into the collection in Rome, while others were acquired by other institutions (Leipzig, Universitätsbibliothek; Berlin, Staatsbibliothek and others, for a complete recension see Jemolo and Palma, 1984, p. 21ff.). A few, such as the present manuscript, are still in private collections or resurface on the market (a list of "codici ritrovati" and "codici non localizzati"--65 codices in all--was established in Jemolo and Palma, 1984, p. 19 et sq).

4. Charles Alexandre, Marquis de Ganay (1803-1881), collector and bibliophile, his catalogue: *Catalogue d'un choix de livres rares et précieux manuscrits et imprimés composant le cabinet de feu M. le Marquis de Ganay*, Paris, 1881, p. 43, no. 67 [sold 220 Fr. Francs in 1881]. See also : *Table alphabétique des noms d'auteurs et des ouvrages anonymes de la bibliothèque de feu M. le Marquis de Ganay*, Paris (1881), p. 9: "Maffei (Benedetto). Epitome in libros Plinii, ms. XVe siècle." A cutting from a French book-dealer's catalogue (no. 6499) confirms the Ganay provenance, pasted on the verso of the first parchment flyleaf, associated with an Italian inscription: "Ho fatto venire da Parigi questo cimelio."

5. M. Guyot de Villeneuve, Président de la Société des bibliophiles français, important bibliophile and erudite. The present manuscript was catalogued and sold in *Catalogue des livres manuscrits et imprimés, des dessins et des estampes du cabinet de feu M. Guyot de Villeneuve, Première partie*, Paris, 1900, no. 3: "Benedicti Maffei Epitoma..." (p. 4).

6. Private European Collection.

## TEXT

ff. 1-3, Benedictus Maffei, *Epitoma in libros Plinii*, dedicatory Prologue to Cardinal Oliviero Carafa, Cardinal-bishop of Santa Sabina and Archbishop of Naples, rubric, *Amplissimo patri et domino D. Oliverio episcopo Sabinensi cardinali neapolitani benedictus maffeus salutem d[at]*; incipit, "Quoniam omnes homines qui ingenio aut doctrina excellunt rerum multarum scientiam ra duce apetere consueverunt..."; explicit, "[...] sed dantis animum ut ille artaxerses metiri solebat metiaris meque ames etiam atque etiam rogo. Vale";

ff. 3v-9, Table of Books contained in Pliny's Natural History, with their major contents, rubric, *Benedicti Maffei Epitoma in libros plinii historie naturalis*; incipit, "Liber primus est index aliorum librorum et tabula vocatur...";

ff. 9-60v, Benedictus Maffei, *Epitoma in libros Plinii*, incipit, "Abrotanum pro frigidis et maleficiatis lege Plinium libro .xxi. circa finem..."; explicit, "[...] Zoroastes vixit in desertis annis .xx. solo caseo valida senectute lib[r]o .xi. circa finem".

This manuscript is an *epitoma*, a term used to designate a work of abridgment, commentary or simply a reading aid. The present *epitoma* is not so much an abridgment or commentary per se as it is an

alphabetically organized reading aid containing references to the relevant books where one might find certain topics in Pliny's *Natural History* with some reflections or commentaries. Indeed the author does allow some personal reflections from time to time, for instance in his entry on an ocular disease "Reius morbus aspicitur in oculis in illa tenuitate pellicule felle subeunte... *Ego* vero ex hoc loco comprehendo esse opilationem iuxta sentetiam Io. Messue qui dicit opilationem omnium egritudinum reginam et naturam. Plinius libro .xxvi. circa finem" (f. 50v). Amongst the entries one finds topics reflecting the variety of themes and subjects found in Pliny's encyclopedic work, such as "Coriandri proprietates" [On the property of coriander] (f. 18); "Canes fiunt rabiosi si menstrua mulierum gustaverint..." [How dogs become enraged if they taste a woman's menstruations...] (f. 19) or "Terremotus" [earthquake] (ff. 56v-57).

This unpublished work was compiled and composed by Benedetto or Benedictus Maffei (1428-1494), one of the representatives of the famous Maffei family, which originated in Verona, with roots in Mantua (another branch is referred to the Maffei of Volterra). Along with his brothers (Agostino, Francesco, and Girolamo), Benedetto Maffei settled in Rome in or before 1473 and was very active in the Papal Curia, and also closely associated with the Accademia romana of Pomponius Leto, the members of which adopted Greek and Latin names, and met at the house of Leto on the Quirinal to discuss classical questions. There has not yet been a complete study of the humanist Maffei brothers and their works. There are other unpublished works by Benedetto Maffei, in particular in Paris, BnF, MS lat. 7483 which contains two works respectively dedicated to Lorenzo de Medici and Marco Barbo; also dedicated to Cardinal Carafa is his *De laudibus pacis oratio*.

The Maffei of Verona were active patrons both of illuminated manuscripts and early imprints. The collection of manuscripts and antiquities, which he assembled with his brother Agostino at the maffei residence in Via della Pigna, formed one of the first important private collections of Renaissance Rome. From this collection, Benedetto's brother Agostino had started a museum and a library, which passed on to the descendants of his brother Benedetto. The museum in Rome was open to a great number of scholars, including Pomponius Leto, Ludovicus Regio and Bartholomeus Saliceto. The library was carefully preserved for generations, by the great grandsons of Benedetto who were very active in acquiring and studying the Codices Maffeiani, in particular Cardinal Bernardino Maffei whose name is often apposed on manuscripts having belonged to Agostino or Benedetto. The collection seems to have been kept intact in the house in which it had been for a hundred years (see Ullman, 1973, p. 365 and "Codices Maffeiani," pp. 373-382; Ruyschaert, 1958, pp. 306-355, who lists 51 manuscripts belonging to the Maffei of Rome; see also A. Piccolomini, "De codicibus Pii II et Pii III deque Bibliotheca Ecclesiae Cathedralis Senensis," in *Bullettino Senese di Storia Patria*, 6 (1899), pp. 483-496; on Benedetto Maffei see J. Ruyschaert, 1958, pp. 305, 335; Cosenza, *Biographical and bibliographical dictionary of the Italian Humanists*, V, Boston, 1962, p. 272).

A number of Italian humanists produced such *epitome* on Pliny's *Natural History*. One can quote for instance Bartholomeus Platina, Roman historian and humanist, who composed his *De naturali historia Platinae epitome* (unprinted), dedicated in fact to none other than Agostino Maffei (brother of Benedetto) and found in London, BL, Harley MS 3475 (40 ff.). Another such *epitoma* was composed earlier by Ludovico de Guastis, *Epitome Plinii*, as found in Vatican City, BAV, Chigi E. VII. 228, copied for A.S. Piccolomini (Pope Pius II, uncle of Francesco) [see Kristeller, vol. II, 1998, p. 603; see also T. da Marinis, *La legatura...*, I, p. 41, no. 316]. The *Epitome* by the Genoese Ludovico de

Guastis is considered the "first" commentary on Pliny's *Natural History*, produced no later than 1422 (see Nauert, 1980, p. 306).

The present *Epitoma* on Pliny's *Natural History* was dedicated to Cardinal Oliviero Carafa (1430-1511), a member of a most prominent Neapolitan family (see Aldimari, 1691, pp. 19-21). Cardinal Carafa, an important patron of the Renaissance humanities, assembled a great library that was frequented by numerous scholars and was particularly interested in *Natural History*. This work was thus fittingly dedicated to him, perhaps even commissioned by Carafa himself. He died on 20 January 1511. His tomb is in the Carafa Chapel of Santa Maria sopra Minerva (where both Benedetto and Agostino Maffei were also buried). His patronage is discussed in Strazzullo, 1965 and a list of other works dedicated to Carafa is found in F. Petrucci, *DBI*, vol. 19, p. 595. His important collection of books, originally willed to the monastery of Santa Maria della Pace upon his death in 1511, has since been dispersed.

There are two other known codices containing this work. These are: (1) Vatican, BAV, Vat. Lat. 5874: "Bened. Mapheus, epitome Plinii, to card. Oliverius (Carafa)." This is the dedication copy (listed in Kristeller, 1998, vol. II, p. 336) that once belonged to Prospero Podiani (an important sixteenth-century bibliophile) as studied by J. Bignami Odier, 1964, pp. 130-131, no. 69. The illuminated frontispiece contains the arms of Carafa associated with those of the Maffei, as seen in the plate reproduced in J. Bignami-Odier, 1964, pl. IX: "Manuscrit dédié au cardinal Oliviero Carafa par Benedetto Maffei. Les armes des Maffei, de Vérone-Rome, sont accrochées à la guirlande qui orne le blason du cardinal Carafa." Note this manuscript is copied in a rounded humanistic script, a different hand than the present manuscript. – (2) Narbonne, BM, MS. 5, 60 leaves, 16<sup>th</sup> c. (197 x 134 mm), once belonging to the Couvent de Fontfroide [see CGM. Narbonne, p.94; not yet seen].

The copyist and illuminator of this presentation copy, likely made to order for Cardinal Piccolomini, future Pope Pius III, have not yet been securely identified. However, amongst the books owned by the Maffei of Verona-Rome, a number have been copied by Ludovicus Regio, a humanist scholar who was part of Pomponius Leto's circle and whose hand resembles closely the script found in our manuscript. Although further comparisons with the works copied and annotated by Ludovico Regio are necessary, it would seem that the present manuscript could be related to this humanist particularly attached to the Maffei brothers and their collection of manuscripts and incunables (see Ruyschaert, 1958, no. 70, 71, 85 [Vatican, BAV, Ott Lat 1505: "Haec opuscula scripsit accuratissime Ludovicus Regius..." ], 92, 106 [Vatican, BAV, Vat. lat. 3250, Cicero, *Epistolae ad Brutum*..., dedication copy to Agostino Maffei], all luxury manuscripts made for the Maffei in Rome and annotated or copied by Ludovico Regio).

Caius Plinius Secundus (Pliny, c. 23-79 A.D.) wrote the *Natural History*, a work of 37 books organized by topics (geography, botany, mineralogy, etc.) that was widely read in the Renaissance and embraced by humanists. It underwent 15 incunabula editions and at least 43 editions during the sixteenth century. The history of scholarship on Pliny's *Natural History* from the time of the author's death to the year 1600 is of special interest because it involves an author who never had to be "rediscovered" since he was never lost (Nauert, 1980, p. 300). Approximately 200 medieval manuscripts of Pliny are extant, often corrupt and poorly copied, and the Renaissance in Italy and

France was most interested in correcting these texts and generating commentaries on them (on Pliny's reception, see E.W. Gudger, "Pliny's *Historia Naturalis*, the Most Popular Natural History Ever Published," *Isis*, 6, 1924, pp. 269-281; see also M. Chibnall, 1975, pp. 57-78). The first great humanistic commentator of Pliny, Hermolaus Barbarus stated flatly that "without him Latin scholarship could hardly exist" (as quoted in Nauert, 1980, p. 305). Petrarch owned a copy of Pliny's *Natural History* that contains his marginal notes (Paris, BnF, MS lat. 6802); Guarino da Verona was the first to prepare a critical text of the whole work in 1433, and later Politianus gained a reputation as a leading authority on Pliny. The new art of printing created the conditions out of which grew the numerous commentaries and reading aids to Pliny--such as the present *Epitoma*--in the Quattrocento.

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## ONLINE RESOURCES

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<http://www2.fiu.edu/~mirandas/bios1467.htm#Carafa>

On Francesco Todeschini-Piccolomini:

<http://www2.fiu.edu/~mirandas/bios1460.htm#Todeschini>

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[http://www.repertoriumpomponianum.it/pomponiani/maffei\\_agostino.htm](http://www.repertoriumpomponianum.it/pomponiani/maffei_agostino.htm)