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MARCUS TULLIUS CICERO, *De natura deorum* [On the Nature of Gods]

In Latin, manuscript on paper

Italy, Rome?, c. 1460-1475

90 ff., preceded and followed by a paper flyleaf, complete (collation: i12, iis, iii-ix10), on paper with watermarks close to Briquet, "Huchet", no. 7834, Rome, 1470 and Piccard, "Wasserzeichen, Horn" (1979), VIII, no. 36, Rome, Urbino, 1460, written in a humanistic semi-cursive script, in brown ink, on up to 25 lines, paper ruled in lead point (justification 150 x 85 mm.), spaces left blank for decorated initials, never executed, some marginal annotations in a cursive script. Bound in limp vellum over pasteboard, perhaps redone in imitation of a contemporary vellum binding, smooth spine, with title in pencil faintly visible (Generally in good condition, a few wormholes, a bit of staining to paper). Dimensions 200 x 147 mm.

Relatively small in format, this manuscript offers a humanist copy of one of the philosophical works by Cicero, composed towards the end of his life. *De natura deorum* expounds and confronts Stoic, Epicurean, and Academic skeptical theories. Amongst the topics debated are the existence of the gods, nature, the government of the world, and providence. This particular copy, which is simple in lay-out, is noteworthy for its numerous marginal annotations that suggest it was copied for use by a student or a member of humanist circles.

PROVENANCE

1. Copied in Italy based on script and watermarks. A possible place of origin could be Rome or the Latium, with a paper stock that seems to be Roman. If this is confirmed, this manuscript is more or less contemporary with the *editio princeps*, published in Rome by Sweenheim and Pannartz in 1471.
2. European continental collection.

TEXT

ff. 1-29, Marcus Tullius Cicero, *De natura deorum*, Book I, incipit, "[C]um multe res in philosophia nequaquam satis adhuc explicate sunt tum per difficilis brute quod tu minime ignoras..."; explicit, "[...] in imbellicitate est et gratia et caritas" (published Rackham, 1972 [Loeb], pp. 2-120; Plasberg and Ax, 1980 [Teubner], pp. 1-48);

ff. 29-69, Marcus Tullius Cicero, *De natura deorum*, Book II, incipit, "[Q]ue cum Cocta dixisset tum Vellius ne ego inquit..."; explicit, "[...] ex animo id sit sive simulate" (published Rackham, 1972 [Loeb], pp. 122-284; Plasberg and Ax, 1980 [Teubner], pp. 49-117);

ff. 69v-90v, Marcus Tullius Cicero, *De natura deorum*, Book III, incipit, "[Q]ue cum Balbus dixisset

tum arrides Cocta..."; explicit, "[...] disputatio verior mihi Balbi ad veritatis similitudinem videntur esse propesior [sic for propensior]..." (published Rackham, 1972 [Loeb], pp. 286-382; Plasberg and Ax, 1980 [Teubner], pp. 118-160).

This manuscript contains a simple copy of Cicero's *De natura deorum* [On the Nature of Gods] with contemporary marginal annotations. It might have been copied by a student or a member of humanist circles. It is of small format, hence easily transportable.

In his *De natura deorum*, Cicero put before Roman readers the theological views of the three schools of philosophy that were of chief importance in his day, the Epicurean, the Stoic and the Academic (inherited from Plato). Cicero had studied in his young age all three philosophical schools with Philo of the Academy, Diodotus the Stoic, and Phaedrus the Epicurian. Composed towards the end of his life, circa 45-43 B.C., Cicero's work is in the form of a dialogue, one continuous conversation, ending at nightfall. *De natura deorum* opens with a preface dedicating the work to Cicero's friend Brutus. Cicero explains how philosophy occupies his retirement from public life and consoles him from the loss of his daughter. The three characters that animate the dialogue are respectively Cotta the Academic skeptic (closest to Cicero's beliefs), Velleius the Epicurean, and Balbus the Stoic.

The first book of *De natura deorum* is occupied with the presentation of the Epicurean case by Velleius and its refutation by Cotta. Book II provides the exposition and criticism of contemporary Stoic theology. Balbus puts forward four arguments refuted by Cotta relating to the existence of the gods, the nature of the gods, the divine Providence over the world and over man. Finally, in Book III, Cotta gives the Academic criticism of Stoic theology.

There are many manuscripts of this philosophical dialogue, especially dating from the fifteenth century. Nevertheless, the Schoenberg Database records no copy sold in the last decade, although nine copies changed hands in the 1980s and several in the 1960s. The work is, thus, not as common on the marketplace as might be expected. It is accepted that the texts of eight of Cicero's philosophical works, including the *De natura deorum*, are based on three Carolingian codices from France (two of which are known as the "Leiden corpus," both ninth century) and a late-eleventh century codex from Montecassino. During a trip to Strasbourg in circa 1417, Poggio discovered an early manuscript (now Florence, Biblioteca Laurentiana, S. Marco 257, s. IX 3/4) which he brought back to Italy, likely the main origin for many of the subsequent Italian copies (on the textual tradition of Cicero's *De natura deorum*, see Reynolds, ed., *Text and transmission...*, 1983, pp. 124-127).

De natura deorum was first published in Rome by Konrad Sweynheim and Arnold Pannartz in 1471 (Goff, C-558), hence more or less contemporary with the present manuscript. Before 1472, Sweynheim and Pannartz had published 26 books, mainly of classical and theological works. *De natura deorum* was not the first text by Cicero they published (their first Cicero imprint was *De Oratore*, which is also the first book printed in Italy that is still extant), but it is a token to the popularity of the work with schools and humanists that they included it amongst their publications.

LITERATURE

Auvray-Assayas, C. *Cicéron. La nature des dieux*, Paris, Belles-Lettres, 2002.

Harris, B. F. *Cicero as an Academic. A Study of De natura deorum*, University of Auckland, 1961.

Plasberg, O. and W. Ax. M. *Tulli Ciceronis...De natura deorum...edit W. Ax*, Stuttgart, Teubner, 1980.

Rackham, H. *Cicero. De natura deorum*, Loeb Classical Library, 268, Cambridge, 1972.

Reynolds, L. D., ed. *Texts and Transmission. A Survey of the Latin Classics*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1983.

Walsh, P. G. *Cicero. The Nature of the Gods*, Oxford, 1997.

ONLINE RESOURCES

Cicero, *De natura deorum*, in Latin:

<http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/cicero/nd1.shtml>

Cicero, *On the Nature of the Gods*, English Translation, Francis Brooks, 1896:

http://oll.libertyfund.org/index.php?option=com_staticxt&staticfile=show.php%3Ftitle=539&layout=html

On Cicero:

<http://www.1911encyclopedia.org/Cicero>

TM 546