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MARCUS TULLIUS CICERO, *Laelius seu de amicitia*
In Latin, illuminated manuscript on parchment and paper
Italy, likely Rome, c. 1455-1470

66 folios, preceded and followed by a single paper flyleaf, complete (collation i^s, ii-vii¹⁰, viii^s) on parchment and paper (inner and outer bifolium of first quire in vellum), watermarks close to Briquet no. 3668: "Ciseaux" (filigrane "exclusivement italien"), Rome, 1456-1460; Naples, 1459, written in brown ink in a very delicate and even rounded humanistic minuscule by a single scribe, on up to 14 long lines (justification 80 x 58 mm), contemporary interlinear annotations, in cursive humanistic script, showing how the text was read and glossed by a scrupulous reader, vertical catchwords, initials painted in blue or red with opposing red or blue penwork, ONE LARGE WHITE-VINE ILLUMINATED initial Q in burnished gold with partial border of white vine-stem ornament on blue, green and red (faded) grounds, with white-vine extending in the margin with terminals of gold discs with brown hair-line strokes, in lower border a CIRCULAR WREATH in dark pink and green with fluttering ribbons, with PAINTED ARMS (likely overpainted, see Provenance below), some manichae, names of actors in dialogue traced in capitals, additional annotations in a contemporary small humanistic cursive, often interlinear with some marginal ones (these glosses are found especially at the beginning of the book, as commonly). Bound in later, nineteenth-century green-stained overturned sheepskin, smooth spine tooled in blind with fleur-de-lys and single filets, frame of single blind filet on boards, traces of gauffered edges (Generally in good condition throughout, with nice wide margins, some light foxing or dampstains, never hindering legibility; first folios slightly frayed). Dimensions 180 x 118 mm.

Complete, handsomely illuminated, elegantly written, and carefully glossed pocket edition of one of Cicero's best-known dialogues on the subject of friends and friendship (specifically political friendship), this previously unknown manuscript offers excellent evidence of the practice of classical scholarship in Rome during the Renaissance.

PROVENANCE

1. Watermarks, script, and ornamentation point to an Italian origin for this manuscript. The style of the initial and partial border bears some resemblance to the manuscripts made in Rome (compare London, Sotheby's, 3 Dec. 2002, lot 25, Cicero, *De officiis*, Florence or Rome, c. 1450-1470, presenting similar decoration, clear affinities of script [see the elegant Q and R traced with dramatic swooping descenders] and gloss, and a comparable wreath with unfurling ribbons).
2. Unidentified arms (painted over the original patron's arms) painted in the laurel wreath, described as: *Ecartelé, aux 1 et 4 de sinople plein et aux 2 et 3 de gueules plein.*

3. Added note by a different hand (early sixteenth century?) with the following inscription and initials: "Thomas unus de duodecim qui dicitur didimus. Valet in d[omi]no semper. M. S. So. scripsi" [Thomas, one of the twelve [apostles] also called Didimus [Didymus]. Farewell in [with] God, as always. Written by M.S.So.] (f. 65v). This same hand might also be responsible for the faded note that reads: "Officium romani [pontificis?]" (f. 30), which might suggest that the manuscript is related in some way to Rome, perhaps even the Papal Curie. Even more faded but legible is an excerpt from the Ciceronian text itself: "Amicus certus in re incerta cernitur" (f. 12v).

TEXT

ff. 1-62, Cicero, *Laelius seu de amicitia*: Preambula, "Quintus Mutius augur Scevola multa de Celio Lelio socero suo memoriter & iocunde narrare solebat..."; preliminary dialogue, "Gaius Fanius & Quintus Mutius ad socerum veniunt post mortem affricani..."; explicit, "Haec autem habui de amicitia quae dicerem. Vos autem hortor ut ita virtutem locetis sine qua amicitia esse non potest ut ea excepta nihil amicitia prestabilius esse putetis. Finis." (K Simbeck, ed., Leipzig, 1917, pp. 46c-86c).

ff. 63-63v, blank;

f. 64, Added contemporary inscription reads: "Yhs [Jhesus] mihi filius. Crato moram [...] Illi moram in ea civitate per duos menses: sed prins[.] egressi civitatem ed popula[vit] (?) eam sed [...] nocturno tempore egressi sunt per portam. Aripuere fugam fugere coactus fuit [...] ut redimerem me";

ff. 64v-65, blank;

f. 65v, Added inscription (sixteenth century) reads: "Thomas unus de duodecim qui dicitur didimus. Valet in d[omi]no semper. M. S. So. scripsi" [Thomas, one of the twelve [apostles] also called Didimus [Didymus]. Farewell in [with] God, as always. Written by M.S.So.] [not recorded in Bénédictins du Bouveret, *Les colophons des manuscrits occidentaux...* (1965-1982)].

Dedicated to his own friend Titus Pomponius Atticus, Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-43 B.C.) composed his dialogue on friendship, entitled *Laelius seu De amicitia*, within the year 44 B.C. It is one of Cicero's later works. The three interlocutors in this dialogue are Gaius Laelius, the principal speaker, and Gaius Fannius and Quintus Mucius Scaevola, his auditors and interrogators. Laelius was the type of the best Roman gentleman of the time--of spotless character, well-read and by principle a Stoic, an honorable statesman and competent soldier. Fannius, married to the daughter of Laelius, was a person of great literary achievements who wrote, among other things, a history of his own times. Finally, Scaevola, another son-in-law of Laelius, was a great lawyer, generally spoken of as Augur.

The dialogue takes place in Rome in the days just following the death of Julius Caesar and immediately following the sudden (and suspicious) death of Scipio Minor in 129 B.C., when Laelius was about 57 years of age. His sons-in-law call upon him, and Laelius makes his own friendship with

Scipio the basis of a general philosophical discourse on the subject of friends and friendship. For Laelius, friendship is construed as political friendship, which is necessarily based on notions of justice and virtue shared by both parties. In contrast, the dialogue presents the tyrant as one who lives in a world without friends.

The most important orator that Rome produced, Cicero was of lasting greatness due to his exceptional mastery of the Latin language which appealed to Renaissance Humanists. His prose became a model for later writers in Latin. Hundreds of manuscripts of *De Amicitia* survive, and most of the research on the manuscript tradition concentrates on the numerous early, pre-twelfth century copies (e.g., Powell, 1998). Noting that the text in the four or five hundred surviving manuscripts from the later Middle Ages and Renaissance was a "vulgate," in other words the "product of a continuous process of corruption and contamination," Powell therefore doubts the utility of a study of these later manuscripts as an aid to an edition. However, since many of the later, especially fifteenth-century manuscripts are glossed, like the present copy, a census of glossed copies and a careful study of them would likely reveal much about the appreciation of Cicero in the Renaissance.

The first edition of *Cicero's Laelius seu de amicitia* was published in Cologne, Ulrich Zel, c. 1467 (Goff C-559), thus probably contemporary with the production of the present manuscript.

ILLUSTRATION

White-vine decoration, which takes its name from the interweaving of vines with white unpainted stems and blossoms against a colored background (typically red, green, and blue), originated in Florence in the second quarter of the fifteenth century. By mid-century, however, white-vine decoration was adopted throughout Italy, from Milan to Naples and in all major centers of illumination. The palette employed here and some details of the decoration, as well as the script, suggest Rome as the origin of the illumination (see Provenance, above; on the pervasive influence of Florentine decoration in Rome and Naples in the second half of the fifteenth century, see Alexander and de la Mare, 1969, pp. xxvii-xxviii).

LITERATURE

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Ullman, B.L. *The Origin and Development of Humanistic Script*, Rome, 1960.

ONLINE RESOURCES

Cicero, Laelius, Latin text

<http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/cicero/amic.shtml>

The Cicero Homepage

<http://www.utexas.edu/depts/classics/documents/Cic.html>