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[PS-SEXTUS AURELIUS VICTOR], *De viris illustribus Romae*
 In Latin, decorated manuscript on parchment
 Italy, Florence(?), c. 1450-1475

i (medieval flyleaf) + 30 leaves, the main text with medieval ink foliation i-xxvij, the table of contents with modern pencil foliation xxix-xxx (collation: originally a flyleaf followed by i-iii^o, the first leaf replaced apparently within the 15th century); prickings often survive, single verticals ruled in lead-point, 26 horizontals ruled in dry-point (for up to 25 lines of text, but only the top 24 usually used); the ruled space c. 110 x 75 mm.; written in brown ink in a fine semi-cursive humanistic script, with occasional omitted passages added by the same or a similar scribe in the margins, the first heading in red capitals, two-line initials in Roman square capitals at the beginning of sections, mostly in blue, but red/pink on ff. 1, 1v, 2v, 11, 21 (the extreme edges of the leaves somewhat browned, and with signs of use and handling throughout, but generally in very fine condition). Bound in a parchment leaf of a fine decorated 12th-century Lectionary turned sideways (the text and decoration on the outer face largely erased, the covers with insignificant creasing, the spine worn and with minor losses). Dimensions 180 x 130 mm.

This is a fine humanistic copy of a work of Roman biographical history by an author whose identity eludes modern scholarship. Exceedingly rarely found in single-text manuscripts such as this, the text is equally rarely available on the market. The manuscript is preserved in a 16th(?)-century wrapper made from a leaf of a fine 12th-century decorated Lectionary.

PROVENANCE

1. Written by an accomplished scribe who was perhaps, however, not a professional: on f. 2 one can see that he wrote the first few words "above top line", then erased these and re-started "below top line," as if he was unsure of the "correct" humanistic practice.
2. The flyleaf is inscribed with a 15th-century title: "Plinius De Viris Illustrib[us]" (see the discussion of authorship below), by the same hand that added "& Tarquinus Colatinus" after "Tarquinus Superbus" in the table of contents (f. 29). This reader apparently wanted to use the manuscript for study or reference purposes, rather than being satisfied to just read it from beginning to end. He added the table of contents thus enabling him subsequently to refer to specific passages with greater ease.
3. The same flyleaf is inscribed with a 16th-century ownership inscription: "Hic liber erat Suetonij de Veteribus & Divi / Mei Alexandri de Domo de sp[iri]to" (the reading of the words after the name uncertain); the spine of the binding inscribed: 'Io. And. Bracc[...?]

Come[n]taria in [...] Iacobum(?)", and therefore apparently previously used as the wrapper around another text.

4. Unidentified modern owner, with their self-adhesive paper label on the inner face of the front cover, with a shelf-mark in red and black typescript: "MS. / S.I./P.12 / N.42."

TEXT

ff. 1-28v, Rubric, *Incipit liber de viris illustribus urbis Romae*, text incipit, "Romulus asylum convenis patefecit et magno exercitu facto cum videret coniugia deesse ...," the first leaf ends at "... in arcem perduxit ubi Tatius", and the text continues in another hand for the rest of the volume from f. 2: "scutis eam obrui precepit. Nam et ea in levis habuerant. ...," the main text ends "... et pretiosissimus odoribus cremandum curavit." followed in blue square capitals by "FINIS."

ff. 29-30, Table of contents with near-contemporary folio references, starting with "Romulus fol. i" and ending with "Gneus Pompeius magnus fol. xxviiij"; f. 30v is blank.

Modern printed editions of the text have 86 chapters, starting with a short one concerning King Procas of Alba Longa, the mythological great-grandfather of Romulus and Remus, and ending with Cleopatra. Most of the manuscripts, however, comprise just chapters 2-77 as numbered in the editions: they start with Romulus (c. 771-c. 717 BC), first king of Rome, and end with Pompey (106-48 BC) and the end of the Republic, and do not continue on to Julius Caesar and the Empire. These manuscripts (including the present one) therefore contain 76 summaries of the lives of famous Romans during a period of about 700 years.

Books concerning the lives of famous men formed a popular Roman genre of exemplary literature; the tradition was continued through the early Christian and medieval periods, and was revived and extended in the Renaissance to include famous women.

In editions printed since the incunabular era the main text presented here has traditionally been attributed to Sextus Aurelius Victor (c. 320-90), a Roman historian and politician, but this attribution is rejected by modern scholarship. This attribution was largely based on the fact that the *De viris illustribus Romae* (a short work) was frequently found from an early date together with two or three other related works, including the *Origo gentis Romanae* by Victor.

The authorship of the text has always been uncertain, however, and it has been variously attributed: to Suetonius (to whom a 16th-century owner attributed the present manuscript; see his flyleaf inscription), who included not only rulers but also men such as historians and poets; to Cornelius Nepos, who wrote a book on Eminent Commanders; and in many medieval manuscripts the text is attributed to either the Elder or the Younger Pliny (e.g. Bodleian, MS D'Orville 146, written in July 1483 by the humanist Lodovico Carbo of Ferrara: "Gaii Plinii Secundi oratoris Veronensis de viris illustribus").

A comparatively recent detailed study (Braccesi, 1973) suggests that the work is indeed by Pliny the Elder, but while the evidence offered for this has not been accepted (see Sage, 1975 etc.) Braccesi makes a persuasive case that the original work consisted of just 77 chapters ending with

Pompey (as in the present manuscript), and that a later compiler both added chapters 78-86 and subtracted the first chapter, because its material was covered elsewhere in the compilation.

The opening of the present manuscript presents a conundrum. The first leaf has been removed and replaced—apparently within a fairly short time—by a leaf whose text does not fill up all the available space. This leads one to suppose that the text originally consisted of chapters 1-77, but after the loss of the first leaf (containing chapter 1 on King Procas, and the start of chapter 2 on Romulus) the person who replaced it used as his exemplar a printed edition beginning, as normal in the version found in compilations, at chapter 2. The table of contents by the original main scribe, however, records that the first chapter of the volume, on folio 1, concerned Romulus, not Procas. It therefore seems likely that the text always commenced with Romulus, and perhaps had, or received, some defect so significant that it was decided to remove and replace the first leaf.

The sequence of some of the Lives in the present manuscript is disrupted because the positions of the two innermost bifolia of the first quire (i.e. ff. 5 and 6, and ff. 4 and 7) are transposed: for the text to be read in correct order the sequence of these leaves in the first quire should be ff. 1-3, 5, 4, 7, 6, 8-10. Interestingly, this mistake occurred in the fifteenth century during the binding process, as demonstrated by both the early foliation, and by the table of contents that lists the Lives in the correct order so that their corresponding folio numbers run in the disarranged sequence.

Manuscripts of the text are extremely rare on the market: according to the Schoenberg Database, only four copies have been on the market since 1900, and none since 1956; the latter is now at the University of Kansas, and is one of only five copies recorded in the USA and Canada in de Ricci's *Census* and its *Supplement*: two other copies are in the Walters Art Museum, and one each were formerly in the Marston collection (present whereabouts unknown, apparently not with the other Marston manuscripts at the Beinecke Library at Yale), and the Ricketts collection (now presumably with his other manuscripts at the Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington). No other copies (except a single-leaf binding fragment) are recorded in the thirty-five American libraries covered by the Digital Scriptorium consortium's union catalog (<http://www.scriptorium.columbia.edu/>).

BINDING

The binding is made from a full leaf of a very elegant 12th-century decorated Italian Lectionary; ruled in drypoint, the written space c. 230 x 140 mm.; the outer face erased but partially legible, with traces of two decorated initials and to rubrics; the inner face is not erased, and is more clearly legible through thin paper pastedowns. The leaf preserves part of four readings: the first is from Mark 11:19-24; the second is unidentified; the third has a rubric, apparently *Secundum Lucam* and with text beginning at Luke 6:36, continuing on the inner face of the binding as far as Luke 6:42; and finally I Peter 3:8-11, with a fine red and blue initial "K" at the start of the latter. The reading from Mark is from the account of Christ's Entry into Jerusalem, ending "Therefore I say unto you, all things, whatsoever you ask when ye pray, believe that you shall receive; and they shall come unto you"; the reading from Luke is part of Christ's sermon beginning "Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful. Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you shall be forgiven . . ."

LITERATURE

Behrens, Hugo. *Untersuchungen über das anonyme Buch De viris illustribus*, Heidelberg, Carl Winters Universitätsbuchhandlung, 1923.

Braccesi, Lorenzo. "Ancora su *Elogia e de viris illustribus*," *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte*, 30 (1981), 126-28.

Braccesi, Lorenzo. *Introduzione al De viris illustribus*, *Il mondo antico: Studi di storia e di storiografia*, 1, Bologna, Pàtron, 1973.

Pichlmayr, Franz with addenda and corrigenda by R. Gruendel. *Sexti Aurelii Victoris Liber de Caesaribus. Praecedunt Origo gentis Romanae et Liber de viris illustribus urbis Romae, subsequitur Epitome de Caesaribus*, Bibliotheca scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana, Leipzig, Teubner, 1961.

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Sage, Michael M. "The *De viris illustribus*: Chronology and Structure," *Transactions of the American Philological Association (1974-)*, 108 (1978), 217-41.

Sage, Michael M. "[untitled review of Braccesi, 1973]," *Phoenix*, 29 (1975), 308-09.

ONLINE RESOURCES

Editions in Latin:

<http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/victor.ill.html>

http://www.forumromanum.org/literature/aurelius_victor/illustr.html

http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/0320-0390,_Aurelius_Victor,_Sextus,_De_Viris_Illustribus_Urbis_Romae,_LT.pdf

Translation into French:

http://www.forumromanum.org/literature/aurelius_victor/illustrf.html

The articles by Michael M. Sage cited above, and Braccesi's rebuttal, are all available to JSTOR subscribers:

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/4435749>

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1087630>

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/4476149>

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/284249>

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