

Guido da Pisa, *La Fiorita d'Italia*

In Italian, decorated manuscript on parchment

Italy, Tuscany, Florence(?), c. 1440-1460

83 folios on parchment, original foliation in brown ink, 1-91, lacking nine leaves (collation i¹⁰ ii¹⁰ [-4, lacking one leaf, f. 14, with loss of text] iii¹⁰ iv¹⁰ [-4, -7, lacking two conjoined leaves, ff. 34 and 37, with loss of text] v⁸ [-1, -4, -5, -8, lacking four leaves, the innermost and outermost bifolia, ff. 41, 44, 45, 48, with loss of text] vi¹⁰ vii¹⁰ [-8, lacking one leaf, f. 66, with loss of text] viii-ix⁸ x⁸ [-8, lacking the final leaf, with loss of text]), horizontal catchwords, ruled in brown ink (justification c. 167 x 122 mm.), written by two different scribes in brown ink in Italian cursive mercantesca script in single column on 38 lines (scribe 1, ff. 1-47v) or c. 28 lines (scribe 2, ff. 49-91v), rubrics in red, 3-line initials alternating in red and blue with penwork in the contrasting color throughout the part copied by scribe 1, 6-line initials in blue with red penwork on f. 1, small stains, slight water damage in the outer margins on ff. 65-68, otherwise in very good condition. ORIGINAL BINDING of dark brown calf over wooden boards blind-tooled with fillets, twisted rope and x-form motifs, all arranged in frames around a central rosette enclosing x-forms, two brass catch supports (one slightly loose), clasps and catches missing, losses of leather especially at foot of boards and spine (the latter with modern conservation), worm holes, otherwise in good condition, fitted purple buckram case of c. 1900. Dimensions 260 x 182 mm.

Guido da Pisa's universal chronicle – from the life of Moses through the history of Rome – written in Italian is remarkably rare. This is the first copy to appear on the open market in over 140 years, and, as one of only a few copies of the text on parchment, it was presumably commissioned by an eminent patron. Best known for his commentary on Dante's *Inferno*, Guido da Pisa also cites Dante frequently and at length in the present work, along with Livy, Ovid, Isidore, and especially Virgil. There is no critical edition and few manuscripts located outside Italy.

PROVENANCE

1. The script and decoration suggest that the manuscript was written in Tuscany in the middle of the fifteenth century. The fifteenth-century is additional evidence that the book was prepared in Tuscany, probably in Florence. The twisted rope and x-form motifs are very similar to those found in the bindings made for Federico da Montefeltro (1422-1482), and especially the binding of MS Urb.lat.328 at the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, the production of which has been localized in Florence by Albinia De La Mare (Online Resources and De La Mare, 1985, pp. 436, 487, 524). The binding, decoration, the quality of the script and the choice of parchment support suggest it was made for a patron of some wealth and influence.
2. Eighteenth-century inscription in margin of f. 78v: "Questo libero di santo Cosma da I (?)" in a negligent eighteenth-century script in margin of f. 78v. Other erased inscriptions on front pastedown and at head of f. 1.

3. Gerali di Pontremoli (in Tuscany), inscription on front pastedown, records the acquisition of the book from his family on November 20, 1889; the name is unrecorded elsewhere.

TEXT

ff. 1-3, [Preface], *Incomincia il libro di molte e belle storie antiche Et dell' eneyde di Virgilio reducto di latino in vulgari per frate guido da pisa del ordine [smudged] di santa Maria di monte Carmello*, incipit, "Tuicti gl[i] uomini secondo che dice Aristotile nel principio della mecthafisica [metafisica], naturalmente disiderano di sapere; Ma tutti quanti non disiderano di sapere ad un fine. Che come dise san bernardo, altri disiderano di sapere per esser[e] saputi cioe conosciuti e tenuti savi: Et di questi cotali dice [i] poeta; lo tuo sapere e a nulla s[e] altri non sa che tu sappi ...";

Followed by a contents list of the seven books of the work on f. 1v, summaries of the five parts of the first book on f. 2, and a contents list of the first 52 chapters of the first part on ff. 2-3 (although this contents list provides only 52 chapter headings, the text itself has all the 56 chapters of the first part).

f. 3rv, [Prologue], *De nomi d'Ytalia del suo sito et delle sue comendationi Rubrica*, incipit, "Italia secondo che dice e scrive Ovidio nel quarto libro de' fausti, Et san Ieronimo nel primo prolago sopra la bibia, E santo Ysidero nel quartodecimo libro dell' ethimologie, fu chiamata anticamente la grande Grecia ...";

ff. 3v-91v, *Di Iano primo re d'Italia. Robrica*, incipit, "Lo primo re che su in Italia, secondo che schrivono li antichi, su Jano, questo Jano su un grande huomo di persona e tanto savio in quella prima etade, che su il primo huomo che rengnasse e principasse in essa ..."; [contents list of the chapters in the second book on ff. 28v-29, the second book on ff. 29v-91v, ending imperfectly in chapter 182 on f. 91v], "... poiche fummo partiti dalle Sthrofade e giunti in Egitto [sic. Epiro], Eleno sacerdote mi disse; io che vai cerchondo [cercando] Italia; ma innanti, che tu possi intrare nuova citta fondare sechondo il tuo disiderio io dichio che tu//";

Ending imperfectly and lacking the final chapter 183 and the end of 182, which were on the final, now missing, leaf (cf. Muzzi 1824, pp. 379-382).

Guido da Pisa, *La Fiorita d'Italia*, edited by Luigi Muzzi in 1824 (Romano Turchi, Bologna).

The scribe left out 22 chapters, probably intentionally, most of which are about the twelve labors of Hercules. In Guido's text these come between the chapter about Palladio, which our scribe terminates on f. 43, and the chapters about Aenae, which the scribe starts immediately on the verso, f. 43v (for the missing chapters, see Muzzi 1824, pp. 187-233, these are Muzzi's chapters 94-115; chapter numbering is different in our manuscript and re-starts in each book). Our scribe, however, copied the headings of these missing chapters into the contents list on f. 29. Thus, apart from the nine missing leaves and the 22 chapters omitted, the text in this manuscript corresponds, in terms of its contents, to that edited by Luigi Muzzi.

Little is known about the author, Guido, native of Pisa, who reveals in his work that he is a Carmelite friar. Active in the fourteenth century, Guido is best known for his commentary on Dante's *Inferno*. Notarial records in Pisa attest that he is a Carmelite friar of Santa Maria del

Carmelo of Pisa in 1332 and 1339. Guido composed *La Fiorita* or *Fiore d'Italia* sometime between 1321 and 1337. Despite his modest description of the work as a collection of memorable facts and sayings of the ancients, the work is in fact the history of Rome composed within the format of a universal chronicle that combines the history of the biblical and ancient world, designed to show how it developed into civilized Christian society. Guido draws on a large number of classical and early Christian authors, including Livy, Ovid, Isidore, Jerome, and especially Virgil's *Aeneid*, as well as medieval writers such as Jacobus da Voragine and Nicholas Trivet, and above all Dante Alighieri, whose verse in *Commedia* he cites directly, frequently and at length.

Guido's work is clearly unfinished. In the prologue he defines the scope of the work as beginning with the life of Moses and ending in the seventh book with the history of Rome at the time of Julius Caesar and Augustus. However, in the version known from all surviving manuscripts, it ends after two books. The first book discusses the names of Italian cities and its first king and then the life of Moses. While the second concentrates on Roman mythology, including Saturn, Diana, Juno, Minerva, Hercules, and especially Aeneas.

The sixty-nine known manuscript copies on parchment and paper, and several printed editions since 1490, demonstrate that it was very popular in the late Middle Ages. Saverio Bellomo has identified 68 manuscripts, excluding this one (Bellomo, 1990). For the textual tradition, see also Rinoldi, 1999. The majority of these copies were produced for use by students and are on paper; Bellomo lists only four on parchment. Our parchment manuscript stands out as an exceptionally fine copy and was probably prepared for a nobleman. For the most complete bibliography on the text (see Bellomo 2004, pp. 276-277).

Two scribes copied our manuscript. Scribe 1 copied the first five gatherings (until f. 47v; last leaf of quire v, f. 48, is missing), and scribe 2 the last five (from f. 49 until the end). Both scribes wrote in the *scrittura mercantesca*, as is the case for over half of the manuscripts of the *Fiorita* identified by Bellomo. This mercantile script was developed by the Italian merchants who used it in their account books. In addition to recording private and professional activities of businessmen, this cursive script was used for writing in *volgare*. Between the fourteenth and the sixteenth century, students in schools for the abacus (*scuola d'abaco*) and vernacular literature in Italy learned the mercantile script. In Latin schools they learned humanist roman and cursive scripts from the second half of the fifteenth century onwards, when chanceries adopted them and they had become standard scripts; manuscripts in Latin were usually copied in humanist scripts (Grendler, 2006, IV, p. 21).

Few copies of the text exist outside of Italy. Moreover, the Schoenberg database, which contains manuscripts from over 13,000 auction and sales catalogs, records only one copy of Guido's *Fiorita* having appeared on the market, a copy dated 1411 once in the collection of a noble Englishman living in Florence, Baron Seymour Kirkup (1788-1880), and offered at Sotheby's on 6 December 1871, lot 2035. It is doubtful that this text will ever appear on the market again in manuscript form.

LITERATURE

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