

PYTHAGORAS, *Carmina Aurea (Golden Verses)*, with commentary by HIEROCLES

In Greek, manuscript on paper

Italy, probably Supersano (Apulia), c. 1465

iii + 42 folios on paper folded in 4°, watermarks similar to Piccard nos. 122329-122333 (scissors), flyleaves i-ii have a watermark similar to Piccard nos. 32231- 32233 (cardinal's bat); collation a<sup>2</sup> (flyleaves), b<sup>1</sup> (flyleaf), i<sup>10</sup>, ii<sup>12</sup>, iii<sup>8</sup>, iv<sup>8</sup>, v<sup>4</sup>; quires signed by the scribe with catchwords in the middle of the lower margin of each quire's last page; 38 lines per page (justification 141 x 86 mm.); ruling (leadpoint) type Leroy V 00A1. Binding, probably c. 1830 AD: tooled calf over thick cardboard, flyleaves i-ii come from an earlier binding, the paper pastedowns are c. 1980. Dimensions 220 x 147 mm.

Rare manuscript copy of the Golden Verses, traditionally attributed to Pythagoras, in the fifth-century commentary by the Neoplatonist Hierocles. With an illustrious nineteenth-century provenance (Earl Frederick North, Sir Thomas Phillipps, etc.), the manuscript has been newly identified here as written by the scribe George, a priest working in Supersano in southern Italy and fits well in the context of the Humanist interest in Greek texts. Copies are extremely rare; only three are in the Schoenberg Database and none has appeared on the market since 1979.

## PROVENANCE

1. The volume is written by a single hand. The scribe did not sign his name, but can be identified through palaeographic comparison with the priest George (Γεώργιος ἀνάξιος ῥήτωρ κοιόλης), who copied and signed MS Vatic. Barber. gr. 226 in AD 1472: J. Mogenet et al., *Bibliothecae Apostolicae Vaticanae codices Barberiniani graeci*, 2 vols. to date, Vatican City, 1958-, II:70-71; E. Gamillscheg et al., *Repertorium der griechischen Kopisten, 800-1600*, 3 vols. to date, Vienna, 1981-, III:no.141. This scribe was active in Supersano in southern Italy.
2. Frederick North (1766-1827), 5th Earl of Guilford (1817-1827). His bookplate (bearing the family coat of arms and the mottoes "La vertue est la seule noblesse" and "Auspicium melioris aevi") is glued to the front pastedown. North's library was auctioned in seven sales between 1828 and 1835 (a slip from a sale catalogue is attached to flyleaf i).
3. Sir Thomas Phillipps (1792-1872), Middle Hill, his no. 23007: *Catalogus librorum manuscriptorum in bibliothecae D. Thomae Phillipps, Bart. A.D. 1837 impressus typis MedioMontanis*, repr. London, 1968, 425. In North's library, the present flyleaves i-ii and ff. 1-42 were bound together with two other texts, because flyleaf i has the following table of contents written in an eighteenth-century hand: 1° Hieroclis *Philosoph. Pittagorei Opus*, 2° Galeni *Historia Philosoph.*, 3° Mercurii Trismegisti *Opus Medico-mathematicus*.

Phillipps had the three items rebound separately but still grouped under the single shelfmark 23007. The Galen volume is now in Provo UT, Brigham Young University, Lee Library, L. Tom Perry Special

Collections, Vault 091 G13 1475: A. Touwaide, "Byzantine Medical Manuscripts: Towards a New Catalogue," *Byzantion* 79 (2009), 453-595, esp. 535: no. 23. (see <http://archive.org/details/galenouperiphilo00gale> for a fully digitized version of the Galen manuscript). The Hermes Trismegistes volume was Kraus no. 81 in cat. 153: H. P. Kraus, *Bibliotheca Phlippica: The Final Selection*, New York, 1979, p. 94. The scribe of the Galen volume is similar but not identical to the scribe George of the present volume. The present location of the Hermes Trismegistes volume is unknown.

4. Phillipps estate, Cheltenham, sold in 1978.
5. Hans Peter Kraus (1907-1988), New York, his no. 63 in cat. 153, sold in 1984 (pencil note on the back pastedown): H. P. Kraus, *Bibliotheca Phlippica, Manuscripts on Vellum and Paper from the 9th to the 18th Centuries from the Celebrated Collection Formed by Sir Thomas Phillipps: The Final Selection*, New York, 1979, 76.
6. Joost Ritman (b. 1941--), Dutch businessman and book collector, founder of The Ritman Library, Stichting Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica, Amsterdam (their bookplate is glued to the front pastedown), their shelfmark 107 (pencil note on the back pastedown), deaccessioned in 2011.

## TEXT

ff. 1r-2v: Pythagoras, *Golden Verses*, no title, inc. [Α]θανάτους μὲν πρῶτα θεοῦς, νόμῳ ὡς διάκεινται, τίμα, des. ἔσσεια ἀθάνατος θ(ε)ῶς ἄμβροτος, οὐκέτι θνητός, edd. D. Young and E. Diehl, *Theognis*, Leipzig, 1971, 86-94, tr. K. S. Guthrie, *The Pythagorean Sourcebook and Library*, Grand Rapids, 1987, 163-165.

ff. 2v-39r: Hierocles, *Commentary on the Golden Verses*, Ἱεροκλέους φιλοσόφου εἰς τ(ὰ) πυθαγορικ(ὰ) ἔπη ὑπόμνημ(α), inc. Ἡ φιλοσοφία ἐστὶ ζωῆς ἀνθρωπίνης κάθαρσις καὶ τελειότης, des. πρὸς τὸ συναίσθησιν τῆς ἀπ' αὐτῶν ὠφελείας ὅψε γοῦν ποτε κτήσασθαι, ed. F. G. Köhler, *Hieroclis in aureum Pythagoreorum carmen commentarius*, Stuttgart, 1974, 5-122, tr. H. S. Schibli, *Hierocles of Alexandria*, Oxford, 2002, 170-325.,

f. 39r: versified colophon Τέλος ἦδε φέρει γε βιβλίου, φίλοι / Ἱεροκλέ(ους) πυθαγορείων ἔπ(ων) / ἐξηγητοῦ δῆτα παγκαλλίστου πέλει. Τῷ συντελεστῆ τ(ῶν) ὅλων Θ(ε)ῷ χάρις (Friends, here finishes the book of Hierocles, / excellent interpreter of Pythagorean sayings. Glory be to God through Whom all labours are completed).

f. 39v: Excerpt (about nobility) from St Gregory Nazianzenus, *Homily XXXIII*, Τοῦ μ(ε)γ(ά)λ(ου) Γρηγορίου τ(οῦ) Θεολό(γου) περὶ εὐγενεί(ας), inc. Πᾶσι (μὲν), ὧ οὔτος, ἢ ἄνω Ἱε(ρουσα)λήμ, εἰς ἣν ἀποτιθέμ(ε)θ(α) τὸ πολίτευμ(α), des. δυσγενὲς (δέ), τὸ τ(ῶν) πενήτ(ων) π(ατέ)ρων, ἢ δ(ιὰ) συμφορὰν, ἢ δι' ἐπιείκειαν, ed. J.-P. Migne, *Patrologiae cursus completus: Series Graeca*, 161 vols., Paris, 1857-1866, XXXVI:229, tr. Ch. G. Browne and J. E. Swallow in Ph. Schaff, ed. *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church: Second Series*, 14 vols., Oxford and New York, 1890-1900, VII:332.

f. 39r-v: Excerpt (about the soul) from St John Chrysostom, *Commentary on I Corinthians*, Τοῦ Χρυσοστ(ό)μ(ου) ἐκ τ(οῦ) Πρὸς Κορινθ(ίους) δευτέ(ραν) [sic], π(ερ)ὶ ψυχῆς, inc. Οὐκ (ἔστι) ψυχῆς οὐδὲν ἀντάξι(ον), οὐ(δὲ) ὁ κόσμος ἅπας, des. δι' οὗ καὶ μεθ' οὗ τῷ Πατρὶ δόξα σὺν ἀγίῳ Πν(εύματι) εἰς τ(οὺς) αἰῶν(ας) τ(ῶν) αἰῶν(ων), ed. J.-P. Migne, *Patrologiae cursus completus: Series Graeca*, 161 vols., Paris,

1857-1866, LXI:29-30, tr. T. W. Chambers in Ph. Schaff, ed. *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: First Series*, 14 vols., New York, 1886-1890, XII:15.

ff. 40r-41v are blank.

f. 42r, originally blank: church hymn (copied by a later hand) for the Sunday of All Saints Π(ατέ)ρα κατ' ούσίαν τήν θεϊκήν, ὡς (δὲ) φύσει γενόμε(ν)ος ἄν(θρωπ)ος, ἔφης Θε(εὸ)ν, Ὑψιστε, τοῖς δούλ(οις) συγκατιών, ἔξαναστ(ὰς) τοῦ μνήμ(α)τ(ος), χάριτι Π(ατέ)ρα τ(ῶν) γηγενῶν, τιθεῖς τὸν κατὰ φύσιν, Θε(εὸν) τε καὶ Δεσπότην, μεθ' οὗ σε πάντ(ες) μ(ε)γ(α)λ(ύνομεν), tr. Holy Transfiguration Monastery, *The Pentecostarion*, Boston, 1990, 474.

f. 42v is blank.

The *Golden Verses* traditionally attributed to the Greek mathematician and mystic Pythagoras (c. 570-495 B.C.), best known for the Pythagorean Theorem, consist of moral maxims comprising 71 lines written in dactyl hexameter. The Golden Verses may be divided into two parts, the first treating of the Practical or Human Virtues, whose aim is the making of Good Men; and the second, treating of the Contemplative or Divine Virtues, the end of which is to make Good Men into Gods

The exact origins of the Golden Verses are unclear, and there are varying opinions regarding their dating. No actual texts by Pythagoras are known to have survived. It appears that the verses may have been known as early as the third century BC, but their existence as we know them cannot be confirmed prior to the fifth century AD. In the fifth century AD they were interpreted by the Alexandrian Neoplatonic philosopher Hierocles (active c. 430), a pupil of Plutarch who lived and worked first in Athens, then in Constantinople. His commentary on the Golden Verses is the only work known by him. The commentary of Hierocles enjoyed great popularity in early modern times: 230 copies are known, mostly from the fifteenth and subsequent centuries.

The Neoplatonists used the Golden Verses as part of their preparatory program of moral instruction, which in part accounts for the popularity of the text among Italian Humanists. A number of Neoplatonic commentaries on the verses are extant, but that by Hierocles was the most popular. The present manuscript was produced in southern Italy, where Greek dialects were spoken until relatively recently and local clerics would occasionally also copy non-religious texts.

In spite of the number of recorded manuscripts, copies of the text are evidently extremely rare on the market. The Schoenberg Database lists only four pre-1500 versions of the Golden Verses (only three with this commentary). One of these is now in Yale University (Beinecke Library, MS 247, description online). The last copy sold is the present one, offered by Kraus in 1979.

## LITERATURE

Chambers, T. W., tr. in Ph. Schaff, ed. *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: First Series*, 14 vols.

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Schibli, Hermann S., tr. *Hierocles of Alexandria*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002, pp. 170-325

Young, D. and E. Diehl, eds. *Theognis*, Leipzig, 1971, pp. 86-94.

## ONLINE RESOURCES

Picard Online (watermarks)

[www.piccard-online.de](http://www.piccard-online.de)

Pinakes: textes et manuscrits grecs

<http://pinakes.irht.cnrs.fr/>

Golden Verses of Pythagoras with Commentary (in English)

<http://www.sacred-texts.com/cla/gvp/index.htm>

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