

Le Louvre des Antiquaires  
2 Place du Palais-Royal  
75001 Paris (France)  
tel. +33 (0)1 42 60 15 58 • fax. +33 (0)1 40 15 00 25  
info@lesenluminures.com

2970 North Lake Shore Drive  
Chicago, IL 60657 (USA)  
tel. +773 929 5986  
fax. +773 528 3976  
chicago@lesenluminures.com

CONSTANTINUS LASCARIS, *In hoc libro haec continentur...* [*Grammaticae compendium*  
(Compendium of Grammar Works)]  
In Greek and Latin, printed on paper  
[Venice, Melchior Sessa and Petrus Ravanus, 18 February 1521]

Small in-4, 286 ff. [unnumbered, although a light brown ink foliation has been added in the upper righthand corner], preceded and followed by a paper flyleaf, missing the last leaf (\*4), collation: sig: a-z8, &8, A-I8, K6, aa-bb8, \*3 [wanting \*4], with blank A8, H8, bb8), colophon on sig. bb7, some marginal contemporary annotations and manicha in light brown ink (in particular sig. e 1-f 6, k4v-k5v). Bound in contemporary Italian limp vellum, smooth spine with inscription: "Costanti Lascari Gregor Latino," traces of ties (now wanting), 2 spine reinforcing strips cut from a Beneventan manuscript, fragments written in a well-formed angular Beneventan script of Montecassino type, in dark brown ink, initials touched in red, front strip (fragment A) measures 205 x 134 mm., back strip (fragment B) measures 205 x 132 mm., ruled on the flesh side with a hard point, double bounding lines, fragments a bit worn and erased on recto of fragment A and verso of fragment B from use in the binding likely as pastedowns, with fragment A verso and fragment B recto very legible (Overall good condition, with covers a bit stained, first paper flyleaf after parchment fragment A cut, probably to remove an inscription, a few black ink scribbles on title-page, small tear to title-page). Dimensions 212 x 155 mm.

Rare printed edition of Lascaris's important grammatical works, largely redrafted by the Venetian printers Melchior Sessa and Petrus Ravanus from the earlier Aldine edition of 1494/1495, the first dated Aldine imprint. It is preserved in its original limp vellum binding that includes two hitherto untraced Beneventan fragments reinforcing the binding as one continuous piece of parchment, some words are stuck on the actual spine. The fragments contain excerpts from Gregory, Dialogues, in a thirteenth-century century Montecassino-type Beneventan script.

## PROVENANCE

1. Printed in Venice by Melchior Sessa and Petrus Ravanus on 18 February 1521 as per the colophon on sig. bb 7, with Melchior Sessa's printer's device on the title-page. Both printers co-sign the dedicatory preface on sig. a 2: "Melchior Sessa et Petrus de Ravanis, studiosis S[alutem]." This is the first edition, rarer than the second edition whose colophon reads "Impressum Venetiis: per Melchiorem Sessam & Petrum de Rauanis socios, 1521 die XVIII Octobris."

Melchior Sessa (fl. 1505-1555) was one of the most successful booksellers of his time. His shop was "at the sign of the cat" in San Giuliano where most of the important printers had

their homes and shops. The Sessa cat was known to represent a certain quality on book production. In general the Sessa imprints were addressed to the general public and to young students. This is revealed by the preface of the present 1521 imprint which is addressed to "studiosi adolescentes" as well as in the Greek and Latin edition of C. Lascaris, *De octo orationis partibus*, 1533 (Legrand, BH, III, no. 330). Indeed, when one examines Sessa Greek output, with very few exceptions the Sessa publications consist of beginner's texts or grammars.

There is very little known about Pietro Ravani (fl. 1516-1531). Pietro Ravani was a native of Brescia. His name is tied to that of his better-known colleague Melchior Sessa. They formed a partnership in 1516 that lasted until December 1525. The printer's device used by the partners is a cat holding a mouse in its mouth (see Kristeller, no. 298). During the Sessa-Ravanni partnership, the firm published 65 books, mostly in Italian and Latin. It was in 1521 that they produced their first Greek book, C. Lascaris's *In hoc libro haec continentur* (Legrand, BH, III, no. 239). In all they published only five Greek books. The Sessa-Ravanni books were well printed and were illustrated with fine decorative initials and headpieces. On the partnership, see S. Curi Nicolardi, *Una società tipografico-editoriale a Venezia nel secolo xvi: Melchior Sessa e Pietro di Ravani (1516-1525)*, Florence, 1984; Layton, 1994, pp. 441-444).

2. There is a quote attributed to Publius Syrus inscribed on the recto of the second Beneventan fragment (fragment B), in a 16<sup>th</sup> century hand, vouching for the early presence of these fragments in the binding structure: "Formosa facies muta commendatio est" [A beautiful face is a silent commendation].
3. European Continental Collection.

## TEXT

Adams, L-232 (with a different date (second printing?), 17 October 1521); Curi Nicolardi, 1984, no. 31; Graesse, IV, 113; Legrand, BH, III, no. 239: "Edition de la plus grande rareté"; London, BL, 624.c.13; Paris, BnF, Reserve X-1912 (17 October 1521); *Short-Title Catalog of Books Printed in Italy...*, Boston, 1970, vol. II, p. 226.

sig a 1, Title-page, *In hoc libro haec continentur: Constantini Lascaris Byzantini de Octo partibus orationis Lib. I. Eiusdem de Constructione Liber secundus. Eiusdem de nomine et verbo liber tertius. Eiusdem de pronomine in omni Idiomate loquendi, ac ut poetae utuntur opusculum. De Graecarum proprietate linguarum, ex scriptis de arte Ioannis Grammatici. De Graecarum proprietate linguarum ex his quae a corintho decerpta. Plutarchi de his quae apud Homerum linguis. Cebetis Thebani Tabula. De literis graecis ac diphtongis & quemadmodum ad nos veniant. De potestate literarum Graecarum, & quo modo quis per se discat legere graeca verba. Item quare Christus et Iesus sic scribimus XPS IHS. Cur in alphabeto ypsilon a quibusdam fio dicitur. Oratio dominica et duplex salutatio ad Beatiss. Virginem. Symbolum apostolorum. Evangelium divi Ioannis Evangelistae. Carmina Aurea Pythagorae. Phocylidis Poema ad bene, beateque vivendum. Introductio perbrevis ad hebraicam linguam. Omnia haec cum interpretatione latina;*

sig. a 2, Printer's dedication, "Melchior Sessa et Petrus de Ravanis, studiosis. S[alutem]";

sig. bb 7, Colophon, "Impressum Venetiis per Melchiorem Sessam & Petrum de Ravanis socios. Anno Domini M. D. XXI. die XVIII februarii";

sig. \*1-\*3, Alphabetum Hebraicum, preceded by a letter from Aldus to scholars: "Aldus studiosis S[alutem]. Quoniam hebraicam linguam necessariam esse existimamus ad sacrae scripturae cognitionem..." (wanting last leaf \*4).

This imprint contains a compendium of grammatical works by Constantinus Lascaris (1434-1501). A Byzantine humanist, once close to Cardinal Bessarion, Constantinus Lascaris taught in Milan (1460), passed through Naples and Rome, and eventually settled in Messina. Amongst his students in Messina, one finds the Venetian Pietro Bembo, who was to play an important role in the establishment of the first Venetian edition of Lascaris's grammar, printed by Aldus Manutius in 1494-1495 (On Lascaris, see Manoussakas and Staikos, 1986, pp. 54-55; Martínez Manzano, 1988).

Venice was to become a city invested with the mission of saving classical culture and the major center in Italy for the study of Greek culture (see Pertusi, 1962, pp. 185-189). Venice naturally constituted something of a link between Europe and the Middle East during the Renaissance. The establishment of Greek printing presses in Venice coincided with the substantial diminution at the end of the fifteenth century of Latin manuscripts reduced by the availability of printed editions of the majority of the leading authors. In Greek this was not so: only a few texts had been printed when Aldus set up his press in 1494, with the ambition to secure the literature of Greece from further loss by committing its chief masterpieces to type (see A. Firmin-Didot, *Alde Manuce et l'hellénisme à Venise*, Paris, 1875; N. Barker, *Aldus Manutius and the Development of Greek Script and Type in the Fifteenth Century*, New York, 1992).

The *editio princeps* of C. Lascaris's Grammar works was first published in Milan by Demetrius in 1476 and as such is the second work printed in Greek, the first being Manuel Chrysolaras, *Erotemata*, Venice, Adam von Ambergau, 1471, actually an abbreviation of Chrysolaras's work by Guarino da Verona (see Pertusi, 1962, pp. 33-327; pp. 350-351; see also E. Layton, "The First Printed Greek Book," in *Journal of the Hellenik Diaspora*, 5 (1979), pp. 63-79); or the third imprint in Greek, if one accepts the very rare *Batrachomyomachia*, printed by Tommaso Ferrando of Brescia circa 1473 (a single copy, Manchester, John Rylands University Library, no. 3325). Lascaris's grammar is considered nonetheless the first unabridged Greek work, printed first by Demetrio Damila (da Milano) from Crete, working in Milan from 1475 (see Manoussakas and Staikos, 1986, p. 55). Lascaris's Greek Grammar was reprinted by Aldus Manutius, and it was in fact his first dated imprint, in 1494 with the alphabet printed at the end dated March 1495 (Legrand, BH, I, no. 12; Goff, L 68; copy London, BL, G.7586; UCLA, *The Aldine Press. Catalogue of the Abmanson-Murphy Collection of Books...*, 2001, no. 1; see generally Lowry, 1979, pp. 80-81). Pietro Bembo had returned to Venice from Messina in 1494 with a manuscript of Lascaris's Grammar, corrected by the author (this manuscript corrected by Lascaris appears to be Vatican, BAV, Cod. Vat. gr. 1401). In his introduction, Aldus professed a certain disdain for the versions of Lascaris that circulated in print form (i.e. editions provided by Demetrius in 1476 and Bonus Accursius in 1480). Because he had access to the author's corrections in the manuscript that was brought to him, Aldus was in a position to offer a better text, and he associated the Latin translation facing the Greek text. Lowry however revised Aldus's statements and shows that the manuscript – although effectively corrected

by Lascaris – was not a printer’s copy but rather a school text annotated by Lascaris. The Latin translation is not at all by Aldus, who actually plagiarizes the Latin translation by Giovanni Crastone and already published in Milan, Bonus Accursius, 1480 (Lowry, 1979, pp. 224-225).

The present imprint by Sessa and Ravani presents essentially the texts as found in the Aldine 1494/1495 edition, with some variants. It is here found in its rare first emission with a colophon dated 18 February 1521 rather than the more common 17 October 1521 (second printing). In its present limp vellum binding with early Beneventan pastedowns, it is a thoroughly humanist object, with some contemporary annotations to be studied.

## BINDING FRAGMENTS

The two binding fragments which survive in the above-described edition of Lascaris, *In hoc libro haec continentur...*, Venice, 1521, are preserved in the contemporary Italian limp vellum binding. These *membra disiecta* are, properly speaking, spine reinforcing strips cut out from a Beneventan manuscript, datable to the later thirteenth century. Examples of Beneventan script are rare, fragments often well hidden in bindings, as is the case here. Beneventan script is a distinctive type of writing practiced in medieval southern Italy and Dalmatia. It is a liturgical script, written from the middle of the eighth to the middle of the sixteenth century. The script in the present fragments shows all the features of the “Montecassino type” noted by Lowe, 1980, vol. I, pp. 49-51; see also chapter on “Dating,” in Lowe, 1980, vol. I, pp. 314-319. It bears some resemblance to the fragment described in Quaritch, 1990, cat. 1128, no. 24, from a Homiliary, Paul the Deacon, dated Montecassino, late thirteenth century (former Armando Petrucci Collection: see Lowe, 1980, vol. II, p. 133). The late dating of the present fragments is suggested by the general angularity of the script; the presence of the medial “r” with a straight shoulder; the descenders of “r,” “p” and “s”; the closed second bow of “e”; the characteristic commas and final points with the two surmounting points forming a zigzag (e.g. Frag. B, recto, line 11, 16, 21; this is a late practice, see Lowe, 1980, vol. I, p. 233: “In MSS of the thirteenth century the whole sign is curiously debased. The two points are joined so as to form a sort of zigzag line, and the comma, placed between or below them, often merges with them”); the pointed upper loop of “e”; a 3-sign for “-m” (Frag. B, recto, line 11).

These binding fragments come from a manuscript that once contained Gregory’s *Dialogues* (here more precisely, Book II, *De vita et miraculis venerabilis benedicti abbatis*). Indeed, the works of Gregory the Great enjoyed a wide circulation in the Beneventan zone (see Quaritch, 1990, nos. 17 and 22). The correct textual sequence of the fragments is: B verso / A recto / B recto / A verso. Further research and cross-referencing might lead to the identification of other fragments and leaves from the same dismembered codex. The text found in these fragments is as follows:

Fragment A recto: Gregory the Great, *Dialogues*, Book II, incipit, “[...] que sibi para[uerat ad loc]um tetendit...”; explicit, “[...] absti[nere mini]me congruit [...]” (*Grégoire le Grand, Dialogues*, Book II, 1, 6, line 66 – Book II, 1, 7, line 79; ed. A. de Vogüé, tome II, Paris, 1979, p. 134);

Fragment A verso: Gregory the Great, *Dialogues*, Book II, incipit, “[...] a bestiali mente [mutati sunt]. Nomen itaque...”; explicit, “[...] T[anta autem carnis] temptatio certa...nunqua[m fuerat ex]pertus. Quanda[m]...[...]” (*Grégoire le Grand, Dialogues*, Book II, 1, 8, line 87 – Book II, 2, 1, line 8; ed. A. de Vogüé, tome II, Paris, 1979, p. 136);

Fragment B recto: Gregory the Great, *Dialogues*, Book II, incipit, "[...] veprium iuxta densa suc[re]sere..."; explicit, "[...] Ceperunt [po]stmodum multi iam mun[dum] [...]" (*Grégoire le Grand, Dialogues*, Book II, 2, 2, line 14 – Book II, 2, 3, line 25; ed. A. de Vogüé, tome II, Paris, 1979, p. 138);

Fragment B verso: Gregory the Great, *Dialogues*, Book II, incipit, "[...] Ad eundem...[spe]cum a Romani cella..."; explicit, "[...] modis congruentibus ministr[a]re non desiit" (*Grégoire le Grand, Dialogues*, Book II, 1, 5, line 45 – Book II, 1, 5, line 55 ; ed. A. de Vogüé, tome II, Paris, 1979, p. 132).

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## ONLINE RESOURCES

On Constantinus Lascaris, Byzantine Grammarian:

<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09010b.htm>

Digitized edition of Venice, Aldus Manutius, 1494/1495:

[http://dfg-viewer.de/show/?set%5Bmets%5D=http%3A%2F%2Fmdz10.bib-bvb.de%2F%7Edb%2Fmets%2Fbsb00015875\\_mets.xml](http://dfg-viewer.de/show/?set%5Bmets%5D=http%3A%2F%2Fmdz10.bib-bvb.de%2F%7Edb%2Fmets%2Fbsb00015875_mets.xml)

OPAC record for Venice, Sessa and Ravanis, 1521, with list of recorded copies in Italian repositories:

[http://edit16.iccu.sbn.it/scripts/iccu\\_ext2.dll?fn=10&i=30062](http://edit16.iccu.sbn.it/scripts/iccu_ext2.dll?fn=10&i=30062)

Digitized edition Venice, Sessa and Ravani, 1521, Europeana:

<http://www.europeana.eu/portal/record/92005/4C6174EA9EC82D7EB876E49AB197CB3CF78E3213.html>

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