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BOETHIUS, *De consolazione philosophiae* (On the Consolation of Philosophy), with a detailed alphabetical index; Astronomical Calendar 1451-1469

In Latin, illuminated manuscript on parchment

Northern Italy, c. 1450

i + 32 + i folios on parchment, modern foliation in pencil at top recto corner complete (collation i⁸ ii¹² iii¹⁰ iv²), decorated catchwords on first three quires at center of bottom margin, faint ruling of 40 long lines in light brown ink, (justification 140 x 110-95 mm.; ff. 28v-32v, 170 x 111-40 mm.), written below the top line and with bottom line left blank on ff. 1-28, with ruling overwritten in ff. 28v-32v in variable lines of minute script, all in an upright, compact and expertly written Italian Gothic bookhand by a single scribe in dark brown ink, majuscules touched in red throughout, red paraphs and red underlined lemma on ff. 28v-32v, red two-line initials throughout with one in blue on f. 12v, calendar tables and astrological diagram on f. 32r-v, one six-line green, fuchsia and white initial enclosing a floral motif on blue infilling on a square ground of gold foil overlaid on red, blank spaces remain for initials at the beginning of each of the text's books, light signs of wear and natural discolorations throughout, occasional minor moisture and use stains, black ink blots at top and/or bottom corners on three quarters of folios, none touching script and possibly bled from earlier (now trimmed) fore-edge painting, original hole on f. 28 with text written around, some abrasion of text on f. 32r-v, intentional erasure in diagram on f. 32v, discoloration and wear on flyleaves with a few small wormholes, only one of which affects the margin of f. 1, overall in very good condition. EARLY BINDING (may be original but book-block has been trimmed) of cross-cut oak boards covered from spine halfway to fore-edge in deep brown leather, front and back feature a 30 mm. roll stamp with an interlocking knot pattern at outer edge and three single 15mm stamps of a decorative cross near spine, stamps on spine obscured by abrasion, nails and fragments of leather remaining from clasp on front, diamond-shaped brass clasp stamped with a decorative 'M' or 'N' on back, book-block attached with two alum-tawed split thongs, with only top thong intact, endbands separated at front but intact at back, leather cover detached from spine, scuffs and general abrasion on both sides of cover, overall in fair condition. Dimensions 188 x 137 mm.

A charming copy, with an illuminated initial, of one of the best loved and most enduring works of medieval secular literature, with unique additions that speak to the scholarly skills and interests of its first owner. This complete manuscript, preserved in an early binding, appears to have belonged to a reader with distinctive scholarly interests, as indicated by its rare topical index, a yet unidentified astrological text, and a set of monthly astronomical tables of new moons and syzygies paired with a dial diagram of the Golden Numbers (or rather here, Golden Letters) for the years 1451-1469.

PROVENANCE

1. Copied by a single expert hand, probably that of a professional Italian scribe, in the mid-fifteenth century. The script's overall roundness with short ascenders and descenders, alternate letter forms as well as the style and colors of the single completed initial and the manuscript's parchment (likely goat) suggest this origin. Its illuminated initial (f. 1) with deep shades of cobalt blue and fuchsia on a gold ground locates it within Northern Italy. A

date of c. 1451-1469 is indicated by the dated astronomical calendar it contains, likely c. 1451 as the calendar is arguably most useful at the opening of this period, it may date closer to 1451 than 1469.

2. Most marginal notation is added by the original scribe. There are, however, a few lines of clarifying notes added by a reader on f. 5. The hand is roughly contemporary.
3. This manuscript is found in the Schoenberg Database (SDBM 16408), having twice sold at auction in London: first in 1850 through Payne & Foss, and again in 1857 by S. Leigh Sotheby & John Wilkinson (today's Sotheby's). The buyers and sellers are unrecorded.
4. Owned by D. McClure, Oakland, as suggested by the inscription in ink, back cover at the top corner, probably from the last quarter of the nineteenth or first quarter of the twentieth century: "D. McClure | Oakland." D. McClure yet been identified; there are several dozen towns and cities named Oakland in the US and four in Canada.
5. Numerous owners' and booksellers' annotations on the flyleaves in pencil in different hands over the course of the nineteenth century to the present including, front flyleaf recto, "413, ", "Boethius, ", "Boethius de Consolatione XV Century | Calendar from 1461 [erroneous] to 1469 | Vellum 32 leaves, ", and others now illegible; front flyleaf verso, "N° 12, ", "30, ", and "32 feuillets"; back flyleaf's verso, "n/c/e".
6. Inside front cover, twentieth-century typed note: "Boethius de Consolatione Philosophiae | MS. upon VELLUM. At the end is a Calendar from 1451 to 1469, oak binding. 32 leaves, 4to."; and strip of paper typed in red, laid in: "OLD MS. Upon VELLUM. XV CENTURY. OAK COVER."

TEXT

ff. 1-28v, incipit, "Carmina qui quondam studio florente peregi ... Hec dum mecum tacitus reputarem ... [f. 1v] Heu quam praecipiti mersa profundo ... Sed medicine inquit tempus est ... [f. 5v] [P]ost hec paulisper obticuit ... Hec cum superba verterit vices dextra ... [f. 11] [I]am cantum illa finierat ... Qui serere ingenuum volet agrum ... [f. 18] Haec cum philosophia ... Sunt etenim penne volucres mihi ... [f. 24] [D]ixerat orationisque cursum ad alia ... [f. 24v] Rupis achamenie scopulis ... [f. 28v] cum ante oculos agitis iudicis cuncta cernentis";

Boethius, *De consolatione philosophiae* (Bieler, 1984; O'Donnell, 1990; Weinberger, 1934). This copy of *De consolatio philosophiae* is complete. Book 1 runs ff. 1-5; Book 2, ff. 5v-10v; Book 3, ff. 11-17v; Book 4, ff. 18-24; and Book 5, ff. 24-28v. The text comprises alternating prose and verse; each book is numbered in the center of the top margin, and each prose section numbered in the side margin near its incipit.

ff. 28v-32v, incipit, "Accio regerit votem et potestatem. Liber 4 prosa 2 | Duo sunt ... [f. 32] Ymago liber 3 prosa 10 ...," *Explicit*;

A very detailed alphabetical index of topics, sorted by verb, of *De consolacione philosophiae*, corresponding to book and prose or verse section as found in the present volume. Two- or three-word quotations from each indexed section (in the above, "Duo sunt") are underlined in red. The final entry is partially illegible due to the minute script, heavy abbreviation and light abrasion of the text.

We have not been able to determine whether this index was the creation of the owner of our manuscript, or a copy of an existing index, since indexes for manuscripts of *De consolacione philosophiae* do not appear to have been the subject of a modern scholarly study, despite the interest of the topic; they are apparently uncommon, with only a few examples located in the Schoenberg Database: University of Michigan, MS 154, London, British Library Harley MS 3236 (added index); London, BL, Royal MS 19 A IV (in French); and Paris, BnF, MS lat. 6426 (apparently an index without the text of the *Consolation*). However, this is an imperfect list (our manuscript's entry in Schoenberg, for example, does not mention the index); more witnesses surely exist. Indexes described in the comprehensive catalogue of Boethius manuscripts, the *Codices Boethiani*, unfortunately can only be located by reading through the entries, but it is the obvious resources to investigate. We scanned the entries in the first half of the Italian volume and did not locate any additional indexes.

f. 32r-v, Astronomical calendar for the years 1451-1469, with each month of the year represented as a table with four columns accompanied by a dial diagram assigning letters to each year and by a brief, unidentified and incomplete text at the foot of f. 32v, incipit, "Accipe in ista tabula horas a principio solis ortus ... Juli 29; Juli 30 [...]". This text describes the transition from one ascendant zodiac sign to the next around the mid-point of each month. Whether this calendar is a copy or was derived by the scribe is uncertain.

Tables for the months of January through May, unlabeled and with some text loss caused by trimming of the bottom margin, are found on f. 32. Tables for June through December are located on the verso and are labelled; October lacks some text in its first column due to abrasion. The first column of each month's table, labelled in the first instance as "3ntranet" and thereafter "I," contains letters which correspond to (now erased) years placed around the dial diagram at the bottom of f. 32v (discussed below). Whereas many medieval calendars customarily use the Golden Numbers 1-19 to calculate the dates of new moons, and thus Easter (see Falk, 2020, Online Resources), these tables instead use the 19 letters of the Latin alphabet to mark the dates on which full moons fall for each year (1451-1469) first introduced in pseudo-Grosseteste's *Kalendarium* (Nothaft, 2018, p. 169). The solar cycle comprises 19 years, corresponding to 235 lunar months (a lunar month is the period between new or full moons), after which the cycle repeats. Thus, the letters in the first column of the month tables correspond to the day of the month on which a new moon occurs for the year represented by each letter in the dial diagram. The second column of the tables labelled 'd' for 'dies,' presents days of the month to which these correspond.

The third column (labelled 'h' for 'hora') considered alone may indicate any number of astronomical positions, in the context of the fourth column it appears to represent the hours at which, on the date indicated in the first and second columns, the sun and moon align by either conjunction or opposition (i.e., "when the elongation between the two luminaries is 0° or 180°," Chabás and Goldstein, 2012, p. 139). These alignments are called 'syzygies' and are expressed

in 'points' (in the tables' fourth column labelled 'p' for 'puncti'), a unit of time used by Jewish astronomers of which there are 1080 per hour (Ibid., p. 141). The scholarly tradition from which this manuscript's particular calculations are derived (or perhaps copied) is unidentified, although syzygy was a widespread concern in the late Middle Ages. It was thought by many medieval scholars, following the so-called Toledo Letter of 1184, that an alignment of all celestial bodies may precipitate the end of the world. Syzygies also played a role in the Ptolemaic understanding of the cosmos and would later lead Copernicus to his heliocentric theory (see Cunningham, 2019, Online Resources).

The dial diagram, comprised of three layers of nested circles in paired lines of red and black ink, is labelled at its center: "Cum fuerit completus numerus hic positus. Annus 1451 quod durat usque ad 1469. Tunc reincipies ad dices 1470 1471 etcetera donec proverias ad [C? T?] et sic durabit in sempiternum." The ring surrounding the center circle has letters A-T, which correspond to the dates 1451-1469 placed in the outermost ring. These years, however, have been intentionally erased, leaving only traces, suggesting an unidentified error was made in assigning the dates of new moons or each year's position in the 19-year lunar cycle.

As first dubbed by Dante, Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius (c. 477-524), commonly known as Boethius, has frequently been identified as one of the 'Last of the Romans' and the first of the medieval scholastics. Born into a prominent patrician family, Boethius was a senator by age twenty-five, and was later an advisor to Theodoric the Great, the Ostrogothic King of Italy. He was also an active translator, historian, and philosopher, writing extensively on music, mathematics, and theology (Marenbon, 2003). Boethius was imprisoned in 523 by Theodoric for treason and sorcery. He wrote *De consolazione philosophiae*, his most famous work, in prison before his execution in or around 524 (ibid, p. 17). His remains are interred in Pavia, where he is recognized as a Christian martyr.

De consolazione philosophiae (*On the Consolation of Philosophy*) casts the imprisoned Boethius as the main character opposite the female personification of Philosophy. They hold a neoplatonic dialogue, in verse and prose (a *prosimetrum*), on the existence of evil and the nature of free will in a world governed by divine Providence and an omniscient God, and how happiness is attainable through seeking God despite the inherent vicissitudes of Fortune. Although dormant for nearly two centuries, the work became immensely popular in the Carolingian era and remained so throughout the Middle Ages; some 900 manuscripts survive, many of which are catalogued in the *Codices Boethiani* series (1995-2009). It was also translated into Old and Middle English, Old French, Middle Dutch, Old High German, and Italian between the ninth and fourteenth centuries and adapted into various versions in prose and verse. The original Latin was commonly used as a grammar school text in the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, including in Italy where this copy was produced (Brancato, 2012, pp. 364-365).

While *De consolazione philosophiae* retained a readership beyond the Middle Ages, in c. 1450 in Italy, humanist scholars preferred earlier Platonist literature, and it was taught in schools less than before (Brancato, 2012, pp. 358-359). Our manuscript is an example of a particularly personalized copy of this text. Its abbreviations are intended for a highly Latin-literate reader, and its rare and extremely detailed index, itself deserving of further exploration, points to one experienced with such scholarly apparatuses and shows an extraordinary level of engagement with the text. The astronomical calendar and its brief accompanying text are not intended for

liturgical use, such as the calculation of Easter, and rather point to a (perhaps amateur) astronomer interested in one of the era's most pressing celestial concerns; it is worthy of deeper study to identify potential influences and comparable simplified examples of complex mathematical astronomy. Overall, it is a charming and collectable manuscript containing one of the best loved and most enduring Western works of all time, combined with unique additions that speak to the scholarly skills and interests of its first owner.

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