

PSEUDO-SUETONIUS, [PSEUDO-SEXTUS AURELIUS VICTOR], *De viris illustribus urbis Romae* (On the Illustrious Men of the City of Rome); list of ten kings of Egypt; epistolary formulas in Italian and Latin; [ANONYMOUS], *Epistula Pilati ad Claudium* (Letter of Pilate to Claudius)

In Latin and Italian, manuscript on paper

Northern Italy (Bergamo?), December 10, 1432

ii (modern paper) + 32 (folio 32 modern paper flyleaf) + i (modern paper) folios on paper, modern foliation in pencil on the top outer recto corner, 1-32, watermark, a Latin Cross very similar to Briquet 5619, Fribourg, 1461, Vercelli and Biella, 1473, Azeglio, 1473-74, Palermo, 1476, Sion, 1477, Turin, 1480, collation impracticable, missing the first leaf, otherwise the text appears complete, ruled in lead with full-length vertical bounding lines ruled in blind (justification 138 x 97 mm.), ff. 1-27 written by Michaelis de Pergamo in a Gothico-Antiqua script in 24 long lines, headings in square capitals (f. 1, 15v, 26v), f. 27 written in a script similar to the main text, ff. 27v and 28, copied in humanist cursive scripts (likely added by the scribe or early users), 2- to 3-line red initials at the chapter beginnings (guide letters visible in blank spaces), one 5-line decorated initial in red and blue on f. 1 with a page length flourish. Bound in nineteenth-century quarter green Morocco gilt over marble paper boards, gilt lettering on the spine reads, "HISTORIA DANLÆ REGVM," binding separating from bookblock at the front, otherwise good condition. Dimensions 188 x 142 mm.

What we colloquially call a "Selfie," a volume copied for the scribe's personal use, this manuscript was written by Michael of Bergamo, who signed and dated it. Michael copied an early Roman history that attests to the importance of Republican Rome as a model for humanist thinkers and citizens, a text that is now undergoing a scholarly rebirth. The size, paper support, clearly legible but idiosyncratic script, and simple decoration of this modest manuscript, are characteristics that suggest an unprofessional though accomplished project. Perhaps it was Michael who added the interesting short texts at the end which customize the manuscript.

PROVENANCE

1. A colophon on f. 26v, dated December 10, 1432, identifies the scribe of *De viris illustribus urbis Romae* as Michaelis de Pergamo (Michele da Bergamo) (not included in Bénédictins de Bouveret, *Colophons* 1965-1982). A marginal note adds that Michele is the son of Balsarino ("filius quondam Balsarini"). Briquet notes that the Latin Cross watermarks of the type found in this manuscript are of Italian origin, and it seems very likely that our manuscript was copied in Bergamo in Northern Italy.
2. In Spain in the nineteenth century; table of contents in Spanish is pasted to the second flyleaf at the beginning of the manuscript.
3. Book sticker, "no 5099" on inside lower cover.

TEXT

f. 1-26v, *SVETONIVS TRANQVILLVS DE PRAECLARE GESTIS ROMANORVM*, incipit, "PROCA REX Albanorum Amulium et Numitorem filios habuit ... [Chapter 77, Pompey the Great] "...Qui non continens lachrimas. Illud plurimis et pretiosissimis odoribus cremandus curauit,"

f. 26v, [Verse summary], *DE REBVS PRAECLARE GESTIS VIRORVM ILLVSTRIVM*, incipit, "Romanas acies regumque illustria facta/ ... Continet et ueterum fortia facta virum"; [scribal colophon], incipit, "Finitum fuit hoc opus per Michaellem de pergamo [added in margin: filius quondam Balsarini] de Anno currente Millesimo quater centesimo trigesimo secundo die x decembris";

Liber de viris illustribus urbis Romae, chapters 1-77, the text is complete, but may have once begun with a table of contents, now lacking; ed. Franz Pichlmayr, Leipzig, 1911; latest edition, Martin, Paris, 2016; first printed probably in Rome, Sixtus Riessinger, c. 1470, GW M50384; the text circulated widely and survives in over 150 manuscripts (Reeve and Tarrant, 1983, p. 151).

Now known as the *De viris illustribus urbis Romae*, this brief history of famous and important figures in the history of Rome was written sometime in the fourth century CE. It has been variously attributed to Pliny the Younger or Elder, Cornelius Nepos, Suetonius (as in our manuscript), and, most frequently, to Sextus Aurelius Victor (c. 320-390 CE), a Roman historian and politician. Yet, the identity of the author still escapes modern scholarship, although scholars generally agree on its fourth century date. The text consists of 77 short biographies of Roman men and women as well as enemies of Rome such as Hannibal; written in a straightforward and engaging style, they provide an overview of Roman history from its prehistory and foundation to the end of the Republic. This text is currently having its own scholarly re-birth, including a new edition (Martin, 2016), and a series of extensive monographs by Joachim Fugmann, bringing to light its importance as a source for the history of Rome that is independent of the famous history of Rome by Livy (Fugmann, 1990-2003, 2016).

The original version of the *De viris illustribus* circulated in the *Corpus Aurelianum* and contained 86 chapters; it survives, however, in only two manuscript copies (called manuscript class A by its recent editor, Fugmann). The much larger class of manuscripts (class B) contains 77 chapters and is further subdivided into classes C and D. Class C ends abruptly in the middle of chapter 77.9 (*ad Ptolomaeum Alexandriae*) and is only represented in five manuscripts, probably all deriving from a mutilated exemplar. Class D, to which this manuscript belongs, is by far the largest and contains material extrapolated from Valerius Maximus and Lucan to complete the narrative of Pompeius Magnus' demise (Fugmann, 2016, pp. 9-14).

Following the text of *De viris illustribus*, the scribe adds two elegiac distichs summarizing the work: "Romanas acies regumque illustria facta / Si cupis, hoc sumas. Fac breve lector opus, / Quod breve sit quamuis ingentia pondera rerum / Continet et ueterum fortia facta virum." (If you desire Roman armies and the famous deeds of kings, take this. Perform a short task, reader, which even though it is short, contains the great import of history and the brave deeds of ancient heroes.) These distichs are found in other manuscripts and early printed editions of the *De viris illustribus* and may represent a distinct branch in the transmission of the text.

f. 27, [List of ten Egyptian Kings], incipit, "Reges egiptiaci decem fuerunt. Primus vocabatur Tolomaeus filius Lagi ... decimus Dionisius qui Pompeium obtruncari iussit."

This brief list of ten kings of Egypt provides a history of rulers parallel to the *De viris illustribus*, and ends with Dionysius, who ordered the assassination of Pompey in 48 BCE.

f. 27v, [Formulas for letter-writing], *Como lo amigo scrive a lo amigo*, incipit, "Insignis et michi cundam luce carior Petre de tali et cetera; *Como anchora lo amigo scrive a lo amigo*, Dilecte ac percordialis amice Petre uel Antonii de tali Petrus uel Iacobi, sicut uocaris, salutes mitit non paucis /; *Como alcuno scrive al podestade*, "Generose ac potens miles domine Iohannes";

Before the humanist imitation and adoption of Cicero's epistolary style, the *Artes dictandi* (or *Artes dictaminis*) governed the rules and decorum of letter writing in the High and Late Middle Ages. They provided practical advice to writers on how to address friends, magistrates, and professors, as well as stylistic and rhetorical advice on how to present oneself and one's requests in the best possible light. For a brief overview of epistolography in the Middle Ages see Haseldine (1996). This bilingual fragment reflects the need for students and other Italian speakers to learn the proper form for letters written in Latin.

f. 28, *Epistula Pilati ad Claudium*, incipit, "Pontius Pilatus Claudio Imperatori suo: Nuper accidit quod ipse probaui Iudeos et suos posteros in crudelem damnationem per iniustitiam incurrisse... et existimet credendum mendaciis iudeorum. Hec Pilatus."

This letter from Pontius Pilate to the Emperor Claudius relating the events and truth of the Crucifixion and Resurrection circulated widely in the apocryphal *Gospel of Nicodemus* and the *Passiones sanctorum apostolorum Petri et Pauli* during the Middle Ages (*Clavis Apocryphorum Novi Testamenti*, no. 64). The letter also circulates independently alongside other historical sources for the Life of Jesus. See, for example, Paris, BnF, MS Latin 17730, f. 8r, where the *Epistula* (addressed here to Tiberius), is copied below an extract from Josephus detailing the trial of Jesus under Pontius Pilate (*Antiquities*, 18.3.3).

This manuscript, copied on paper, of modest dimensions and physical appearance, was likely copied by the scribe for his own use for private reading or study – a forerunner to Aldus Manutius' *libelli portatiles*. The two short texts at the end, perhaps added by Michael himself at later dates, or added by other early users, shed further light on the interests of students and readers in fifteenth century Italy.

LITERATURE

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Corpus scriptorum latinorum, online edition of Pseudo-Aurelius Victor, *De viris illustribus urbis Romae*, ed. Franz Pichlmayr, Leipzig, 1911

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North American Society for the Study of Christian Apocryphal Literature, "Epistle of Pilate to Claudius"

<https://www.nasscal.com/e-clavis-christian-apocrypha/epistle-of-pilate-to-claudius/>

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