

LUCIUS ANNAEUS SENECA, *Epistulae morales or Epistulae ad Lucilium* [Letters to Lucilius]; PSEUDO-SENECA, *Epistulae Senecae ad Paulum et Pauli ad Senecam*  
In Latin, illuminated manuscript on parchment  
Italy, Tuscany (Florence?, Siena?), c. 1425-1450

201 [2 + 199] ff., with the first two leaves bound at the start perhaps from binder's waste or a first draft abandoned, actual text commencing on fol. 3, complete, in very regular quires of 8 (collation: i2, ii-xxiv8,xxv6+1), written in a humanistic cursive minuscule, in light to darker brown ink on up to 37 long lines (justification 180 x 90 mm), parchment ruled in blind and pale ink, quire signatures in red ink, decorated catchwords, initials in red or blue with purple or red filigree pen-flourishing, large opening initial in burnished gold, with colored flowers and acanthus leaves scrolling in the margin, a few burnished gold disks with black ink ornamentation, some marginal corrections and annotations throughout, especially in the text of the last three leaves (e.g. ff. 199v-201v). Bound in a modern polished tan calf over pasteboard, back sewn on four thongs, boards with ornaments in imitation of 16<sup>th</sup> c. tools (rope-work designs and fleurons) distributed in multiple frames of blind fillets (Binding a bit scuffed, but overall in good condition, a few waterstains towards the end of the codex, never affecting legibility; some flaking to opening initial, with colors a bit toned down). Dimensions 295 x 223 mm.

Deluxe large-format copy, opening with an illuminated initial, of the much-appreciated Letters that Seneca wrote to his friend Lucilius. Focusing on Stoic themes dear to Seneca, The Letters constitute a sort of "advise book" on all sorts of subjects at the same time that they present a classic example of epistolary Latin. An unidentified dedicatee "Jacobino de Castiliano" might help to localize better this copy. The inclusion of the spurious Letters of Seneca to Saint Paul witnesses the persistent attempt to "Christianize" Seneca in Italian humanist circles.

## PROVENANCE

1. Copied and decorated in Italy, probably Northern Italy given the style of the filigree initials and the opening painted larger initial (f. 3). This codex contains the name of what appears to be an unidentified dedicatee, found very discretely on f. 157: "Pro Jacobino de Castiliano."
2. European Private Collection.

## TEXT

ff. 1-1v, Lucius Annaeus Seneca, *Epistulae ad Lucilium*, apparently binder's waste, rebound at the beginning, copied in a contemporary humanistic hand, with copy of Book I, letter 1, incipit, "[I]ta fac mi Lucilli..." (text interrupted);

ff. 2-2v, Lucius Annaeus Seneca, *Epistulae ad Lucilium*, also binder's waste, rebound at the beginning, copied in a contemporary humanistic hand, with an excerpt of Book I, letter 9 (beginning and ending incomplete), incipit, "... ipse circumventam hostili custodia liberet..."; explicit, "[...] ecce vir fortis et..." (text interrupted); a catchword at the bottom of the leaf "strenuus": the leaves bound here (ff. 1-2v) could be the exemplar used by the scribe who copied the rest of the manuscript (ff. 3-201v) with the exact same page layout or alternatively a

first draft that the scribe abandoned before giving a new fair copy (the hands are very close, if not the same, although the first is less polished).

ff. 3-199, Lucius Annaeus Seneca, *Epistulae ad Lucillum*, added heading, *Epistole Senesce ad Lucillum* [published by L. D. Reynolds, 1965, pp. 1-539];

ff. 3-14, Book I, Letters 1-12, incipit, "Ita fac mi lucilli vendica [sic] te tibi et tempus quod..." (Book I, letter 1); explicit, "[...] optima sunt esse communia. Vale" (Book I, letter 12);

ff. 14-25v, Book II, Letters 1-9, incipit, "Multum tibi animi esse..." (Book II, letter 1); explicit, "[...] non quod potes. Vale" (Book II, letter 9);

ff. 25v-35, Book III, Letters 1-8, incipit, "Iam inteligis educendum..." (Book III, letter 1); explicit, "[...] istum favore ferat. Vale" (Book III, letter 8);

ff. 35-44v, Book IV, Letters 1-12, incipit, "Bassum Aufidium virum optimum..." (Book IV, letter 1); explicit, "[...] populus inpellit nemo retinet. Vale" (Book IV, letter 12);

ff. 44v-55v, Book V, Letters 1-11, incipit, "Iam tibi iste persuasit..." (Book V, letter 1); explicit, "[...] sed antistem nacta est. Vale" (Book V, letter 11);

ff. 55v-68v, Book VI, Letters 1-10, incipit, "Quid non potest michi..." (Book VI, letter 1); explicit, "[...] habenda permissit. Vale" (Book VI, letter 10), with a letter misplaced on ff. 64-65v, Book IX, letter 1, incipit, "Minus tibi accuratas a me...";

ff. 68v-81, Book VII, Letters 1-7, incipit, "Molestes fers decessisse Flacuum..." (Book VII, letter 1); explicit, "[...] quod relinquis alienum est. Vale" (Book VII, letter 7);

ff. 81-93, Book VIII, Letters 1-5, incipit, "Post longum intervalium..." (Book VIII, letter 1); explicit, "[...] quod sentias dolor. Vale" (Book VIII, letter 5);

ff. 93-103, Book IX, Letters 2-6, incipit, "Hodierno die non tantum..." (Book IX, letter 2); explicit, "[...] nunc qualis sis aliis credis. Vale" (Book IX, letter 6) [*nota bene*: Book IX, letter 1 is misplaced and has been copied ff. 64-65v, Book IX, letter 1, incipit, "Minus tibi accuratas a me..."];

ff. 103v-111v, Book X, Letters 1-3, incipit, "Queris incidisse..." (Book X, letter 1); explicit, "[...] et in parte ebrium. Vale" (Book X, letter 3);

ff. 111v-126, Book XI, Letters 1-5, incipit, "Itinera ista quae..." (Book XI, letter 1); explicit, "[...] relinquerunt nichil scire. Vale" (Book XI, letter 5);

ff. 126-138v, Book XIV, Letters 1-4, incipit, "Rem utilem desideras..." (Book XIV, letter 1); explicit, "[...] secundis cinxisset. Vale" (Book XIV, letter 4);

ff. 138v-152v, Book XV, Letters 1-3, incipit, "In epistula qua de morte..." (Book XV, letter 1); explicit, "[...] fictilia durabunt. Vale" (Book XV, letter 3);

ff. 152v-159v, Book XVI, Letters 1-5, incipit, "Tantum indignaris..." (Book XVI, letter 1);  
explicit, "[...] universum magnificus. Vale" (Book XVI, letter 5);

ff. 159v-173v, Book XVII-XVIII, incipit, "Omnis dies omnis hora..."; explicit, "[...] nunc doce  
quod necesse est. Vale";

ff. 173v-186v, Book XIX, Letters 1-8, incipit, "Ex momentario [sic] meo..." (Book XIX, letter 1);  
explicit, "[...] omne quod disco" (Book XIX, letter 8);

ff. 186v-199, Book XX, Letters 1-7, incipit, "Exigis a me..."; explicit, "[...] cum inteliges  
infelicissimos esse felices. Vale" (Book XX, letter 7);

f. 199, colophon, "Deo gratias Amen. Explicit liber epistolarum senece ad lucillium"; followed by  
an added short biography of Seneca: "Lucius Anneus Seneca moralis phylosophie professor  
facundissimus..."; explicit, "[...] Ad amicum suum lucillium has morales et nobillissimas epistolas  
composuit continentes optimam hominis institutionem et doctrinam ad bene vivendum  
distinctas per libros .xxii."

Seneca (c. 4 B.C. - died in 65 A.D.) was born in Cordoba, Spain to a wealthy and erudite family.  
He is remembered as a statesman but especially as a Stoic philosopher and dramatist of the  
Silver Age of Roman literature. Tutor and then advisor to Emperor Nero, he was later forced to  
commit suicide for alleged complicity in the Pisonian conspiracy to assassinate the last of the  
Julio-Claudian emperors, although he may have been innocent. To his years of retirement, one  
can ascribe the composition of the 124 Moral Letters (*Epistulae Morales ad Lucilium*).

The extant 124 letters which comprise the *Epistulae Morales ad Lucilium* are divided into twenty-two  
books. This large corpus was split in Antiquity into two groups, containing respectively letters  
1-88 and 89-124, so that the early codices are split into two distinct manuscript traditions. The  
citation by Aulus Gellus of excerpts from a Book 22 shows that there was at least a third volume  
which has not survived. The two parts of the corpus found united in the present manuscript  
made an isolated appearance in a late ninth-century codex and then not again until the twelfth  
century. Much work remains to be done on the later Middle Ages and Renaissance circulation of  
the Letters. William of Malmesbury is the first person since Antiquity to quote from the whole  
range of Letters (on the manuscript tradition of Seneca's Letters, see L.D. Reynolds, 1965; and  
L.D. Reynolds, 1983, pp. 357-360; esp. pp. 369-375).

The earliest copies of both traditions of the Letters (one containing letters 1-88, the other 89-  
124) date from the first third of the ninth century and are both associated with the scriptorium  
of Louis the Pious. But it was not until the twelfth century that manuscripts began to circulate  
on any scale, and then the two parts of the text, which had usually remained separate, begin to  
be more commonly found together.

The spiritual emphasis of Seneca's writing and the brilliance of his rhetoric were likely to win  
him a favorable passage through Antiquity and the Middle Ages. Seneca's popularity continued  
unabated in the Renaissance. There are no less than four editions of the Letters in or about 1475  
(at Rome, Paris, Naples, Strasbourg). The first edition of critical importance was that of Erasmus  
printed at Basel by Froben in 1515 and again in 1529.

Seneca's Letters to Lucilius are especially about learning how to live and that is what makes them such a great read, and still very modern. It is a beautifully written "advice book" that transcends the ages. The *Epistulae morales ad Lucilium* all start with the phrase "Seneca Lucilio suo salutem" (Seneca greets his Lucilius) and end with the word "Vale" (Farewell). In these letters, Seneca gives Lucilius tips on how to become a more devoted Stoic. Lucilius was, at that time, the Governor of Sicily, although he is known only through Seneca's writings. Some of the letters include "On Noise" and "Asthma." Others include letters on "the influence of the masses" and "how to deal with one's slaves." Their subjects were considered important for Renaissance education: e.g., from Book I, "On Discursiveness in Reading" (2), "On Philosophy and Friendship" (10), "On Brawn and Brains" (15), "On Progress" (32), "On the Futility of Learning Maxims" (33), "On Sophistical Argumentation" (45), "On Quiet and Study" (56), etc. Although they deal with Seneca's eclectic form of Stoic philosophy, they also give us valuable insights in the daily life in ancient Rome. A famous quotation attributed to Seneca is "It is for life we are learning, not for school."

The early Christian Church was very favorably disposed towards Seneca and his writings, and the church leader Tertullian called him "our Seneca." Medieval writers and works (such as the Golden Legend, which erroneously has Nero as a witness to his suicide) believed Seneca had been converted to the Christian faith by Saint Paul, and early humanists regarded his fatal bath as a kind of disguised baptism. However, this seems unlikely as Seneca always professed to be Stoic. Dante placed Seneca in the First Circle of Hell, or Limbo, a place of perfect natural happiness where virtuous non-Christians like the ancient philosophers had to stay for eternity, due to their lack of the justifying grace (given only by Christ) required to go to heaven.

ff. 199v–201v, Pseudo-Seneca, *Epistulae Senecae ad Paulum et Pauli ad Senecam* [Letters of Seneca to Paul and of Paul to Seneca], preceded by the *Prologus Sancti Hieronimi*, incipit prologue of saint Jerome [chap. XII of *De viris illustribus*], "Lutius Anneus Seneca cordubensis fotini stoyi discipulus..." (published in Aizpurua, 2000, p. 30); incipit, Ep. I [Seneca to Paul], "Credo tibi Paule nuntiatum..."; explicit Ep. XIV [Paul to Seneca], "[...] ad deum istinc properantem. Vale Seneca karissime nobis" [published in L. Bocciolini Palagi (ed.), 1999, pp. 50-70, with Latin and facing Italian translation; P. Aizpurua, 2000, pp. 32-66, with a variant order of Epistles diverging from the edition by Bocciolini Palagi];

f. 201v, Colophon (not revealing a scribe or dedicatee), "[...] Cura labor meritum sumpti pro munere honores...namque animam cello reddimus ossa tibi. Deo gratias. Amen."

Appended to the Letters to Lucilius, is a selection of Letters to Saint Paul, spuriously attributed to Seneca from an early date (by Jerome, by Augustine, and well into the nineteenth century, see Fleury, *Saint Paul et Sénèque. Recherches sur les rapports du philosophe avec l'apôtre*, Paris, 1853). There was a legend that recounted the friendship between Saint Paul and Seneca, participating also in the general will to assert Seneca's Christianity and the affinity between the Stoic and Christian ethics (see L. D. Reynolds, *The Medieval Tradition...*, 1965, pp. 81-82, 89). It is known that both Seneca and Saint Paul were contemporaries (c. 58-64). The apocryphal Correspondence with St. Paul frequently accompanied the Letters, from the early Middle Ages onwards.

Notwithstanding, it is now accepted that the work is an anonymous apocryphal one, composed in the fourth century, known to Lactantius and Jerome, and of immense popularity. Most interestingly, within the present copy, it is the only text that is considerably annotated and corrected.

There are some 400 codices that contain this correspondence, whose veracity was contested in the Renaissance by such a scholars as Lorenzo Valla and Erasmus. On this work see in particular M.G. Mara, pp. 41-54.

## LITERATURE

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Reynolds, L.D. "The Younger Seneca," in *Texts and Transmission. A Survey of the Latin Classics*, Oxford, 1983.

## ONLINE RESOURCES

On Seneca, Stoic philosopher

<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/seneca/>

Latin Original of Seneca, *Epistulae morales ad Lucilium*

<http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/sen.html>

English Translation, Seneca, Letters to Lucilius

[http://www.stoics.com/seneca\\_epistles\\_book\\_1.html](http://www.stoics.com/seneca_epistles_book_1.html)

TM 465