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BOETHIUS Anicius Manlius Severinus, *De Consolatio Philosophiae* with [ANONYMOUS],
Commentary on Boethius
In Latin, manuscript on paper
[Northern Italy, perhaps Ferrara or Verona, circa 1400-1425]

67 folios, complete, mostly in quires of 10 (i¹⁰, ii¹⁰, iii¹⁰, iv¹⁰, v¹⁰, vi¹⁰, vii⁷ (8-1) [no text missing]), on paper (watermarks close to Briquet nos. 14642 and 14658: *Tête de boeuf à yeux et trait étoilé*, Verona, 1409; Ferrara, 1410; Ferrara, 1401), written in dark brown ink in a rounded gothic Italian bookhand, on up to 61 long lines (alternating different sizes of script include a larger script for the poetry and a smaller script for the prose) (justification 205 x 125 mm.), copied by a single scribe except for last folios 65v-67 copied by another scribe, quire signatures, catchwords, ruled in plummet, some marginal annotations, numerous marginal and interlinear corrections, alternating initials in blue or red with opposing red or blue penwork, FIVE ELEGANT 2-LINE to 5-LINE high painted initials in pink on blue grounds with infill of foliate motif and colored acanthus leaves in red, pink, blue, and green, extending in the margin (ff. 1, 12, 24v, 42, 56). Bound in a later eighteenth-century or early nineteenth-century speckled paper binding over cardboards, smooth spine, speckled edges (binding scruffy but sound), fitted in a measured modern red morocco box with title gilt on spine and marbled paper edges, protective box in very good condition. Dimensions 280 x 210 mm.

From northern Italy, an early humanist copy of one of the greatest medieval classics, this exemplar with an interesting *mise en page*, accommodating the difference between verse and prose on the one hand and text and commentary on the other hand, the commentary still to be unidentified.

PROVENANCE

1. Script, decoration and watermarks all confirm an Italian origin, probably in the north in the area of Ferrara or Verona.

2. Later eighteenth-century(?) note on verso of second flyleaf reads: *Severini Boetii De Consolatione Philosophiae libri quinque commentario perpetuo ab anonymo illustrati Ubertota tamen leguntur commentaria super hos Boetii libros in editione veneta anni 1492 que quedam sub nomine sancti Thome circumferuntur. Scriptus est codex seculo ut quid certi afferatur quatuordecimo vel quincedecimo.* The note

refers to a Venetian edition that contains the text by Boethius as well as a commentary attributed to Thomas Aquinas. This edition is recorded in Pellechet, 2490, and Goff, B-767. In his important study on Boethius and his commentators, Pierre Courcelle corrects this attribution and refers to the Pseudo–Thomas d’Aquin (William Whetley, Thomas Waleis or Marquard ?) (cf. Courcelle, 1967, pp. 322-23).

TEXT

ff. 1-11v, Boethius, *De consolatione philosophiae*, Liber I; incipit, “Carmina qui quondam studio florente peregi / Flebilis heu mestos cogor inire modos” [Verses I made once glowing with content / Tearful, alas, sad songs must I begin]; incipit interlinear commentary, “Ego Boethius flebilis qui peregi in composui quondam in quando ego eram juvenis...” ; explicit text, “Nec dolor adsit / Nubila mens est / Vincitque frenis / Hec ubi regnant”; explicit commentary, “...vel frenis .i. damnosis impedimentis” ;

ff. 12–24v, Boethius, *De consolatione philosophiae*, Liber II; incipit text , “Post hec paulisper obticuit atque ubi attentionem meam modesta taciturnitate collegit...” ; incipit commentary : “Philosophia obticuit...” ; explicit text , “O felix hominum genus / Si vestros animos amor / Quo celum regitur regat” ; explicit commentary, “...quod genus hominem est felix si amor quo etc.” ;

ff. 24v–41v, Boethius, *De consolatione philosophiae*, Liber III; incipit text, “Iam cantum illa finiverat cum me audiendi avidum stupentemque...” ; incipit commentary, “Illa .s. philosophia finierat pro finierat jam...” ; explicit text, “Quicquid praecipium trahit / Perdit dum videt inferos” ; explicit commentary, “...solicitus circa ista terrena et temporalia” ;

ff. 42–56, Boethius, *De consolatione philosophiae*, Liber IV; incipit text, “Hec cum philosophia dignitate vultus et oris...” ; incipit commentary, “Ego Boethius nundum oblitus...” ; explicit text, “Ite nunc fortes ubi celsa magni / Ducit exempli via cur inertes / Terga nudatis superata tellus / Sidera donat” ; explicit commentary, “...mittit vos ad celum quia ad gloriam” .

ff. 56–67, Boethius, *De consolatione philosophiae*, Liber V; incipit text, “Dixerat orationisque cursum ad alia quandam tractanda atque expedienda...” ; incipit commentary, “Philosophia dixerat supradictam...” ; explicit text, “...cum ante oculos agitis iudicis cuncta cernentis et videntis etc. Deo gratias, Amen. Finis constructus est Boetii optimus” ; Added annotations : “Heu male finivi quia non bene scribere scivi. Absolvit rectum dubium brevitatis quia editum. At super scriptum numerum titulum quia super adde” ; explicit commentary, “...dei cuncta cernentis .i. videntis etc.” .

De consolatione philosophiae remains the principal work by Boethius (480-524), written while he was in prison, accused of treason and shortly before his execution by order of Theodoric,

king of the Ostrogoths. In prose and verse, it contains a beautiful account of the author's optimistic philosophy-theology structured through a dialogue between Philosophy and Boethius, in which the Queen of Sciences strives to console the fallen statesman. The *De consolazione philosophiae* remains one of the most famous books in the Western world, as testify the many commentaries and vernacular translations. It was translated into Anglo-Saxon, Old German, and influenced many of the literary classics, including Beowulf, Chaucer, and Dante. It has been called "by far the most interesting example of prison literature the world has ever seen."

Statesman and philosopher, sometimes referred to as "the last of the Romans," Boethius became a Christian martyr by the eighth century. He translated many of Aristotle's works from the Greek, Porphyry's *Isagogoe*; and he wrote original logical treatises. He also contributed much to the science of mathematics and the theory of music, *De Institutione Arithmetica Libri II*, *De Institutione Musica Libri V*, among others, works that are known in manuscript by the eleventh and twelfth centuries. His theological works include *De Trinitate* and two short treatises addressed to John the Deacon.

Although the commentary in the present exemplar is not in Courcelle, who gives the best account of the commentaries, and has not therefore been identified, there is an interesting humanistic *mise en page*: alternating sizes of script are employed, sometimes indicating the transition between prose and poetry or else indicating the separation between text and commentary. The same commentary appears in another manuscript, a late fifteenth-century Italian copy of Boethius at Harvard, also unidentified (Houghton Library, MS lat. 126; see Light, 1997, pp. 163-65, Pl. 43).

According to Beaumont in her discussion of the Latin tradition of Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*: "Glosses and commentaries still have to be referred to their proper authors ... the study of the Latin tradition of this period is therefore filled with question marks, lacunae and mantraps for the unwary." (p. 279). Any Italian humanist manuscript of Boethius's *Consolation*, especially one with a commentary, warrants further study, because as Grafton has pointed out "the early humanists were not quite sure what to make of Boethius ... no classic of Latin literature made the humanists more uneasy." (p. 410).

LITERATURE

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ONLINE RESOURCES

Life of Boethius

<http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/latin/boethius/boebio.html>

e-text of the Consolation of Philosophy in Latin

<http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/latin/boethius/consolatio.html>

Translation of the Consolation of Philosophy (Cooper edition)

<http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/latin/boethius/boephil.html>

International Boethius Society

<http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/jod/boethius.society.html>