

## Chronicle of the Kings of Rome, Roman Emperors, Holy Roman Emperors, and Popes In Italian, manuscript on paper Italy (Florence?) between 1542 and 1549

50 + i paper folios, single watermark in gutter throughout of a sun with conjoined eyes and nose and six thick rays, centered over chain line, unmatched in Briquet, Piccard, or Gravell but somewhat similar to Briquet 13953 (Pisa 1576) and Gravell SUN.002.1 (Italy 1592), quires gathered in two booklets with original Arabic numeral foliation from 1-20 and 1-30 (identified below as 'B1' and 'B2') in brown ink in upper recto corners, many blank folios but complete (i-v<sup>10</sup>), both booklets supported at spine with strips of paper with the second booklet's strip extending into a narrow flyleaf at back, unruled and written almost from gutter to outer edge (justification c. 180 x 140 mm.) in 24-26 lines in dark brown ink by a single scribe in a rapid and imperfect Italian semi-hybrida (*mercantesca*), no catchwords, signatures, rubrics, nor decoration, occasional minor stains from damp, primarily at edges, and some insignificant chipping or gnawing at edges, (e.g. bottom corner of B1, f. 3), no damage to text and overall in very good condition, original folder binding made from a recycled late fourteenth- or fifteenth-century parchment folio holding an unidentified text written in a tidy Italian semi-hybrida (*mercantesca*) with a red and blue two-line initial on inside back cover, quires sewn together with white thread and tacketed to the folder binding at head and tail of spine with twisted parchment cord, twentieth-century stamp-sized label, partially removed, reading '33' affixed to front cover at bottom near spine, some small holes, tears, and gnawing at edges, but otherwise in good condition. Dimensions c. 218 x 145 mm.

A rare survival in its original folder binding, this booklet contains a selection of chronicles ranging from the kings and emperors of Rome to popes and Holy Roman Emperors, accounts of the legendary Pope Joan, the Sack of Rome, and the rumored death of Pope Alexander VI at the hand of his son Cesare Borgia. This Italian-language chronicle in *mercantesca* script was probably written for the owner's own edification or entertainment. Owner-produced books (or "selfie-books") like this one shed light on how ordinary Italians – as this scribe probably was – learned and interpreted history and their own place in relation to it.

### PROVENANCE

1. This Italian manuscript was written in a legible but unpolished script, probably for the scribe's own use. It was certainly made between 1542 and 1549: the last date recorded for the Holy Roman Emperors, concerning Charles V (r. 1519-1556), is 1542 (B1, f. 13); the last in the list of popes is Paul III (r. 1534-1549), but unlike all previous entries, the length of his papacy is not recorded (B2, f. 23v). Thus, Paul III was still alive when the book was written. The scribe was probably Tuscan, and maybe Florentine: this manuscript's script was most commonly used in Tuscany, and there appears to be a heightened interest in Florence's historical events (outlined below).

The script, known as *mercantesca*, developed in Tuscan mercantile settings in the thirteenth century and was originally used for commercial accounts and documents before its adoption as a book hand. It was only used for vernacular texts and was the primary script of the middle-class literate who generally received a monolingual (Italian) education. It is possible, given the frequent ink pooling that suggest hesitation while writing, that the scribe was

somewhat unpracticed. Mercantesca was predominantly employed for own-use, small-format paper manuscripts like this one, although larger, more formal parchment manuscripts are also found; a folio from one such manuscript, copied in the fourteenth or fifteenth century, was recycled to make this manuscript's folder-style binding. (On *mercantesca*, see the *Italian Paleography Handbook* (Online Resource, and Ceccherini, 2008, 2009, 2010).

2. Contemporary and later readers left no traces of use behind in this manuscript. Aside from identifying marks recently entered in pencil at the bottom of the back flyleaf – “22759 / 2262 / L.1083” written upside-down on the verso, and “TM 1068” and “1068” on recto and verso – nothing was added to the manuscript after production.

## TEXT

### Booklet 1

f. 1rv, *Nomi discrete Re di Roma, ilquale fu il primo governo di quella citta*, incipit, “.1. Romulo fu El primo Re di romani Elquale fu fondatore di roma, regnio anni .38. ... [f. 1v] .7. Lucio tarquino, nominato tarquino superbo ... detto governo La citta si resse anni 474”;

A numbered list of the seven legendary kings of Rome, each with a formulaic three- to five-line biography. The series begins with Romulus, and concludes with Tarquinius Superbus, after whose reign the Kingdom of Rome became the Roman Republic.

B1, ff. 2-8v, *Nomi di Tutti Limperatori di Roma*, incipit, “.1. Caio Julio Cesare, primo imperatore occupo limperio lanno .44. ... [f. 8v] .38. Costantino magno trentottesimo imperatore fu creato lanno .308. ... liberato da Santo Silvestro della Lebbra donde sui doto Lachiesa”;

A numbered list of pre-Christian Roman emperors, each with a formulaic three- to eight-line biography including ascension date and reign duration. The series begins with Julius Caesar and ends with Constantine the Great, who was said to have converted to Christianity on his deathbed. The list includes most emperors, with some intentional omissions, usually of co-emperors, short-reigning emperors, and unsuccessful usurpers. For example, Marcus Aurelius was co-emperor with his adopted son Lucius Verus, who died in 169 A.D. during their shared reign. While Marcus Aurelius is here noted as both a great philosopher and sacrilegious, Verus goes unmentioned (f. 3v). There are also some apparent errors. In one, the text identifies the son and successor of Severus as “Cassiano” (f. 4rv). Rather, Carcalla succeeded his father Severus. The historical account of Carcalla's contemporary, Cassius Dio, is a primary source of knowledge about Carcalla; perhaps the two names were confused.

B1, ff. 5v-8v, incipit, “.2. Constantino secondo imperator di gostantinopoli figuiolo Hsopraditto ... [f. 8v] .37. Nicephoro paritio imperatore .37. fu dipoi illo pranominaro constantino ... grandissime guerre con li saracini dalli quali ricevette grandissimi danni e ruine”;

A numbered list of the Roman emperors of Constantinople, each with a formulaic three- to eight-line biography including ascension date and reign duration. The series begins at the second emperor, Constantine II. Constantine the Great, who consecrated Constantinople as the new Roman capital in 330 and who was thus its first emperor, ends the previous list. The final emperor in this series is Nikephoros I.

The list is almost complete, lacking only three figures whom one might expect to be overlooked by early modern historians. Absent are Constantine the Great's youngest son, Constans (r. 337-350 CE), Leo II (r. Nov. 473-Nov. 474), who died at age seven and was sole Augustus for only a month, (f. 6v), and Irene, who was regent in her son Constantine VI's minority from 780 to 790, co-regent with him from 792 to 797, and finally sole ruler from 797 to 802. Instead, Nikephoros is here said to have ascended in 797 instead of 802, although the length of his reign, nine years, is correctly reported (f. 8v).

B1, ff. 9-13, incipit, ".1. Carlo nominato magnio limperatore franzese ... [f. 13] .26. Carlo dital nome quinto di casa daustria figliuolo di philippo re di spagnia e nipole ... Dipoi lanno 1542 del mese dottobre Ando impersona allo assalto dalgieri e fortuna del mare ricevi grandissimo danno lasua armata venne in Italia"; [ff. 13v-20v blank];

A numbered list of Holy Roman Emperors, or claimants as King of the Romans, with some only achieving kingship of Italy and/or Germany. Each has a three- to eight-line formulaic biography including ascension date and reign duration. The series begins with Charlemagne (r. 800-814) and ends with Charles V (r. 1519-1556). Charles still ruled at the time this manuscript was produced, as the location in the text where his length of reign should have been written is left blank.

Continuing from the entry on Charles V is a brief account of the Sack of Rome on May 6, 1527, and, also in 1527, the end of Medici rule in Florence and the creation of a republic, ending the Medici golden age. This last entry also reports Charles's attack on La Goletta, the port of Tunis, in 1535. Finally, it tells of Charles's Algerian Expedition of October 1541. It was a colossal failure resulting in major losses among Charles's fleet and soldiers. Notably, the manuscript incorrectly attributes this event to 1542: given the manuscript's likely production prior to 1549, this error is unusual.

## Booklet 2

B2, ff. 1-23v, incipit, ".1. Piero apostolo dicristo di natione galileo fu anuntiato papa lanno secondo di Claudio imperadore visse papa anni 25 e messi 7 ... [f. 22] .Valentino. Valentino el quale lofece cardinale, dipoi sidisfice e privando tutti lisingnori diromagnia ... [f. 23v] .230. Paulo di tal nome terzo, papa .230. romano di casa farnese fu eletto lanno 1534 addi 13 dottobre ~ isse anni"; [ff. 24-30v blank].

A numbered list of the popes, each with a three- to nineteen-line usually formulaic biography including his origin, ascension date, papacy duration, and often tomb location (typically St. Peter's Basilica in Rome). The series begins with St. Peter the Apostle and ends with Paul III (r. 1534-1549) who was still pope when this manuscript was produced.

This manuscript appears to follow the second-century tradition of Hegesippus for the order and content of the list of the earliest popes (see Chapman, 1908 for a more detailed account of early chronologies). The series is generally consistent with modern chronologies of the popes, but also includes some antipopes: Felix II (f. 3v), Christopher (f. 11v), Boniface VII (f. 12v), John XVI (f. 13), and Benedict X (f. b-15). Two unfamiliar figures, "Gostantino" between Paul I and Stephen III (f. 9), and Donus II between Benedict VI and antipope Boniface VII (f. 12v) are also

entered. One accepted pope, Felix III (483-492), is missing between Simplicius and Gelasius I (f. 4v).

A number of events, real and spurious, are called out with a word or phrase in the margin: among others, that the 107<sup>th</sup> pope was a woman next to an entry for the legendary Pope Joan (f. 10); the rare voluntary abdication ("renuntio il papato," f. 18v) of Celestine V in 1294; the return of the papal court from Avignon to Rome in 1377 under Gregory XI (f. 20); and finally the Sack of Rome on 6 May 1527 during Clement VII's papacy (f. 23). Several councils are also marked marginally. Eugene IV's papacy appears to be of particular interest to the scribe.

The series unexpectedly includes Cesare Borgia, nicknamed "Valentino," under the entry for his father, Pope Alexander VI (1492-1503). The Borgias are considered the first true 'crime family,' and their use of poison against enemies is well attested. This entry recounts a famous rumor: Valentino hosted a garden banquet for many cardinals, as well as his father. Valentino had arranged to poison his guests "come era suo consueto" (as was his custom), but the poisoned flask was accidentally switched, leading himself and his father to imbibe it instead. Pope Alexander succumbed to the poison, while Valentino survived.

Renaissance humanism, carried into the sixteenth century by extraordinarily wealthy merchant families like the Medici, supported a broader culture of education in Florence that extended learning and literature to a wider audience than witnessed in the Middle Ages. By the mid-sixteenth century, merchants were firmly established as a powerful new "middle class" in Florence, as in cities throughout Italy and Europe. While monastery schools and universities were largely the domain of Latin and the Church, merchant guilds had established secular schools geared towards teaching the skills needed for trade. At least basic Latin literacy was taught at merchant academies, but the children and adolescents of middle-class families received a primarily vernacular education. In line with the values of humanist pedagogy, ancient and recent history were standard in the curriculum (on education in Renaissance Tuscany, see Black, 2007).

Humanist historiography in Florence was first popularized in the Latin chronicle of Leonardo Bruni (c. 1370-1444), which was based on ancient models such as Livy's *History of Rome* (Cochrane, 1981, p. 3). As centuries progressed, so too did the fashion of chronicles. These also disseminated in more accessible vernacular translations, like the *Supplemento de le chroniche vulgare*, a translation of Fra Giacomo Filippo Foresti's 1483 *Supplementum chronicarum*. As part of this trend, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries vernacular chronicles written by notaries, merchants, and craftsmen – that is, literate but not scholars – grew in popularity (De Caprio and Senatore, 2016, p. 129). This manuscript appears to be one such chronicle: its text was probably paraphrased from other, perhaps printed, sources by the scribe himself, or may have been copied from another manuscript belonging to someone in his circle. Some vernacular chronicles were written as a means of preserving local history or identity-making (De Caprio and Senatore, 2016, p. 130; Cochrane, 1981, p. 9). Although this particular chronicle is not purely localized, Florence stands out as an important locale for the author.

This manuscript's organization of universal history according to the rulers of Rome – first kings, then emperors, and finally Holy Roman Emperors – belongs to a long tradition. Suetonius (69-after 122 A.D.) had done so in his *Scriptores historiae augustae*, the model followed by printed texts

such as Flavio Biondo's 1483 *Inclinatio Romani Imperii*, or Giovanni Battista Cipelli di Egnazio's *De Caesaribus* of 1516 (Cochrane, 1981, pp. 34-36; 383-384). Likewise, histories arranged by papacy were common in the Renaissance and beyond; see, for example, Bartolomeo Platina's monumental *Vitae pontificum Platinae* of 1479 or, composed shortly after this manuscript, various works by Onofrio Panvinio published in the late 1550s through 1570s. Like other vernacular chronicles, it is primarily concerned with utility rather than editorializing, and with politics alone: reigns, councils, and wars are important, while uncontrollable elements, such as disease or natural disaster, are passed over (Cochrane, 1981, pp. 3-12). The author does not, however, resist a retelling of the peculiar legend of Pope Joan, or recounting the murderous behavior of Cesare Borgia (B2, ff. 10 and 22).

Brief chronicles like this one served both instructive and leisurely purposes for members of the Florentine merchant class (Cochrane, 1981, pp. 13-14). They survive primarily as manuscripts (De Caprio and Senatore, 2016, p. 130), but their total surviving numbers are not yet calculated. Simple, utilitarian examples such as this probably survive in a minute proportion of the total number made; its excellent condition makes it especially appealing. A deeper analysis of this manuscript in the context of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century vernacular chronicles may shed new light on how ordinary Italians – as the scribe of this manuscript probably was – learned and interpreted history and their own place in relation to it.

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## ONLINE RESOURCES

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NB: The examples of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century mercantesca are incorrectly identified as littera textualis at the link, but are correctly identified as mercantesca in their individually linked catalogue descriptions.

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