

ONOSANDER, *Libro de optimo imperatore*, translated from the Greek into Latin by  
NICOLAUS SAGUNDINUS

In Latin, manuscript on paper

Northeastern Italy (Venice?), c. 1460-1480

*i (modern paper) + 30 + i (modern paper) folios on paper, watermark, unidentified type, barely visible, ff. 6 and 23, complete (collation, i-iii<sup>10</sup>), vertical catchwords written along the bounding line reading from top to bottom, no leaf or quire signatures, horizontal rules in brown ink, full-length single vertical bounding lines ruled in lead or brown crayon, with a single large pricking in the outer margin alongside the penultimate ruled line (justification, 149 x 105-103 mm.), written in a small and very regular humanistic cursive bookhand in thirty-one long lines, two blank spaces for four-line initials, small guide letters for one-line initials throughout which were to be placed in the inner margin alongside the vertical bounding line, first folio darkened and with two small stains within the text space (text remains legible), inside front and back covers stained at the corners, but otherwise in very good condition. Nineteenth- or early twentieth-century half leather and marbled paper binding, spine with gilt title "Onosander Latine M.S. Saec. XV," rubbed with visible wear along the sides and top and bottom of the spine, but overall in good condition. Dimensions, 192 x 138 mm.*

This is a military treatise from ancient Greece, in a Latin translation by an eminent Greek humanist and diplomat who spent most of his adult life in Italy, serving the city of Venice and the Pope. There is no modern edition or census of the surviving manuscripts of this important text (possibly surviving in only fifteen manuscripts, including this copy). It is extremely rare on the market, with only one sale since 1947 recorded in the Schoenberg Database.

### PROVENANCE

1. Evidence of the script and codicological details suggests this was written in Northeastern Italy in the second half of the fifteenth century, probably c. 1460-80; the ruling pattern with the horizontal rules ruled in ink by means of a rake, and the vertical bounding lines added in lead (note the single pricking in the lower outer margin) were particularly common in Northeastern Italy, especially in Venice (Derolez, 1984, vol. 1, p. 84).
2. Reverend Walter Sneyd of Keele Hall, Staffordshire (1809-1888), bibliophile and antiquarian, who acquired the surplus of Matteo Luigi Canonici's library in 1835. His round heraldic bookplate, pasted inside front cover: "Guelteri Sneyd ex-libris." Sold at Sotheby's, 16 December 1903, lot. 565.
3. Belonged to the Wigan Free Library; their oval stamp in blind on ff. 1 and 28 (touching written area); and their large printed bookplate, front flyleaf, f. i; front cover on paper, "Case 13" and front flyleaf, f. i v, "E.P.B. case 13"; bought from George Winter, 1904, his name on a blue paper slip loosely inserted. Described as MS 42411 while at the Wigan library (Ker and Piper, 1991, p. 575).

### TEXT

ff. 1-28v, *Ad serenissimum Regem Alfonsum Nicolai sagundini traductionem onosandri praefatio*, incipit, "[S]uperiore tempore serenissime Rex cum apud maiestatem tuam. Inclini senati veneti iussu annum ferme in urbe Neapoli peregissem satis intelligere potui multisque ... Eque enim et res

abste geste autoritate atque amplitudine regia illustrantur et dignitas ac maiestas ipsa rerum gestarum celebritate et gloria decoratur. Sed iam onosandrum ipsum audiamus"; f. 2 [text], *Onosander ad Q. Verannum de optimo imperatore eiusque offitio per Nicolaum Sagundinum e greco in latinum traductus*, incipit, [E]quitandi aut venandi piscandi ... Verum etiam perpetuande propagandeue sue glorie citra periculum sapiens imperator atque custos et moderator diligentissimus" [ends mid f. 28v; remainder and ff. 29-30v blank but ruled].

Onasander, *De optimo imperatore*, translated by Nicolaus Segundinus; although scribe left two blank folios at the end of the quire, the text is complete; printed without the preface, Rome, 1494, Hain 15915, Paris, 1504, Basle, 1541, 1558, and 1570; edition of the Greek text with modern English translation, Oldfather, 1922 (Loeb edition, often reprinted). There is no modern critical edition of this translation, nor a census of surviving manuscripts. It appears to have survived in only fourteen manuscripts, not including this copy: Valencia, Biblioteca Històrica, Ms 723 (Online Resources); Florence, Riccardiano, MS 680; Paris, Bibliothèque Mazarine, MS 660; Escorial, S. Lorenzo, MS S.III.14; Milan, Ambrosiano, MS L95 Sup, and T3 Sup; Naples, BN, MS V.D.26; Berlin, Preus. Kulturbesitz, MS Ham 465; Poland, Krakow, National Museum, M.449; Padua, MS B.40; New York, Morgan Library, MS M.449; and Harvard University, Houghton Library, Richardson MS 16 and Typ 179 (*Iter italicum*, vol. 5 lists an additional manuscript in a private collection, with no further identification of its location).

Onasander (Onosander or Onasandrus) has traditionally been identified with a Platonic philosopher who lived in the first century A.D. and who was also the author of a commentary on Plato's *Republic*, now lost, although there is some doubt about the reliability of this tradition. The text included here, the *Strategikos* (the General), was probably written c. 49-59 A.D., since it is dedicated to Quintus Veranius (d. 59), who was a consul in 49 A.D. Onasander's portrait of how to be a perfect general, compared with other military treatises of the ancient world, put greater focus on the importance of moral and ethical considerations. The work discusses the moral, social and military qualities and attitudes expected of a virtuous and successful general, as well as his choice of staff, attitude to war, religious duties, military formations, and conduct in allied and enemy territories. One of his most important attributes was as a rhetorician, able to encourage his troops and lead through speaking. It was an influential text among Byzantine military writers, and proved popular in the Italian Renaissance, in both Latin translation, and subsequently in Spanish, German, French and English.

This is the Latin translation of the text by the Greek diplomat and scholar, Nicolaus Sagundinus or Nikolaos Sekoundinos, dedicated "Ad serenissimum Regem Alfonsum," Alfonso V of Aragon and I of Naples (1396-1458), Alfonso was King of Aragon, Valencia, Majorca, Sardinia and Corsica, and Sicily, Count of Barcelona, and King of Naples from 1442. Nikolaos was at his court in 1454 to speak of his experience in Constantinople after the Fall of the City and its sack by the Ottoman Turks. The translation was made at the request of King Alfonso V of Aragon, probably during Nikolaos' second stay in Naples before 1456.

Nicolaus Sagundinus, or Nikolaos Sekoundinos (1402-1463/4), a distinguished linguist, humanist, and diplomat, was born in Negroponte/Euboea in Greece. He began his career in Italy in Venice as an ambassador at the court of the Sultan Mehmed II, and then served as a translator for the Pope at the councils of Florence-Ferrara in 1438-39, and then as a papal notary and then papal legate. In 1453, after the sack of Constantinople by the Ottoman Turks, he was sent by the Venetians to report on conditions there. When he returned, he recounted what he had learned to the Pope in Rome, and then to King Alphonso V of Aragon in Naples. In 1456, at the request of Aeneas Silvius, then a cardinal, but later Pope Pius II from 1458-1464,

he wrote an account of the origins of the Turks, the *De Otthomanorum familia* (edited and translated in Philippides, 2007, pp. 55-91). He translated a number of ancient Greek texts into Latin in addition to the *Strategikos*, including Plutarch's *Opuscula moralium* and Demosthenes.

## LITERATURE

*Aeneas Tacticus, Asclepiodotus, Onasander*, ed. W. A. Oldfather, et. al., translation by the Illinois Greek Club, London, Heinemann and New York, Putnam, 1923 (Loeb edition of the Greek text with a modern English translation).

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## ONLINE RESOURES

Valencia, Biblioteca Històrica, Ms 723, digitized

<http://www.europeanaregia.eu/de/handschriften/valencia-universitat-valencia-biblioteca-historica-bh-ms-723/de>

Text of the English translation from the Loeb edition

<http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Onasander/home.html>

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