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## LUDOVICUS DE GUASTIS, *Epitoma Plinii Secundi in historia naturali* (Epitome of PLINY THE ELDER'S *Natural History*)

In Latin with occasional words in Greek, manuscript on paper

Northern Italy, c. 1460-1480

ii + 139 leaves + i folios on paper, watermark, flower with eight petals, similar to Briquet Online 6598, Milan 1475, possibly missing a quire and two leaves at the beginning, final two folios fragmentary (collation i<sup>10</sup> [-two leaves, 1 and 2, but text begins with no loss] ii-vi<sup>10</sup> vii<sup>8</sup> viii-xi<sup>10</sup> xii<sup>8</sup> xiii<sup>10</sup> xiv<sup>8</sup> xv<sup>8</sup> [-8, one leaf at the end, with loss of text, 6, 7, are partial leaves glued to more recent paper]), vertical catchwords, contemporary leaf and quire signatures, many trimmed, beginning with quire five as 'f' suggesting one quire at the beginning is now missing, ruled in blind with full-length double vertical bounding lines (justification 100 x 67-65 mm.), written in a practiced cursive humanistic script in nineteen long lines, the occasional Greek words are copied by the main scribe, red rubrics, opening line (or opening word in subsequent books) of text in larger majuscules, one-line red initials, three-line spaces left for larger initials with guide letters often visible, damp-staining ff. 1-11 and 137rv (text remains legible), and thereafter in the outer margins throughout, ff. 138rv-139 are fragmentary, with f. 138rv missing upper and outer halves, most of f. 139 and all of f. 139v missing (replaced with more recent laid paper), overall in good condition. Bound in late eighteenth- or early nineteenth-century Italian white parchment over pasteboards, front pastedown and facing flyleaf marbled, spine with label: "PLINI / EPITHO," and handwritten note, "Inovia Naturale degli Animala. <Libri?> MS prima della stampa," with "1400" below in another hand. Dimensions 157 by 108 mm.

Never printed and neglected by modern scholars, this introduction to Pliny's *Natural History* by the Genoese grammarian and humanist, Ludovico de Guastis, offers a fascinating window into the reception of Pliny's great work in Renaissance Italy. Even a cursory acquaintance with the text reveals Ludovico's interest Pliny as a medical source. Both this text (which survives in 25 manuscripts, not counting this one, all in institutional collections, all but four in Italy, and none in the US), and Pliny's *Natural History*, are exceptionally rare on the market (there are no 20<sup>th</sup>- or 21<sup>st</sup>- century records in the Schoenberg Database for the *Natural History* and none for this commentary, apart from this manuscript).

### PROVENANCE

1. Copied in Northern Italy, possibly in Milan or the vicinity, c. 1460-1480, based on the evidence of the script, codicological features, and the watermark evidence. Perhaps once preceded by another (brief) text, given the quire signatures, but the text as we have it is complete at the beginning.
2. Some leaves with pinpricks in margins forming shapes perhaps a reader's reference (or indexing?) system.
3. Front flyleaf, f. i, full page engraved book plate, left blank (circular frame with a laurel sprig on top).

4. Belonged to Dominico de Advocati, Count of Odelli(?); front flyleaf recto, his mid-twentieth-century armorial bookplate, including a motto, "Respice Finem," labeled, "Ex Libris Dominici de Advocatis comitis Odelli equitis benensis."

## TEXT

ff. 1-139, *Epithoma Plinii secundi in historia naturali abbreviata per dominum ludouicum de Guastis ad illustrem principem Paulum Equinisiu[m] [sic] dominum lucensem foeliciter Incipit probeminiu[m] i*, incipit "[E]tsi compertum habeo illustris princeps Paule tot in orbe terrarum . . . precor clarissime Caesar," *finit probeminiu[m]. Incipit tractatus Mundi eternitas. i*, incipit, "Mundus fuit caelum sub quo clauduntur . . .; [f. 137v, last complete folio], *De Smaragdo 6*, incipit, "Smaragdo magna fuit auctoritas . . . materia altitudinis//; [ff. 138-139, are fragmentary, concluding on f. 139 with the only the beginnings of the bottom six lines of chapter 13], [f. 138v, rubric only], *De Elitropio 13*, [f. 139] //illustri et auctorem// //Deo gratias in// //finit Epithoma// //nii secundi in historia na// //D. ludouicum de guastis// //Paulum Equinisiu[m] D. lucensem//; [f. 139v, not visible].

Ludovicus De Guastis, *Epitoma Plinii Secundi In Historia Naturali*, here ending imperfectly in book 37, chapter 6, followed by two fragmentary folios with parts of chapters 7, 8, 9, 12, and 13. Chapter 13, *De Elitropio* or *De Heliotropio* is the final chapter of the work; most of it is now missing. All that has survived is the rubric on the final line of f. 138v, and a few words on f. 139 (as transcribed above). The fragment of f. 139 that remains is glued onto a sheet of laid paper, completely obscuring the verso. Nauert (1980, p. 324) prints a concluding letter by the author, following *De Heliotropio*, which is not found in our manuscript. It is possible that this letter was copied on the verso of f. 139, and is no longer visible, but we may note that not all copies of this text include the author's letter at the end; it is not found, for example, in Vatican Library, MS Vat. Lat 1944.

This work is an abridgement or summary of Pliny's great work on *Natural History*, which functions in a broad sense as a commentary—indeed it is considered the first commentary on Pliny's *Natural History* (Nauert, 1980, p. 306). Its popularity is attested by the number of surviving manuscripts (Nauert, 1980, p. 324, lists seventeen; Mirabile, Online Resources, expands the list to twenty-five, neither include our manuscript). The text still lacks a modern critical edition and has never been printed or studied by modern scholars apart from Nauert's summary discussion in 1980 (Nauert printed the dedicatory epistle, the beginning and end of the text, and the author's letter found at the end of the text in some copies).

Ludovicus de Guastis (or de Guaschis), humanist and grammarian, was apparently from Genoa. He lived in the first half of the fifteenth century; one source lists him as the rector of the school at Pinerolo after 1431, but the exact years of his birth and death are not known. In addition to this work, he wrote a commentary on the versified grammar by Alexander of Villa Dei, the *Doctrinale*. His *Epitome of Pliny's Natural History* is dedicated to Paolo Guinigi (1376-1432), lord of Lucca from 1400-1430, a noted bibliophile and patron of the arts. The text must date before 1422 (the date of a manuscript now in Milan; Nauert, 1980, p. 323).

Luodovicus's work encompasses all thirty-seven books of the *Natural History* except book one, which is a list of contents and a discussion of sources. There is a slight confusion in the numbering of the books. The rubric on f. 27v states that book five is not discussed (*Epithoma 4ti et quinti libri finit. Nam quintus nul dignum habet sequitur sexti*), but books 1-4 here correspond to Pliny,

books 2-5, and the book numbered six is the sixth book of Pliny. The text, following Pliny, begins with the eternity of the world, preceding through geography, the types of men, animals (including elephants, treated with considerable detail, reflecting Pliny's extensive discussion of them), fish, birds, insects (including a great deal of discussion of bees, as in Pliny), and then plants, medicine, metals, art and pigments, and gems. Within each book, Ludovico includes only selected chapters, and a careful study of his process of abbreviation would be an important contribution to the study of the reception of Pliny in the early fifteenth century.

However, it would be wrong to dismiss this as a mere "summary." In addition to the author's dedicatory epistle, which begins his work, Ludovico included short prefaces before books 22 (f. 102), 23 (f. 104v), 24 (f. 106v, *Sequitur 24 prefatio contra medicos imperitos*), 25 (f. 107v), 26 (f. 109), 28 (f. 111v), 29 (f. 116v, *Sequitur 29, Exclamatio contra medicos*), 33 (f. 126), and 35 (f. 130v). Most of these sections deal with medical remedies, suggesting a personal interest in the subject. Further study of Ludovico's text, particularly in these sections, and a comparison with the text in Pliny, is called for.

The *Natural History* by Pliny the Elder, or Gaius Plinius Secundus (c. 23-79 A.D.), his only extant work, was dedicated to Titus in 77 AD, but was published posthumously after his death at the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 AD. The subjects touched upon in this vast, encyclopedic work made it the essential resource for anyone interested in natural history, and much more, throughout the Middle Ages and Renaissance. It has aptly been called "the Wikipedia of its day" (University of Reading blog post, Online Resources).

The popularity of this immense work assured its survival right through the Classical Era, into the Middle Ages and Renaissance (and indeed, even later, since it was actively used up c.1600)—this was a text that never had to be "rediscovered" by the humanists of Renaissance Italy. More than 200 manuscripts are extant, and it circulated in 15 incunabula editions and at least 43 editions during the sixteenth century (Gudger, 1924, pp. 269-281; Chibnall, 1975, pp. 57-78). The first great humanistic commentator on Pliny, Hermolaus Barbarus stated flatly that "without him Latin scholarship could hardly exist" (as quoted in Nauert, 1980, p. 305). Petrarch owned a copy of Pliny's *Natural History* that contains his marginal notes (Paris, BnF, MS lat. 6802); Guarino da Verona was the first to prepare a critical text of the whole work in 1433; and later Politianus gained a reputation as a leading authority on Pliny.

## LITERATURE

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Lynn Thorndike, "Epitomes of Pliny's Natural History in the Fifteenth Century," *Isis* 26, no. 1 (1936), p. 39.

### ONLINE RESOURCES

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<http://sip.mirabileweb.it/author/ludovicus-de-guastis-fl-1400-1422-author/23687>

Aude Doody, "Pliny the Elder," *Oxford Bibliographies*

<https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780195389661/obo-9780195389661-0194.xml>

Perseus Collection: Pliny the Elder

[Latin Edition] *Naturalis Historia*, ed. Karl Friedrich Theodor Mayhoff. Lipsiae, Teubner, 1906.

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/collection?collection=Perseus%3Acorpus%3Aperseus%2Cauthor%2CPliny%20the%20Elder>

[English translation ] *The Natural History*, tr. John Bostock, M.D., F.R.S. and H. T. Riley, Esq., B.A., London, 1855

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<http://www.reading.ac.uk/web/files/special-collections/featurepliny2.pdf>

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