

**BOETHIUS, *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, with numerous added glosses**  
In Latin, illuminated manuscript on parchment  
Northern Italy, c. 1250-1300 (possibly c. 1250-1275?)

*ii (paper) + 56 + ii (paper) folios on parchment, contemporary quire and leaf signatures remaining in lower outer corner of most folios, modern pencil foliation in lower inner corner, 1-56 (collation, i-vii<sup>s</sup>), ruled in drypoint with vertical bounding lines usually visible (justification, 175 x 100 mm.), written in a professional late gothic Italian bookhand in twenty-nine lines, two-line initials in red or blue with contrasting penwork, five large coloured initials with stylised acanthus leaf sprays extending into borders, enclosing human figures, a dragon and a bird, that on f. 8v surmounted by a crude contemporary 'B' in black ink edged in red (perhaps for 'Boethius', identifying the bearded man in the border), two small miniatures set within the text: a wheel of fortune and a seated figure with a bishop's mitre within an architectural frame (accompanying a short verse on Nero's infamy and so perhaps depicting the emperor), the latter with 'N' and 'E' in contemporary black ink edged in red (probably 'Ne[ro]'), all large coloured initials and miniatures partly washed out and rubbed, old water damage evident throughout, some spots and stains, parchment dry and cockled in places, outer corners of a number of leaves lost and restored with more modern parchment and some small parchment repairs to splits in edges of a few leaves, small late medieval repair to hole in center of f. 16 affecting only a few letters of four lines of text. Bound in nineteenth-century pasteboards covered with brown morocco, gilt-tooled on spine with author's name and title within panels and floral sprays, triple fillet on front and back boards enclosing profusely blind-tooled stars, front board slightly bowed and both becoming loose at extremities. Dimensions, 250 x 160 mm.*

This is an excellent copy of the single greatest philosophical work of the Middle Ages and the most widely copied work of secular literature in medieval Europe. It preserves besides an early still-unrecorded gloss that follows the Carolingian type rather than the post-twelfth-century "framing" model. Its distinguished provenance includes two of the most notorious early modern manuscript collectors: the Venetian cleric turned art-dealer, the Abbé Luigi Celotti, and the greatest private manuscript collector of all time, Sir Thomas Phillipps.

#### PROVENANCE

1. Written and decorated in the second half of the thirteenth century, most probably for a lecturer or student in the University of Bologna (founded 1088), Padua (founded by 1222) or Siena (founded 1240), perhaps the "Bartolomeus magister" who signs his name in the lower part of the verso of the last leaf.
2. The manuscript has additions of the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century on the last two leaves, including the Letter of Toledo sent by Magister Johannes David (perhaps the early Jewish translator Ibn Dawud, f. 1135-1153) to Pope Clement III, which predicts that an imminent grand planetary alignment will lead to the destruction of the world through disastrous floods, storms, droughts, and earthquakes. The letter here predicts the cataclysm will occur on 8 September 1371 (and elsewhere appears with the variant dates of 1186, 1229, 1395 and 1480), and the text appears in a wide array of chronicles in England, France, Germany and Italy (see Grauert, 1901, and Gaster, 1902).
3. Abbé Luigi Celotti (c. 1768- c. 1846), the Venetian cleric turned art-dealer, who purchased illuminated Choir books and liturgical manuscripts from the Napoleonic troops after their looting of the Sistine Chapel in 1798, and began a career acquiring medieval manuscripts and

Old Master drawings in Italy for the London auction rooms. The present manuscript was sold in Sotheby's, 14 March 1825, as lot 56, and bought by the dealer Thorpe for £1.5sh. for Sir Thomas Phillipps.

4. Sir Thomas Phillipps (1792-1872), the notorious and self-confessed "vellomaniac," who by the age of six already owned 110 books, and by his death had amassed the greatest private collection of manuscripts of all time, numbering some 60,000 volumes. This is his MS. 904, with his lion rampant ink-stamp and small paper label pasted to the base of the spine. The collection passed by descent and was acquired in 1946 by the London booksellers Phillip and Lionel Robinson (their small paper identification label loose in front of book), who sold a few manuscripts privately and dispersed the bulk through a vast series of monumental sales at Sotheby's. This volume remained in the collection until the 1970s when it was purchased by the New York book dealer H.P. Kraus. It was subsequently his catalogue 153: *Bibliotheca Phillipica*, 1979, no. 22.
5. Belonged to Joost R. Ritman (b. 1941--), Dutch businessman and book collector, founder of The Ritman Library, who acquired it from Kraus, with his bookplate, *Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica*, MS 55; deaccessioned in 2011 (briefly described in *Medieval Manuscripts in Dutch Collections*, Online Resources).

## TEXT

ff. 1r-8v, incipit, "Carmina qui quondam studio florente peregi . . .";

ff. 8v-18v, incipit, "Post haec paulisper obticuit atque ubi attentionem meam . . .";

ff. 18v-33r, incipit, "Iam cantum illa finierat [sic], cum me audium audiendi . . .";

ff. 33r-46r, [title added by contemporary hand above initial line, "*Incipit quartus liber*"] incipit, "Hec cum philosophia dignitate uultus et oris grauitate . . .";

ff. 46r-55r, incipit, "Dixerat orationisque cursumque ad alia quedam tractanda atque . . . ante oculos agitis iudicis cuncta cernentis";

Edited by Weinberger, *Anicii Manlii Severini Boetii Philosophiae consolationis libri quinque*, CSEL 67; Bieler, *Anicii Manlii Severini Boetii Philosophiae Consolatio*, CCSEL 94; and Moreschini, *Boethius, De consolatione philosophiae, Opuscula theologica*, 2005.

f. 55v, incipit, "Omnibus ad quos praesentes litterae peruenerint. Magister Johannes david tolletani et omnes magistri eiusdem loci saluti . . . concordati sunt omnes phylosofi grece et francie";

Letter of Toledo sent by Magister Johannes David (perhaps the early Jewish translator Ibn Dawud, f. 1135-1153) to Pope Clement III (see Provenance, above) added in a late fourteenth- or fifteenth-century hand; edited by Grauert, 1901, pp. 300-305.

f. 56, incipit, "Fertur aureolus theofrasti liber de nuptiis in quo quareit an vir . . . conversatio est in celis et cetera";

An excerpt of Jerome's treatise, *Adversus Iovinianum* I:47-48, on marriage and virginity, added in the same late fourteenth- or fifteenth-century hand. This text, written in 393 AD., was immensely popular in the Middle Ages and Renaissance; edited in Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 23, cols. 211-338, here cols. 289-291.

f. 56v, incipit, "seme d' finocchio ... e la mattina una poco".

Medical recipe for failing eyesight in Italian, added in another fifteenth-century hand.

Just as Plato provided the philosophical bedrock for the ancient world, so did Boethius for the Middle Ages. The author (more properly Anicius Manlius Severinus Boëthius) was born c. 480 into a prominent Roman family who counted numerous consuls and two previous emperors among their members. He lived in the final dying days of the Roman Empire, and his father had served as consul under the Germanic barbarian Odoacer, after the latter had deposed the last Western Roman emperor. Boethius may have travelled as a young man to Alexandria to study, and he became a senator at the age of twenty-five. He entered the service of the Ostrogothic king, Theodoric the Great, and in 522 was appointed *magister officiorum*, the head of all government and court services. However, the next year he became embroiled in court scandal and was suspected of conspiring with the Eastern Empire against Theodoric. He was imprisoned, and after a year-long period of confinement during which he wrote this work, executed.

Boethius spent most of his life in an attempt to translate and preserve the works of the ancient world, and while this text has often been set aside by modern scholarship in favor of his translations of Aristotle and the Greek mathematicians, in fact it forms a succinct conclusion to his other compositions. It is the work of a Christian scholar deeply informed by Platonic philosophy, living in a world that valued Classical culture alongside the teachings of the early Church. Through a dialogue between the author and Philosophy, here allegorized as a woman, it sets out to address the existence of evil and inequality in a world governed by God, and to show how happiness can be attainable amidst the apparently random tides of fortune.

It was the most widely copied work of secular literature in medieval Europe, and was translated into Old English in the ninth century, Old French in the thirteenth century, Old High German in the eleventh century, Middle English by Geoffrey Chaucer in the fourteenth century, and into almost every European medieval vernacular including Languedoc and Catalan. Many hundreds of manuscripts survive, and the project *Codices Boethiani* is at present attempting to catalogue all Latin manuscripts (the volumes for Great Britain and Ireland [1995]; Italy and the Vatican City [2001]; Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Sweden and Switzerland [2001]; and Portugal and Spain [2009]; are already published, but the present manuscript was overlooked when in the Ritman collection in Amsterdam). The thirteenth and fourteenth centuries were important ones for the history of the text, with it being used to teach proper Latin to university students. It is listed as required reading in the thirteenth-century *Guide de l'étudiant* and similar manuals from the University of Paris, and until the middle of the fourteenth century it remained on the list of books that bachelors were expected to have read.

Like many other university manuscripts, there is an extensive array of glosses added to the text of this manuscript. The hands of these glosses date to the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, but the glosses follow the Carolingian model of occasional interlinear or marginal additions, which came before the earliest continuous "framing" commentary of William of Conches (d. after 1154). Scholarship has only recently begun to examine these early glosses to this text in a methodical fashion (see the "Boethius in early medieval Europe" in Online Resources below), but it is clear that many sets of separate and interacting glosses were added to the text in the Carolingian renaissance, and continuously copied throughout the entire Middle Ages. These here are not identifiable among the twenty-six commentaries catalogued by Pierre Courcelle

(1967, pp. 241-318, see also Gibson, 1995, pp. 12-13), and they may have a significant part to play in future research into these additions to the text.

## LITERATURE

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Smith, L., with the assistance of T. Christchev. *Codices Boethiani II: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Sweden and Switzerland*, Warburg Institute Surveys and Texts 27, 2001.

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## ONLINE RESOURCES

The Ritman Library (Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica)  
<http://www.ritmanlibrary.com/collection/collection-profile/>

Medieval Manuscripts in Dutch Collections  
<http://www.mmdc.nl/static/site/>

The international "Boethius in early medieval Europe" project, set up to investigate and catalogue the glosses to the text  
<http://www.english.ox.ac.uk/boethius/>

The *Codices Boethiani* project, based in the Warburg, and engaged in surveys of all recorded manuscripts of the author's works  
<http://warburg.sas.ac.uk/publications/surveys-and-texts/codices-boethiani/>

The Latin text with a concordance and Modern English translation  
<http://www9.georgetown.edu/faculty/jod/boethius/boethius.html>

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