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ANICIUS MANLIUS SEVERINUS BOETHIUS, *Consolatio philosophiae* (Consolation of Philosophy)

In Latin, manuscript on paper
Italy (Venice?), c. 1475-1500

70 paper folios, two watermarks: scale enclosed in circle with half-moon trays, Briquet, no. 2474, Venice 1480, and letter P with loop continuing through shaft and twisted above, terminating in finials (no comparable watermarks identified), foliation in modern pencil in top recto corner, complete (i-v¹² vi¹⁰), vertical catchwords on last folio of quires i-v surrounded by radiating lines, plummet ruling in 29 lines with prose in one column and verse sometimes in two, occasionally only frame ruled (justification 150 x 77mm.), written in an experienced Italian humanist minuscule, space and cue letters left for initials but incomplete, no rubrication but majuscule display script used at incipits of major text divisions, wear on opening edges with rodent damage on f. 46, minor water damage to outer margin on most folios and inner margin on last 20 folios, no loss or damage of text, flecking on first two folios and occasionally throughout volume but in otherwise good condition. CONTEMPORARY ITALIAN BINDING of bare (beech?) wood boards with beveled edges, remnant of leather formerly pasted across spine and partially covering boards, original brass clasps inset on front cover, three split alum-tawed leather supports plus endbands, all detached with remnants set into outer board edges, exposed spine revealing four strips of recycled parchment which together with restoration glue keep quires intact, top strip painted red, bottom three strips with fourteenth-century Gothic script, front pastedown intact with paste stains indicating a lost bookplate, back pastedown missing, front board chipped above top clasp and split at bottom below lower clasp, overall secure. Dimensions 210 x 140 mm.

The most widely copied work of medieval secular literature, Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy* is nevertheless relatively rare on the market. This volume, lacking the gloss found in many contemporary manuscripts which marks them as schoolbooks, was perhaps copied for the humanist scribe's own use in or near Venice in the last quarter of the fifteenth century. Still in its original modest wooden binding with intentionally exposed boards, it represents an opportunity to acquire a complete manuscript of the greatest philosophical work of the Middle Ages.

PROVENANCE

1. Based on its humanist minuscule and watermarks, this manuscript was produced by a single experienced hand in Northern Italy, probably Venice, in the last quarter of the fifteenth century. As this copy lacks the gloss that signals most contemporary copies of this work as schoolbooks, and the decoration common to collector's copies, this manuscript may have been made as a reading copy for the scribe's own use.
2. Large and unusually detailed manucula (pointing hand) on f. 3 added by a contemporary hand. An early modern reader added a border of jagged scribbles (perhaps pen trials) in light brown ink around the textblocks of ff. 8v and 24v. Another inexpert hand adds "Jacopi – che qui anno 1693 i Viterbo 1693" in runny ink on f. 29v;

presumably a later unidentified owner, placing the manuscript in Viterbo. The same hand adds hastily written sums on ff. 59v and 61.

3. In the top outer corner of the front pastedown, an undeciphered three-word note in nineteenth-century German *kurrent* script; its meaning is unclear, but it suggests a period of German ownership. Below it are several faint pencil inscriptions including numbers; their meanings are likewise unclear. On f. 70v, otherwise blank, are recent sellers's inscriptions in pencil, reading "167615," "69 carte" (signaling a move to France).

TEXT

ff. 1-69, incipit, "[C]armina qui condam studio florente peregi ... (f. 9v) hec ubi regnant"; incipit, "[P]ost hec paulisper opticit Attentionem ... (f. 21v) Quo celum regitur regat"; incipit, "[I]am cantum illa finierat ... (f. 41) Perdit dum videt inferos"; *Explicit iii Incipit iiiii L*, incipit, "[H]ec cum Phylosophia dignitate vultus ... (f. 58) Si dera donat"; incipit, "Dixerunt Orationisque cursum ad alia ... (f. 69v) cum ante oculos agitis iudicis cuncta cernentis; GRATIAS DEO Amen"; [f. 70rv blank.]

Boethius, *Philosophiae consolationis libri quinque*, ed. Gegendatz and Gigon; *Anicii Manlii Severini Boetii Philosophiae Consolatio*, ed. Bieler, 1984. Books 1 through 5, complete, with some minor word and orthographic variations, and lacking the edition's few lines in Greek with no space left to indicate they were meant to be added later.

Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius (c. 477, Rome–524, Pavia), born of a prominent Roman family, was an official of the highest rank during the early years of the Ostrogothic Kingdom following the fall of the last Western Roman emperor. Like his father before him and his sons after, he served the royal administration as a consul. He is, however, best known as an author and translator. In the words of fifteenth-century humanist Lorenzo Valla, Boethius is broadly considered the "last Roman" and the "first medieval." Valla had meant this disparagingly, but it has since been embraced positively: Boethius was both a true philosopher of the old order, and a bright Christian theologian of the Latin West in a tumultuously transitional era (Celenza 2004, p. 96; Stewart and Rand 1918, p. x). With a keen interest in preserving Greek learning in the Latin West, Boethius translated and commented on works by ancient authorities, including Aristotle, Porphyry, Ptolemy, and Cicero. He also wrote original theological treatises focused on the era's greatest doctrinal controversies.

The *Consolation of Philosophy*, his most famous work, was written while he was imprisoned. Accused – probably falsely – of treasonously conspiring with Eastern Roman Emperor Justin I against King Theodoric, Boethius was tried and sentenced to death. Awaiting execution, he composed a dialogue in mixed poetry and prose between himself and Philosophy, personified as a woman who consoles him as he grapples with his fate. They discuss the vicissitudes of wealth and fame, eternity, justice, virtue, and the tension between determinism (or predestination) and free will. Boethius was a Christian and Christianity has long been read into the *Consolation*, but it is not explicitly mentioned in the text itself. His thoughtful application of natural and Platonic philosophy to questions of faith and reason are not inharmonious with Christian doctrine; his approach would resurface in the thirteenth-century work of Thomas Aquinas (Stewart and Rand, 1918, pp. x-xiii).

Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy* maintained a captive audience throughout, and beyond, the Middle Ages. It was the era's most widely copied work of secular literature and was translated into Old English (ninth century), Old French (thirteenth century), Old High German (eleventh century), Middle English (by Geoffrey Chaucer, fourteenth century), and several other medieval European vernaculars. It has perhaps been commented upon more than any other text besides the Bible and has drawn the attention of royals, monks, and laypeople alike (Nauta, 1999, p. 313). The *Consolation* had always been popular in medieval grammar schools and in the fifteenth century, when this manuscript was produced, it was a staple of early Latin education: hundreds of manuscripts survive, and by 1500 sixty editions had been printed (Nauta, 2003, p. 770).

The *Codices Boethiani* project has sought to catalogue all Latin manuscripts, with those of Great Britain and Ireland (1995), Italy and Vatican City (2001), Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Sweden, and Switzerland (2001), and Portugal and Spain (2009) published to date. This manuscript has not been identified within this vast catalogue.

Many manuscripts of this text were schoolbooks, as indicated by the introductory content of their glosses (Nauta, 1999, p. 314; Black and Pomeroy, 2000). Like most other contemporary copies, our manuscript includes only the *Consolation*, but without the glossing usually found in the margins. Although its initials were never added, it was perhaps copied by the scribe for his own personal use, as was common in the late fifteenth century. Quattrocento manuscripts of Boethius are not uncommon but appear on the market only rarely (four or five copies) in the past decade. This pleasantly simple, legible, and complete copy will be an important addition to any collection of medieval classics.

LITERATURE

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