

# LES ENLUMINURES

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*Dell'idea del futuro* (On the idea of Future; unpublished treatise on chiromancy)  
In Italian, illustrated manuscript on paper  
Central Italy (Florence?), seventeenth century

v + 51 + ii folios on paper, flyleaves on the same paper as the text, watermark, a circle enclosing three overlapping mounts surmounted by a bird, Gravell No. FOL 2074, seventeenth century, central Italy (see below), modern foliation in pencil, 1-51, complete (collation i<sup>4</sup> [2 flyleaves and 2 unnumbered leaves with illustrations] ii<sup>12</sup> [first leaf of the quire is blank] iii<sup>10</sup> vi<sup>12</sup> v<sup>10</sup> vi<sup>10</sup> [the last two leaves of the quire are flyleaves]), catchwords on most of the leaves, no ruling visible (justification 125 x 75 mm.), written in dark brown ink in a cursive hand in a single column on 21 lines, title in capital letters in pale pink, rubrics, capitals and paragraph numbers in pale pink, 27 FULL-PAGE DRAWINGS of hands with lines, marks and "mounts" in dark brown ink, some small stains, a minor tear on f. 12, overall in excellent condition. ORIGINAL HALF BINDING with covers in marbled paper over paste boards and spine in green morocco gold-tooled with fillets, worn but in overall good condition. Dimensions 152 x 108 mm.

This extensively illustrated, unpublished manual of chiromancy – the reading a person's character and future in the lines of the hand – is a witness of attempts in seventeenth-century Italy to reestablish the study of chiromancy as a "natural" science with rational foundations, closer to physiognomy than to divination. Full-page drawings of hands, a few of them pounced, instruct how to read a person's life expectancy, digestion, capacity to bear children, sites of wounds and broken bones, love, integrity, wealth, ambition, wisdom, and so forth.

## PROVENANCE

1. The script, watermark and language indicate that the manuscript was written in the seventeenth-century Italy. The watermark is three overlapping mounts surmounted by a bird and an undulating corkscrew on the chain line. A series of similar watermarks are found on transcripts made for the Strozzi family of Florence in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, one of them in Folger Shakespeare Library, W.b. 132 (Gravell No. FOL 2074; see Online resources), suggesting that our manuscript may have been copied in Florence. The watermark, however, is current throughout central Italy.
2. Modern booksellers's(?) notes, "VIII SAL-D" and "6. 530" in pencil on the verso of the second front flyleaf.

## TEXT

ff. iii [unnumbered flyleaf]-51, *Dell'idea del futuro*, incipit, *DELL'IDEA DEL FUTURO Cap. I. Delle qualita et escrementi della mano*, incipit, "Oltre le linee della mano, loggetto del presente libro, devonsi anche considerare le qualita et escrementi della medecima ... la cognitione del futuro i sopradessi mali si possono suggire," *FINE*; [illustration on f. 51; ff. 49-50, 51v are blank];

Anonymous illustrated treatise on chiromancy, apparently unpublished, divided into seventeen chapters, as follows:

[ff. i-ii, two blank flyleaves]; f. iii, Illustration labelled Fig. 2a; [f. iii verso blank];

f. iv, Illustration labelled Fig. 3a; [f. iv verso blank; f. v, blank flyleaf];

ff. 1-2v, chapter 1, "*Delle qualita et escrementi della mano...*", treats the quality and shape of the hand, with descriptions of fifteen different hands, providing a list of the important points, A-Z;

ff. 3-6, chapter 2, "*Della linea vitale...*", treats the lifeline, in which it is described in 37 paragraphs how to read the life line;

ff. 6v-14v, chapter 3, "*Del modo di misurare la vitale...*", tells how to measure the lifeline, explaining how to translate the length of the line into years of life; illustrations on ff. 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14; the versos of the illustrations are blank;

ff. 15-17, chapter 4, "*Della linea naturale...*", on the head line (literally, natural line), tells how to know the nature of a man according to the shape and direction of the line, or the signs that are found next to or across it;

ff. 17v-22, chapter 5, "*Della Mensale...*", on the heart line, describes in 17 paragraphs how to predict the capacity of generating children; illustrations on ff. 18, 19, 20; the versos of the illustrations are blank;

ff. 22v-26v, chapter 6, "*Della linea epatica...*", on the line of the liver, describes how to read the status of digestion and nutrition; illustrations on ff. 23, 24, 26; the versos of the illustrations are blank;

ff. 27-28v, chapter 7, "*Della rascetta e delle linee discriminanti...*", discusses the bracelet lines, which help to measure the length of life; illustration on f. 28, the verso is blank;

ff. 29-30v, chapter 8, "*Della linea Saturnina...*", treats the ring of Saturn, a line associated with death and widowhood; illustration on f. 30, the verso is blank;

f. 31, chapter 9, "*Delle linee che minacciano ferite, percosse o rotture di membri...*", treats the lines that are used for predicting wounds or broken bones;

ff. 31v-32v, chapter 10, "*Del triangolo e quadrangolo...*", describes the triangle and quadrangle used for identifying the attitude of a man;

ff. 33-35v, chapter 11, "*Del monte della Luna...*", discusses the mount of the moon, related to imagination, intuition and mystery; illustrations on ff. 34, 35; the versos of the illustrations are blank;

ff. 36-38v, chapter 12, "*Del monte di Venere...*", describes the mount of Venus, mainly related to love, health and affection; illustrations on ff. 37, 38; the versos of the illustrations are blank;

f. 39, chapter 14, "*Del monte di Saturno...*", is on the mount of Saturn, related to integrity and perspective on things; note that this chapter is copied out of order;

f. 39v, chapter 15, "*Del monte del Sole...*", is on the mount of the Sun, which relates to emotion, interest, wealth and outlook on beauty; note that this chapter is copied out of order;

ff. 40-44v, chapter 13, "*Del monte di Giove...*", is on the mount of Jupiter, representing willpower, authority, ambition and self-respect; illustrations on ff. 41, 42, 43, 44; the versos of the illustrations are blank; note that this chapter is copied out of order;

ff. 45-47, chapter 16, "*Del monte di Mercurio...*", is on the mount of Mercury, representing wisdom and the ability to think; illustration on f. 46, the verso is blank;

ff. 47v-51, chapter 17, "*Aforismi universali...*", universal aphorisms, containing a list of general rules about interpreting lines and mounts on hands; illustration on f. 51; ff. 49-50, 51v are blank;

Palmistry, also known as chiromancy, is the art of evaluating the character or foretelling the future of a person by interpreting the lines on his hand. It probably originated in India in Hindu astrology in the fourth century BC, whence it spread to China, Tibet, Persia, Mesopotamia, Egypt, and ancient Greece. European chiromancy developed from the mid-twelfth century onwards, first influenced by Arabic sources, such as the writings of Averroes (c. 980-1037) and Avicenna (c. 1126-1198). In its European origins, chiromancy was apparently designed for the clergymen, with a series of predictions aimed at an ecclesiastical user, such as the gaining of benefices and episcopal offices (Rapisarda, 2006, p. 181, n. 27). The oldest surviving chiromantic text in Western Europe is found in the Eadwine Psalter (Cambridge, Trinity College, MS R.17.1), in which it is transcribed consecutively, without marking a page break, after some annotations to the *Credo* and *Pater Noster*, illustrating the ecclesiastical origins of the practice (Burnett, 1987; Rapisarda, 2006, p. 181, n. 27). In medieval Italy, Pietro d'Abano (1250-1318), professor of medicine in Padua, wrote at least one treatise on chiromancy. For editions, studies and translations of the different medieval manuals that survive, in manuscript and print, in Latin and vernacular languages, see Rapisarda, 2005 (reprint 2017).

After a period of disrepute in the later Middle Ages, palmistry flourished again in the seventeenth century, when attempts were made to develop scientific foundations for the practice. New chiromantic texts were composed for this aim. In England, for instance, new treatises written by Richard Sauders and George Wharton contributed to the seventeenth-century boom in chiromancy (Rutkowski, 2019). The popularity of the art of chiromancy in the seventeenth century is demonstrated by its wide diffusion through printed manuals. Jean Baptiste Belot's *Les Oeuvres...contenant la chiromence*, with woodcut illustrations, for instance, was printed in several editions in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Isaac Newton is known to have had a copy of Belot's book in his library, testifying to the regard on the practice at the time as a rational and philosophical discipline.

Pouncing is a method of transferring a design by pricking the outlines of a drawing, and then blowing a fine dust through the holes onto another surface. In this case, the last two illustrations of the manuscript are neatly pounced (ff. 46 and 51), which suggests either that a model was used for drawing them, or that these drawings themselves were used as a source for copies. The eight preceding leaves with illustrations have prick marks that outline hands with lines, but these marks do not follow the drawn lines (ff. 34, 35, 37, 38, 41, 42, 43, 44). The

seventeen preceding illustrations have no evidence of pouncing at all. It is not clear why eight leaves have pounced designs that do not match the final drawings.

## LITERATURE

Burnett, C. "The Earliest Chiromancy in the West," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 50 (1987), pp. 189-195.

Burnett, C. "Chiromancy: Supplement: The Principal Latin Texts on Chiromancy Extant in the Middle Ages," in C. Burnett, *Magin and Divination in the Middle Ages*, Aldershot, 1996, pp. 1-29.

Garland, M. "Chiromancy," *New England Review* 16/1 (1994), pp. 8-15.

Pack, R. "Aristotle's Chiromantic Principle and Its Influence," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 108 (1978), pp. 121-130.

Rapisarda, S. (ed.) *Manuali medievali di chiromanzia*, Rome, 2005 (reprint 2017).

Rapisarda, S. "A Ring on the Little Finger: Andreas Capellanus and Medieval Chiromancy," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 69 (2006), pp. 175-191.

Rutkowski, P. "Through the Body: Chiromancy in 17th-Century England," *Swiat i slowo* 32 (2019), pp. 33-44.

## ONLINE RESOURCES

Gravell Watermark Archive, Folger Shakespeare Library, W.b. 132:  
<https://www.gravell.org/record.php?action=GET&RECID=1017>

Piccard online:

<https://www.piccard-online.de/suche.php?sprache=fr>

J. Belot, *Les Oeuvres*, 1672 edition:

<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k1518248n>

Frith, H. and E. Heron-Allen, *Chiromancy, or The science of palmistry*, Oxford, 1883:

<https://archive.org/details/chiromancyorsci00noyegoog>

Chiromantic drawings in a fourteenth-century English manuscript compiling mainly astrological treatises, Paris, BnF, nouvelles acquisitions latines, MS 693, ff. 95v-96

<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b525041880/f198.item>

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