

MEROBAUDES HISPANI SCHOLASTICUS, *De Christo*; LACTANTIUS, *Divinarum institutionum libri VII, De ira dei* and *De officio dei*; PSEUDO-DAMASUS, *De cognomentis Salvatoris*; excerpt from PAULINUS OF NOLA, *De Obitu Celsi Pueri Panegyricus*

In Latin with Greek quotations, illuminated manuscript on parchment
Italy (probably Rome), c. 1400

i (parchment) + 202 + *i* (parchment) folios on parchment, contemporary book number in ink in top outer recto, modern pencil foliation in lower outer recto, 1-202 (collation, i-xxi^s xxii^t [-5, 6, 7 and 8, cancelled with no apparent loss of text] xxiii-xxv^s xxviⁱ [-7 and 8, cancelled from end with no loss of text]), horizontal catchwords, that on f. 112v enclosing a tiny human face, ruled lightly in brown ink with vertical bounding lines mostly visible (justification 180 x 125 mm.), written in two angular and elegant professional gothic bookhands (band one: ff. 1-172, with a partial fingerprint apparently in ink of this hand on f. 119r; band two: ff. 173-202) in thirty-five long lines, ascenders at top of page often accentuated into tall thin cadels, spaces left for Greek quotations and filled in by another contemporary hand, occasionally leaving space or overflowing into margins, two-line initials in red or blue with contrasting penwork, nine large initials in gold or interlocking panels of gold and blue with ornate gold and coloured penwork infill and surround, the first seven in the section written by band one in Italian style, the last two in the section written by band two emulating French models, slight spots to a few folios including small brown discolouration to tops of some folios, small amount of cockling at front of volume, ink flaking from some pages, although text is legible, first leaf slightly rubbed. Bound in polished and bevelled wooden boards, early and perhaps medieval, with spine covered in modern brown morocco tooled in gold with Lactantius' name and the title of his two works, endleaves from Italian manuscripts (described below), spine with five raised bands, thongs attaching boards to text block either split or splitting but volume held solidly together by modern leather. Dimensions 284 x 205 mm.

This fine and attractive early Renaissance manuscript includes the three most important works of Lactantius, a fourth-century Christian apologist and theologian, as well as the only recorded medieval manuscript of a poem on Christ by Merobaudes, the fifth-century scholar-general and advisor to the imperial court of Emperor Valentinian III. This last work is a valuable record of a devout Christian working within the heart of the late Roman administration, and was previously known only from two sixteenth-century printings.

PROVENANCE

1. The large illuminated initials which open each section of the text on ff. 1-172 and the large dimensions of the codex itself point to an origin in Rome, and this manuscript was most probably written there c. 1400 for a patron with humanistic interests. Early humanism in Rome was concentrated on the papal curia and Biblical exegesis through the works of the early Christian fathers such as those in the present manuscript. The original owner appears to have also had a strong interest in the Latin Classics, and contemporary marginal annotations accompany the whole of Lactantius' *Divinarum Institutionem*, picking out ancient Greek and Roman authors where cited in the text, including Greek philosophers and writers such as Homer, Aristotle, Plato, Euclid, Pythagoras, Xenophon, Hesiod, the pre-socratic philosopher Anaxagoras, Socrates' pupil Antisthenes, Cleantes of Assos, Zeno, the mythographer Euhemerus, Heraclitus of Ephesus, Empedocles, Aristippus and Aristoxenus of Tarentum, as well as Roman

Latin authors such as Cicero (commonly as "M. Tullius" or "Tullius" as he was known to the majority of readers in the Middle Ages), Ovid, Seneca, Sallust, Cato, Varro, Quintilian, Epicurus, Cornelius Nepos, and Apulius.

2. Frater Dominicus de Sapsa, with his clumsy sixteenth- or seventeenth-century inscription on f. 202v, perhaps recording its acquisition in Rome.
3. George John Warren Vernon, 5th Baron Vernon (1803-66), Member of Parliament for Derby, friend of Sir Anthony Panizzi, and lifelong student of Dante; Vernon and Panizzi together edited and printed *Le prime quattro Edizioni della Divina Commedia letteralmente ristampate* (London, 1858), the first of a series of Vernon's privately printed editions of texts relating to Dante's works. He lived much of his life in Florence and perhaps acquired the present manuscript there. His armorial bookplate is pasted to the inside of front board. His collection was sold in Sotheby's, 10 June 1918, in which this was lot 311.
4. Wilfred Merton (1888-1957), with his bookplate, inside of front board. The manuscript was most probably bought by him in March 1942 or soon after (the date indicated by pencil markings accompanying a price code inside the front board), and later sold to Quaritch, their catalogue 699, 1952, no.91.
5. Belonged to Joost R. Ritman (b. 1941--), Dutch businessman and book collector, founder of The Ritman Library, who acquired it from Quaritch in 1992; with his bookplate, Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica, MS. 201; deaccessioned in 2011 (briefly described in *Medieval Manuscripts in Dutch Collections*, online resources).

ENDLEAVES

Front: *lower half of a leaf from a large mid-twelfth-century sermon collection; double column, remains of 12 lines in fine rounded bookhand with no biting curves.*

f. i r, [Augustine, sermo XXI for Easter; col. 1 of leaf], incipit, "domini pretiosum turbe letantur quia resurrexit ... fecit dominus exultemus et letemur in ea [sic] quomodo"; col 2, incipit, "et per ipsum [ascendamus] et ad dominum convertamur ... tristati apostoli sed tristitia in gaudio [sic] uersa";

f. i v, [Leo I, sermo VII, ch. 3; col. 1 of leaf], incipit, "dominum dominum [sic] tuam manus proprias pepercisti ... iam quatruiduanus mortuus ad vocis eius"; col 2, incipit, "hic est primogenitus dei qui ante luciferum genitus est ... quia supra dominum non contremuisti impugnatus ab hostibus [contremuisti] super";

Back: *single leaf, double column, fifty lines in an angular bookhand, small capitals touched in yellow, five larger capitals in red or blue with contrasting penwork, one partly obscured by strip of modern parchment glued to inner gutter where leaf attaches to text block.*

From a complete single leaf of a fourteenth-century wordlist descendant in part from Balbus' *Catholicon*; first entry, incipit, "Tomatulum. li. n. g. et dicitur tomatula intestina..."; concluding entry, incipit, "Tot omnis ge. pluralis numeri indeclinabile ...";

TEXT

ff. 1-26r, [title added in the margin in a contemporary or near-contemporary formal hand, *Cecilii Firmiani Lactantii diuinarum institutionem; de falsa religion. li. i. incipit*] incipit, "Magno excellenti ingenio uiri cum se doctrine penitus dedissent quicquid laboris poterant [sic] impendi ...";

ff. 26r-48r, [title added in margin as before, *De origine erroris. li. ii.*] incipit, "Quamquam primo libro religiones deorum falsas esse monstraverim; quo dii [sic], quorum varios dissimilesque cultus per universam terram ...";

ff. 48v-80r, [title added in margin as before, at end of preceding book on f. 48r, *Incipit de falsa sapientia. liber iii.*] incipit, "Uellem michi quam [sic] veritas in obscuro latere adhuc existimatur ..." [ending mid-sentence in chapter 21 on fol.66v, "Omnes enim sapientes erunt, et pecuniam ..." the scribe continuing with book V chapter 9, "...non suscipiunt, nec agnoscunt, verum etiam violenter oderunt, et persequuntur, et exterminare contendunt" to end of book V, "...Demus operam totis viribus ut mereamur a deo simul et ultionem passionis et premium." For this and two other dislocations of the text in this manuscript, most probably due to a misbinding of the exemplar, see below];

ff. 80v-106r, [title added in margin as before, at head of text, *Incipit de vero cultu. Liber iiii.*, followed by note in later humanist hand, "Liber iste vi' est totius operis"] incipit, "Quod erat officium suscepti muneris divino Spiritu instruente ...";

ff. 106r-121r, [title added in margin as before, *Incipit de vita beata. Liber Quintus*, followed by note in later humanist hand, "Liber iste vii istius operis est ..."] incipit, "Bene habet iacta sunt fundamenta ut ait eximius orator ..." [ends on f. 114r mid-sentence in chapter 9, "His itaque argumentis, quae nec Plato, nec ullus alius inuenit, animarum aeternitas ...," with the scribe continuing in error with book III chapter 21, "contempnent. Quo ergo illum comunitas ista perduxit. Matrimonia quoque inquit comunia ...," until the end of book III, "...planius tamen que religio et que sapientia vera sit liber proximus indicabit"];

ff. 121r-146v, [title added in margin as before, *Incipit de vera sapientia et religione. Liber vi.*, followed by note in later humanist hand, "Liber iste quartus est ..."] incipit, "Cogitanti michi et cum animo meo sepe reputanti prioirem illum ...";

ff. 146v-170r, [title added in margin as before, *Incipit de Iusticia. Liber vii.*, followed by note in later humanist hand, "Iste liber quintus est totius operis"] incipit, "Non est apud me dubium quin hoc opus nostrum quo singularis ille rerum conditor et huius immensi rector ...; [ending mid-sentence in book V chapter 9 on f. 153v, "quam obversantem oculis suis non tantum ...", the scribe completing the sentence with the second part of the first sentence of book VII chapter 9, "... probari ac perspici potest: quae nos breuiter collegimus" and continuing until correct end of text] ... ac deuicto aduersario triumphantes premium uirtutis quod ipse promisit a domino consequamur";

Lactantius, *De diuinarum institutionem*, edited by Brandt and Larbmann, *Opera omnia*, part II, fasc. 1, CSEL 19, pp. 1-672.

f.171r, Merobaudes, *De Christo* [here anonymous and without title] incipit, "Proles vera dei cunctisque antiquior annis ... Te potuisse mori poteris qui redere uitam";

Merobaudes, *De Christo*, edited by Vollmer, MGH: AA. 14, pp. 19-20, with a Modern English translation in Clover, 1971, pp.15-16.

f. 171v, Pseudo-Damasus, *De cognomentis Salvatoris* [here without title and identified as the work of the erroneous author Silvius/Symmachus found also in other medieval manuscripts: see Weyman, 1926, p. 59; title in large contemporary bookhand here above first line, "Item uersus silui"], incipit, "Omnipotens uis trina deus ... ad ferit ut foret qui non erat audiet orbis";

Edited by Feder, CSEL 65, p. 162.

ff. 171v-172r, excerpt of twelve lines from Paulinus of Nola, *De Obitu Celsi Pueri Panegyricus* [here without title, and identified in large contemporary bookhand above first line, "Uersus paulini"] incipit, "Si dubitas cineres in carnem posse recogi ... Pulvere de veteri stare novos homines"; followed by six lines [with note in margin in main glossing hand, "Cecilius" apparently identifying Lactantius as the author], "Summe deum sancti genitor rerumque repertor ... Ipse uelim nulli novia nemo michi / Deo gratias Amen" and a twelve line poem, in a later fifteenth-century hand, celebrating Lactantius, incipit "Natus in ausonia rabie seruente uerrina ... Nunc renouante perro sic rediuius eo";

The first text, an excerpt from Paulinus of Nola, *De Obitu Celsi Pueri Panegyricus* edited by Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 61, col. 676A.

ff. 173r-187v, [title added in the margin in a contemporary or near-contemporary formal hand, *Firmiani Lactantii de ira dei. li. incipit*], incipit "Animadverti sepe donate plurimos id existimare ... et nunquam mereamur [sic] iratum";

Lactantius, *De ira dei*; edited by Brandt and Larbmann, *Opera omnia*, part II, fasc. 1, CSEL 27, 1893, pp. 65-132.

ff. 188r-202r, [title added in margin as above, *Firmiani Lactantii de opificio hominis. li. incipit*] incipit, "Quam minime sim quietus etiam in summis necessitatibus ex hoc libelo poteris ... aliquos homines ab erroribus liberatos ad iter caeleste direxerit";

Lactantius, *De opificio hominis*; edited by Brandt and Larbmann, *Opera omnia*, part II, fasc. 1, CSEL 27, pp. 1-64.

The survival of many texts from Antiquity to the Renaissance hangs by a slim thread, but that of Merobaudes' poetic eulogy to Christ, the *De Christo* (here on fol. 171r), is among the most slender and precarious. The poem was composed ca. 430 AD., and this codex contains the only medieval manuscript witness to the text. It was previously known only from two sixteenth-century printings (that of the Franciscan scholar Joseph Camers in 1510, where it was misidentified as the work of Claudian; and the great humanist Georg Fabricius in 1564, from a manuscript with the attribution to "Merobaudes hispani scholasticus"), and a devotional manuscript compendium produced for Cardinal George d'Armagnac in 1544 (now Chantilly, Musée Condé, MS 102 [1398], see *Chantilly, Le Cabinet des Livres: manuscrits* III, no. 102, pp. 101-03), and most probably copied from the printed edition of 1510).

Merobaudes was most probably a Frankish nobleman, who owned estates at Maintenay-sur-Seine, near Troyes, and served as a military commander in Spain (on him see F. M. Clover, 1971, and S. Bodelón, 2002). Sidonius Apollinaris remembered him as a man of letters who lived on the Baetis river (now the Guadalquivir, passing through Córdoba and Seville), and Boethius in his *Commentary on Cicero's Topics* also cites him as an authority on rhetoric and

philosophy. Scholarly consensus agrees that he must be the man of the same name lauded in a fragmentary inscription found in Rome and dated 435 AD., which makes repeated allusions to his talents as a rhetorician (*Corpus inscriptionum latinarum* VI, no. 1724).

Other than the poem here, his work survives only in the lower layer of a series of palimpsest leaves in St. Gallen, Stiftsbibliothek, MS. 908 (now digitised by the e-codices project: <http://www.e-codices.unifr.ch/en/list/one/csg/0908>), which contain fragments of four laudatory poems and two panegyrics celebrating the Spanish general Flavius Aëtius, the wedding of Emperor Valentinian III and his bride Eudoxia, the birth of their first child, Eudocia, and the baptism of their daughter Placidia. For these compositions, and perhaps for service directly in the imperial court, Merobaudes received the offices of *vir clarissimus* and then *vir spectabilis* in the Senate. From here he was admitted to the Consistory, the imperial advisory council, and Valentinian III had a bronze equestrian statue raised in honour of him in the Forum of Trajan.

The text here is of some importance for the history of Early Christianity. The early fifth century followed the legalisation of Christianity by Emperor Constantine the Great in 313 and its declaration as the state religion of the Empire in 380 by only decades, but is among the darkest periods of Late Antiquity. This text was composed some fifty to eighty years after this religious transformation, and contains a deeply personal and pious voice of an educated Christian from the upper echelons of Roman society. It opens "Oh true offspring of God, older than all time, now born, but always existing ... you who saw fit to experience the adverse fortunes of life, to endure the unfamiliar limits in this body and submit to human form, so that you might make God manifest, and so that slippery uncertainty and long-deceived cleverness of a changeable world might not allow human hearts to be ignorant of their creator." It alludes to the Nativity and Christ's saving of men's souls and raising Lazarus up from the dead, before emphatically stating the author's belief in the Trinity (and thus separating himself from Arian beliefs – condemned by the Council of Nicaea in 325, but not stamped out in the Eastern Empire until the 380s and widely practised among the Germanic peoples throughout the fourth and fifth centuries). The poem ends with a rhetorical question that hints towards an audience in part only loosely Christianised: "Who could believe that you could have died for any other reason than for the sake of all – you who could give back life."

A comparison of the text with that of the two sixteenth-century printings shows that this manuscript contains the purer version of the text as otherwise found in Camers' edition of 1510 (sharing the correct readings "nescire" l. 15, "Muneris" l. 22, "Nasci" l. 23 and "redis" l. 23 with Camers' text, as well as including l. 21: "et vitiam ... lege recepti," which was omitted in the Fabricius edition of 1564), but has nine variations individual to itself that demonstrate that this is not the manuscript that served as the exemplar for that edition.

Lactantius (or Lucius Caecilius Firmianus Lactantius) was a native of Roman North Africa, a noted rhetorician and Christian apologist, advisor to Constantine the Great and tutor to his son. He was a pupil of the early Christian scholar Arnobius of Sicca (d. c. 330), and travelled widely teaching in the cities of the Eastern Empire. He was appointed to a professorship in Nicomedia by Emperor Diocletian, entering the imperial circle alongside the pagan philosopher Porphyry, where he presumably met the future emperor Constantine who held the office of military tribune in the court. It was probably there that he became a committed convert to Christianity, destroyed all his earlier writings and resigned his post and fled, fearing Diocletian's purge of Christians and the first imperial edict against the religion which was issued 24 February, 303. Jerome records that he then lived in poverty, supporting himself by his writing,

until Constantine came to power and recalled him to the imperial court in 311/13. In advanced old age, he became tutor to Constantine's son Crispus, and must have died in the 320s.

His works were neglected during the Middle Ages but rediscovered during the Renaissance when his elaborately rhetorical Latin style proved immensely popular. From the late fourteenth century he was portrayed as the ideal Christian orator, with early humanists such as Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola calling him the "Christian Cicero." Leonardo Bruni recommended Lactantius's works above all others: "But the greatest of all those who have ever written of the Christian religion, the one who excels them all with his brilliance and richness of expression, is Lactantius Firmianus, without doubt the most eloquent of all Christian authors ...". The *Opera omnia* of his works (1465) was among the very first books printed in Italy by Sweynheim and Pannartz, and the first to use a Greek alphabet font. Lactantius was one of the most frequently published patristic authors, with fifteen further editions produced in the fifteenth century, and 112 by 1800.

The first work here, his *Divinarum institutionum libri VII* (the Divine Institutions), is his vast *magnum opus*, written during his period of imperial exile. It is composed of seven books which set out a systematic exposition of Christian theology, and build an argument intended to show the reasonableness and truth of Christianity and the futility of pagan beliefs. It was through this work that most Renaissance readers came into contact with the Latin Classics, and he includes substantial quotations from two lost works by Cicero, the *Hortensius* and *Consolatio*, and he knew and quoted a complete copy of Cicero's *De Legibus*, a text which now survives only in a fragmentary state (see Ogilvie, 1978, pp. 59-63). Book IV of the *Divinarum institutionum* also includes some seventy-three quotations from the Old Latin Bible (*Vetus Latina*), with important variants for Luke 3:22 where the text is conflated with Psalm 2:7 as in other *Vetus Latina* witnesses and the Codex Bezae, and John 1:1-3, where Lactantius uses "verbum" rather than "sermo" as a translation of λόγος, agreeing with Western witnesses rather than Eastern or African (these quotations tabulated by Ogilvie, 1978, pp. 98-100). The second work in this volume, the *De ira dei* (The Anger of God), discusses the problem of how to understand the anger attributed to God in the text of the Old Testament. Through the Classical model, which allowed for an emotional and even vengeful god, Lactantius interprets God's anger as just punishment of mankind. The last, his *De opificio dei* (The Works of God), is an apologetic treatise, written during Diocletian's persecution, briefly setting out the Christian principles which would later grow into the *Divinarum institutionum*.

The explosion of humanist interest in Lactantius results in over 150 surviving manuscripts of these texts, overwhelmingly of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. However most are in institutional collections, and they appear rarely on the market. Since 1956, the Schoenberg Database lists only seven manuscripts containing the *Divinarum institutionum*, and three also containing the *De ira dei* and the *De opificio dei*.

The exemplar of this manuscript deserves particular mention as it may well have been among the earliest and most important copies of these works. It beggars belief that a compiler, working c. 1400, should place an early fifth-century poem by Merobaudes, an excerpt from a poem by Paulinus, bishop of Nola (c. 354-431), and another by pseudo-Damasus which though unrecorded until the ninth century (Weyman, 1926, p. 59) is most probably of a similar date, alongside the principal works of the early fourth-century scholar Lactantius. This appears even more so, when we take into account the fact that Merobaudes' poem is anonymous in the present manuscript, and he remained unknown and unstudied until the nineteenth century. It is more probable that these short works were already at the end of the exemplar he used for

Lactantius' *Divinarum institutionum*, and were blindly copied into this manuscript. The exemplar may well have been an extremely old manuscript at the dawn of the fifteenth century, perhaps a Carolingian copy of the ninth or tenth century (only five manuscripts of the *Divinarum institutionum* of this date survive) or even a Late Antique copy of the fifth or sixth century (only two manuscripts from this period survive, one the lower layer of another palimpsest in St. Gallen, Stiftsbibliothek).

LITERATURE

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ONLINE RESOURCES

The Ritman Library (Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica)

<http://www.ritmanlibrary.com/collection/collection-profile/>

Digitisation of Migne's Patrologia Latina editions of the works of Lactantius:

http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/30_10_0240-0320-_Lactantius.html

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