

Latin Vulgate (New Testament Epistles, with Prologues)
In Latin, illuminated manuscript on parchment
Northeastern Italy (Ferrara or Venice), c. 1465-1480

148 folios on parchment, lacking a single bifolium between quires xii and xiii, with the end of the Epistles of Paul, else complete, (collation i-xii¹⁰ xiii-iv¹⁰ xv⁸), vertical catchwords, ruled in pale red ink, (justification 107 x 63 mm.), written in an extremely fine gently sloping humanistic cursive minuscule on 22 lines, beadings in pale red, 2-line chapter initials in lapidary style in red or blue, some 3-line, opening initial in gold on red and blue ground with white tracery, opening initials of the Canonical Epistles in gold on grounds of red, blue and green with tracery in white or yellow, historiated initial on f. 5 (4-line, extending into two margins) showing Saint Paul seated at a desk copying a manuscript, arms at the foot of that page within foliage entwined with a banderole inscribed in red "LEGITIME CERTANTI" ('striving justly'), occasional spots of rubbing, very minor wormholes at ends, seventeenth-century scribbles on last page, an armorial stamp erased from first leaf, overall in very fine condition. Bound in contemporary blind-stamped tanned leather over thin wooden boards bevelled on their inner edges, sewn on 4 leather thongs, covers panelled with frames of multiple lines, border of repeated impressions of an arabesque stamp, central compartments with the same arms as on f. 5 ruled in blind within a circle, spine hatched, paper pastedowns, edges gilt, one clasp and stubs of three others held by star-shaped metal pins on all edges of upper cover with corresponding foliate metal catches on lower cover, front thongs broken and upper cover dangling loosely, slight defects to spine, negligible worming on upper cover, binding generally very fine. Dimensions 189 x 117 mm.

These are the New Testament Epistles, in the thousand-year-old Latin translation of Saint Jerome, found in every medieval Bible, executed here in the format, script, and illumination of classical humanism. One of the rediscoveries of the early Renaissance was that of ancient letter collections. Here the letters of Saint Paul and the apostles are interpreted as authentic classical epistles. It is a remarkably daring and innovative manuscript with script in the style of Bartolomeo Sanvito and illumination by the Pico Master, and we know of nothing precisely comparable.

PROVENANCE

1. Probably illuminated for the Bolognese humanist Guido Antonio Lambertini, or a member of his family. The arms of Lambertini are emblazoned on the first leaf of text: or, 3 pallets gules. Lambertini was a close friend of Giovanni Sabadino degli Arienti (c. 1445-1510) and of Giovanni Mario Filelfo (1426-1480), and was dedicatee of the latter's *Glycephila* (1463). The most celebrated member of his family was Benedict XIV, pope 1744-58. However, the same arms were borne by a number of other families, including Mazzaruol, of Venice, which is another possibility (Morando di Custozza, 1979, pl. XLXXII), and de Foix, of southern France, less likely in an Italian context, except that they were occasionally used in this form by Alfonso V of Aragon, king of Naples 1442-58 (Da Marinis, 1947, vol. II, pl. A.1). The arms are also on the manuscript's binding. This ranks as one of the earliest non-royal or papal bookbindings from renaissance Italy.
2. Erased signature inside upper cover, perhaps "Hieronimi verciglio" (surname uncertain); erased armorial stamp on first leaf.

TEXT

ff. 1- 120v, [Pauline Epistles]: f. 1 [prologue to Romans], Primum queritur [Stegmüller 670]; f. 3, [prologues to Romans], Romani sunt qui ex iudeis ...” [Stegmüller 674]; and Romani sunt partis [Stegmüller 676]; f. 5, *Incipit epistola beati Pauli apostoli ad romanos, Capitulum primum*, incipit, Paulus servus iesu christi ...” [Romans]; f. 25v, [prologues to 1 Corinthians], Epistola prima [Stegmüller 690]; and Corinthii sunt [Stegmüller 685], f. 26v, 1 Corinthians; f. 47v [prologues to 2 Corinthians], In secunda [Stegmüller 697]; and Post actam [Stegmüller 699], f. 48, 2Corinthians; f. 61v, [prologue to Galatinas], Galathe sunt [Stegmüller 707]; f. 62, Galatians; f. 69, [prologue to Ephesians], Ephesii sunt [Stegmüller no. 716]; f. 69, Ephesians; f. 76 [prologue to Philippians], Philippenses sunt macedones [Stegmüller 728]; f. 76v, Philippians; f. 81v, [prologue to Colossians], Colossenses et hi sunt [Stegmüller 736]; f. 81v, Colossians; f. 86v, [prologue to 1 Thessalonians], Thessalonicenses sunt macedones [Stegmüller 747, with variant]; f. 86v, 1Thessalonians ; f. 91v, [prologue to 2 Thessalonians], Ad thessalonicenses [Stegmüller 752]; f. 91v, 2 Thesalonians; f. 94, [prologue to 1 Timothy], Timotheum instruit [Stegmüller 765]; f. 94, 1 Timothy; f. 100, [prologue to 2 Timothy], Item timotheo [Stegmüller 772]; f. 100, 2 Timothy; f. 106v, [prologue to Philemon], Philemoni familiares [Stegmüller 783]; f. 106v, Philemon; f. 107v, [prologue to Hebrews], In primis dicendum [Stegmüller 794]; f. 108, Hebrews, breaking off imperfectly on f. 120v at Hebrews 12:11;

ff. 121-148, the Canonical Epistles: f. 121, [prologues to James], Non ita est ...” [Stegmüller 809], Jacobus Petrus Joannes [Stegmüller 807], and Jacobus apostolus [Stegmüller 806]; f. 122, James; f. 128, [prologue to 1 Peter], Discipulos salvatoris [Stegmüller 812]; f. 128v, 1 Peter; f. 134v, [prologue to 2 Peter], Simon petrus [Stegmüller 818]; f. 134v, 2 Peter; f. 138v, [prologue to 1 John], Rationem verbi [Stegmüller 822] f. 138v, 1 John; f. 144v, [prologue to 2 John], Usque adeo [Stegmüller 823]; f. 145, 2 John; f. 145v, [prologue to 3 John], Gaium pietatis [Stegmüller 824]; 3 John; f. 146v, [prologue to Jude], Iudas apostolus [Stegmüller 825]; f. 148, Jude, ending on f. 148 in a tapering pattern, “et nunc & in secula seculorum Amen.”

This innovative and beautiful manuscript presents the biblical books as a classical text in the style of Bartolomeo Sanvito. Included are the New Testament Epistles, in the thousand-year-old Latin translation of Saint Jerome, found in every medieval Bible. However, these familiar texts are executed here in the format, script and illumination of classical humanism. One of the rediscoveries of the early Renaissance was that of ancient letter collections. Letter-writing was reinvented as a literary form, based on a renewed discovery of the letters of Cicero, Seneca, Pliny and others. Here the letters of Saint Paul and the apostles are interpreted as authentic classical epistles, which they are. It is a remarkably daring and innovative manuscript, and we know of nothing precisely comparable.

SCRIPT

The manuscript is written in an exquisitely calligraphic sloping italic cursive, of the highest quality, very close to that of Bartolomeo Sanvito (1435-1511), the most celebrated scribe of the renaissance. It is close to (and possibly in the same hand as) the Strabo, *Geographia*, in the library of the University of Minnesota (MS 1460/f St), illuminated by the same artist in Ferrara for the Loredano family of Venice, written “by a Paduan imitator of Bartolomeo Sanvito” (Armstrong, p. 238, citing A.C. de la Mare, n. 10, and pl. 5).

ILLUSTRATION

The magnificent opening miniature is attributable to the Pico Master (fl. c.1460-c.1505), an illuminator first in Ferrara and then principally in Venice, where he decorated classical manuscripts and printed books and designed woodcuts (Armstrong, 2003, pp. 233-338, listing no fewer than 87 books decorated by him.) He is named after a manuscript in Venice of Pliny's *Historia naturalis* illuminated for Pico della Mirandola (1470-1533). The style of the illumination here is closest to his early period in the early 1470s, when he was apparently in Ferrara: he probably moved to Venice in 1476. The image of Saint Paul as a humanist in his study bears close resemblance to the opening initial by him added to a printed Pliny of 1472, showing the author in three-quarter profile leaning forward to write in a book on the sloping front of a scholar's desk, set within a classical marble loggia, surrounding the heading and hanging down the left-hand margin (Armstrong, 2003, fig. 2). The artist draws on the innovation of the great Mantuan panel painter Andrea Mantegna (1431-1506), possibly also an illuminator, who transformed Christian iconography into classical and architectural settings. It became the style of the humanists of Northeastern Italy to create illusions of three-dimensional reality: the author here is shown as if behind the text block, on an architectural ground which is itself lifted from the plane of the page by surrounding shadows. These purple shadows became a hallmark of the Pico Master's style, as are the dark eyebrows, classical architecture, and the threads of coloured stones dangling down the margin.

LITERATURE

Armstrong, Lilian. "The Hand Illumination of Venetian Bibles in the Incunable Period," in *Incunabula and Their Readers: Printing, Selling and Using Books in the Fifteenth Century*, ed. K. Jensen, London, 2003, pp. 83-113.

Armstrong, Lilian. "The Pico Master: A Venetian Miniaturist of the Late Quattrocento," reprinted in her *Studies of Renaissance Miniaturists in Venice, I*, London, 2003, pp. 233-338.

Bentivoglio-Ravasio, B. "Maestro del Plinio di Giovanni Pico della Mirandola," in M. Bollati, ed., *Dizionario biografico dei miniatori italiani*, Milan, 2004, pp. 635-42.

De la Mare, A. C. and L. Nuvoloni. *Bartolomeo Sanvito, The Life and Work of a Renaissance Scribe*, Paris, 2009.

De Marinis, Tammara. *La biblioteca napoletana dei re d'Aragona*, Milan, 1947, vol. II, pl. A.1.

Morando di Custoza, E. *Il libro d'arme di Venezia*, Verona, 1979, pl. XLXXII.

Stegmüller, Fridericus. *Repertorium biblicum medii aevi*, Madrid, 1950-61, and *Supplement*, with the assistance of N. Reinhardt, Madrid, 1976-80.

Toniolo, F. "Gli incunaboli miniati della Biblioteca del Seminario Vescovile: Saggio critico e descrizione delle miniature," in P. Gios and F. Toniolo, eds., *Gli incunaboli della Biblioteca del Seminario Vescovile di Padova*, Padua, 2008, pp. 124-126, esp. no. 244, pl. 8, fig. 72.

ONLINE RESOURCES

Pignatti, Franco. "Giovanni Mario Filelfo," *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, Volume 47 (1997) [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/giovanni-mario-filelfo_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/giovanni-mario-filelfo_(Dizionario-Biografico)/)

Repertorium biblicum medii aevi (digital version of Stegmüller)

<http://repbib.uni-trier.de/cgi-bin/rebihome.tcl>

Latin Vulgate online with English translation

<http://www.drbo.org/lvb/>

Rome Reborn: the Vatican Library and Renaissance Culture: Humanism

<http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/vatican/humanism.html>

TM 862