

LES ENLUMINURES, LTD
2970 North Lake Shore Drive 11B
Chicago, Illinois 60657

tel. 1-773-929-5986
fax. 1-773-528-3976
chicago@lesenluminures.com

LES ENLUMINURES
Le Louvre des Antiquaires
2 place du Palais-Royal
75001 Paris

tél : 33 1 42 60 15 58
fax : 33 1 40 15 00 25
info@lesenluminures.com

DOMENICO CAVALCA, Excerpts from *Vite dei santi padri*
In Italian, manuscript on paper
Northern Italy, Milan or Pavia?, c. 1460-1480

175 ff. (5 blank), lacking one leaf after f. 99, another leaf lost or cancelled after f. 20, else complete (collation i-ii8, iii7 [of 8, v lacking or cancelled], iv-ix8, x4, xi-xiii8, xiv7 [of 8, lacking i], xv-xxii8, xxiii5 [of 8, vi-viii cancelled, doubtless blank]), on paper (watermark close to Briquet, "Fleur à 8 pétales," no. 6599: Milan, 1475 or Pavie, 1481; G. Piccard, *Wasserzeichen. Blatt. Blume. Baume* [Stuttgart, 1982], no. 863, Pavia, 1469; no. 865, Pavia, 1472; no. 866, Pavia, 1483. Compare also, no. 862, Milan, 1477), with horizontal catchwords, pencil foliation (followed here) repeats '134', 17 lines, ruled in pale ink (justification 94 x 72 mm.), written in brown ink in a neat rounded gothic bookhand, some flourished cadels, headings in red, 2-line initials throughout in red or blue, a few with decorative penwork in other colors, some larger initials up to 4 lines high with contrasting penwork, old name (probably seventeenth-century) on first page "Di Gio. Cusi." Contemporary binding of reversed leather (usually called "doe skin") over pasteboards, probably originally colored red, stubs of two pairs of ties, later marbled pastedowns, binding worn but sound (A few minor stains, a few wormholes in first page). Dimensions 132 x 100 mm.

By the "father of Italian prose," Domenico Cavalco, this collection of lives of the hermits of the early Church survives in its original binding. Although known from a large number of manuscripts, the work is rare on the market (only two copies exist in North American collections). Extant manuscripts differ immensely from one another and still deserve further study for what they can tell us about the transmission and dissemination of Cavalca's popular text.

PROVENANCE

1. Watermarks clearly point to a Northern Italian origin for this manuscript, with a strong possibility the manuscript could have been copied near Pavia. Linguistic particularities also confirm a Northern Italian origin.

2. Seventeenth-century unidentified Italian possessor, with inscription: "Di Gio[vanni] Cusi" (f. 1).

TEXT

ff. 1-20, Domenico Cavalca, *Vita di s. Eufrosina*, rubric, *Incomentia la legenda de sancta Eufrosina vergene. Et prima de la soa nativita. Et come essendo maritata fugi un habito de homo et fecese monacho in uno monasterio; incipit, "Fu ne la cita de Alexandria uno grande gentile homo ..."; explicit, "[...] glorificando dio padre con lo suo figliolo Jhesu Christo et sancto spirito. Amen"* (ed. Manni, 1830, III, pp. 133-148);

ff. 20-44v, Selection of lives, miracles and *exempla* taken from the *Vite dei Santi Padri*, Books III and IV [Delcorno refers to the "Antologia del Libro III delle *Vite*": some references to Manni's edition are provided, when found] with rubrics, *Come li nostri pensieri debeno essere in celo*, *Miraculo de lo abate Apolo* (published in Manni, 1830, II, pp. 164-165); *Come li angeli goldeno del bon parlare*, *Doctrina del silentio*; *De dui fratelli l'uno vagabundo et l'altro religioso* (published in Manni, *Volgarizzamento...*, IV, Bologna, 1825, pp. 343-344; also Manni, 1830, II, pp. 246-247); *De uno liberato da le temptatione de la carne* (published in Manni, *Volgarizzamento...*, IV, Bologna, 1825, pp. 357-358; also Manni, 1830, II, pp. 247-249); *De lo abate Cipriano cognominato Cuculla*, *Gregorio patriarcha de Theopoli*; *De lo abate Olympio*, *De lo abate Alexandro*; *De Gregorio vesco[vo] de la cita de Roma*, *De dui fratelli seculari molto religiosi*, *De dui phylosophi che pregavano lo abate che qualch' parole de edificatione li dicese*, *De lo abate Theodoro de Penthapholi*; *De uno frate che vene per consigliarse con lo abbate Victore*, *De uno monacho eunucho nominato Theodoro*; *De uno monacho che fu trangolato nela cella de Evagrio*, *De uno frate giovane che delibero de non mai bere aqua ne vino*, *Del beatissimo Gregorio vescovo de Roma*, *Septi capituli che mando lo abate Moyse alo abate Pemen li quali che li observa he liberato da ogni passione de mente e trova riposo dove ello he o in solitudine o vero in convento di frati*, *Altri capituli del medesimo abate Moyse*, *Uno exemplo morale*,

ff. 45-47, blank;

ff. 48-73, Domenico Cavalca, *Vita di s. Abraham romito*, rubric, *Comenza la vita de sancto Abraam e primo se fece heremito*; incipit, "Lo sanctissimo Abraam essendo figliolo de parenti richissimi..."; explicit, "[...] a Dio padre e Yhesu Christo benedeto. Finito he la legenda de sancto Abraam" (ed. Manni, 1830, III, pp. 92-112; Manni, 1731, 45-48);

ff. 73v-75v, blank;

ff. 76-92, Domenico Cavalca, *Vita di Paolo primo eremita*, rubric, *Incomenza el primo libro de le vite di sancti padri compilato da sancto Hyeronimo et prima de sancto Paulo primo vel heremita come lasso el mundo. Capitulo primo*; incipit, "Nel tempo de Decio e de Valeriano imperatori persecutori de fideli christiani..."; explicit, "[...] de Paulo con li meriti soy che le prope de re coronati d'oro" (ed. Manni, 1830, I, pp. 2-14; published by C. Delcorno, 1992, pp. 85-95);

ff. 92-174, Domenico Cavalca, *Vita di Antonio*, rubric, *De sancto Antonio. Capitulo quinto*; incipit: "Antonio nato de nobili et religiosi parenti..."; explicit, "[...] Capitulo vigesimo secondo. Quando li iudici e rectori [...] tuti pianseno vel come de proprio padre" (see A. Salsano, *Il volgarizzamento cavalchiano della "Vita Beati Antonii Abbatis"*, Firenze, 1972; Manni, 1830, I, pp. 15-81 [missing last chap. 22 in Manni, 1830]); chap. 1-18, published by C. Delcorno, 1992, pp. 96-150; here missing last chapter 19 published by Delcorno, 1992, pp. 150-154).

This manuscript contains excerpts from the "volgarizzamento" (vernacular translation) by the Dominican friar Domenico Cavalca (and other collaborators) of the *Vitae Patrum* attributed to the Church Father Saint Jerome, but which is in fact a collection of a very large corpus of monastic texts actually compiled from the sixth century on and which constituted an important repertory of *exempla* used by mendicant preachers to illustrate their sermons.

The ancient legends of the early Christian hermits of Egypt were originally written in Greek and then rendered into Latin as the *Vitae Patrum* (published in 10 books by H. Rosweyde, Antwerp,

1615; see also Migne, PL, vol. 73-74). The present translation into Italian is that attributed to the Pisan Dominican friar, Domenico Cavalca (1270-1342), the "father of Italian prose," as the literary critic Pietro Giordani (1774-1848) called him. According to Dachs, the work is "strictly speaking, a closely derivative text rather than a translation and has always been admired by linguistic purists. It is actually difficult to withdraw from the magic of the fresh and animated prose which carries one over the frustration a modern reader may feel at the recurring accounts of the effortless ease with which the hermit heroes of the tale fight against 'melancholia', 'ebrietà', and the 'diletti carnali'" (Dachs, 1981, p.15).

A total of 191 manuscripts containing some or all of the *Vite dei Santi Padri* (complete in 4 books) are known, mostly in Italian libraries, listed by Delcorno in his publication in 2000. Of the 191 known manuscripts, there are 109 that contain excerpts or single lives inserted in legendaries or miscellanies. There are only four manuscripts in the United Kingdom and two in North America (the Bancroft Library at the University of California at Berkeley and the Houghton Library at Harvard University). The last copy on the market appears to be one that appeared in 1974 (London, Sotheby's, 9 December 1974, lot 41, now Munich, Staatsbibliothek, Cod. ital.691). A survey of the extant manuscripts reveals that they vary immensely in their selection of texts

The rich tradition of the work in print has been studied by Cioni (1962). In the incunabula period alone, twenty editions were published between 1474 and 1499. An attempt to generate a critical edition was first made by Manni (1731-1732), followed by a number of re-editions in the nineteenth century (see Delcorno, 1992, pp. 294-296).

The present manuscript is composed of two parts. It opens with the life of Saint Eufronia, in two chapters, beginning on f. 1, "Fu ne la cita de Alexandria uno grande gentile homo . . .," with an account of her birth to elderly parents helped by the prayers of a friendly monk who eventually took her into his monastery where she passed herself off as a monk, followed by short accounts of the lives and miracles of various desert fathers and hermits, including Hypertio, Isach, Apolo, Theodoro, Acerbio, Cypriano, Cuculla, Patriarch Gregory of Theopoli, and many others, with accounts of conversions, miracles, ascetic life and holy living, and a long account of the hermit Abraham. The second part comprises the much longer lives and miracles of Saint Paul the First Hermit and Saint Anthony.

LITERATURE

Cioni, A. *Bibliografia de "Le Vite dei santi padre" volgarizzata da Fra Domenico Cavalca*, Florence, 1962.

Dachs, K. "Domenico Cavalca, *Vite dei Santi Padri*, Italy, early fifteenth century," in *Fine books and Book Collecting: Books and Manuscripts acquired from Alan G. Thomas and described by his customers on the occasion of his seventieth birthday*, ed. by C. de Hamel and R. A. Linenthal, Leamington Spa, J. Hall, 1981, pp. 15-16.

Delcorno, Carlo ed. *Cinque vite di eremiti dale "vite dei santi padri"*, Venice, Amrsilio, 1992.

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Manni, D. M., ed. *Volgarizzamento delle Vite de SS. Padri di fra Domenico Cavalca*, Florence, Milan, G. Silvestri, 1830, 6 vol. [re-edition of Manni, D. M. ed. *Vite di alcuni santi scritti nel buon secolo della lingua Toscana*, Florence, appresso Domenico Maria Manni, 1731-1735].

ONLINE RESOURCES

Digital Text of Cavalca's *Vite dei santi padre*

<http://www.bnrcrm.librari.beniculturali.it/ita/bibliote/fsvitedeisanti.htm>