

GIOVANNI BOCCACCIO, *Elegia di Madonna Fiammetta*; Unidentified Comic Novella
In Italian, illuminated manuscript on paper
Central Italy (Pesaro?), signed and dated 1458

140 + i (parchment) folios on paper (with watermark similar to Briquet 8429, "Lettre N": Pisa, 1459, 1462-63), traces of earlier foliation in brown ink, top outer recto, 3 and 68, on what are now ff. 1 and 70, modern foliation in pencil, top outer recto, 1-140, missing two leaves at the beginning and an uncertain number of leaves at the end (collation, i¹⁰[-1, -2, with some loss of text, 7, loose and pasted to 8] ii-xiii¹⁰ xiv⁸⁺⁴[now a quire of 8 with four added leaves, pasted in out of order at the beginning of this quire, ff. 129-132, original structure uncertain, but almost certainly missing one or two leaves at the end]), horizontal catchwords on the inner lower margin, paper almost imperceptibly ruled with hardpoint or ruling board (justification 138 x 86 mm.), written in a neat humanistic cursive script with some lingering Gothic features in light brown ink a single column of 28 lines, guide letters for initials, rubrics written in a faded red ink, two- to three-line initials of red or blue set off slightly to the left of the text, EIGHT ILLUMINATED INITIALS of three to four lines in burnished gold on grounds of deep blue and pink with white penwork (ff. 1, 22v, 34v, 44, 48, 114, 123v, 135v), on f. 86v three-line space left for illuminated initial, on f. 138v six lines left for rubric and four-line space left for initial, delicately flourished pointing hands throughout (possibly in the scribe's hand), on f. 111 a different hand has added two words skipped by the scribe between recto and verso, some of the illuminated initials are slightly smeared (ff. 34v, 44, 114, 123v), f. 42 has been neatly patched in the outer margin, slight waterstaining and worming with no damage to the text. CONTEMPORARY ITALIAN BINDING of brown leather blind-tooled with three concentric triple-fillet rectangular frames with diagonal triple fillets connecting the corners of the middle and innermost frames, enclosing additional double-fillet tooling and with the innermost frame enclosing a triple-fillet tooled lozenge, blind-stamped with interlocking rope designs and annular dots, over bevelled wooden boards with three double bands, with eight small bosses, remains of one of two fore-edge clasps on lower board, engraved with a paschal lamb, with three nail holes indicating where the other clasp was attached to the lower board and protruding nails on upper board indicating where the corresponding parts of the clasp were attached, four protruding nails in a rectangle at the top of the upper board may be the remains of a name plate, paper label on spine with slight tear, inscribed "Boccaccio / Fiammetta / M SS / 14[52/ 8?]," upper edge of the volume inscribed "FIAMETTA," front and back parchment pastedowns with back pastedown continuous with flyleaf, cropped, with writing on both sides in at least two Gothic cursive hands, partially scraped away on the flyleaf (f. i^v), damage to the bands at the junction between the spine and lower board such that the lower board and final quire are partially detached, some worming to leather and boards with several patches of leather lost on the upper board. Dimensions 220 x 133 mm.

This manuscript contains the psychologically vivid narrative recounting a woman's destructive passion by the distinguished Italian writer and humanist Giovanni Boccaccio. The copy is attractive and elegantly executed copy, signed and dated by its scribe, and preserved in a contemporary binding. The unidentified comic novella that follows, although now ending imperfectly, will surely repay further study. Copies of the *Elegia* are relatively uncommon outside of Italian collections and only three are currently found in North American libraries.

PROVENANCE

1. A scribal colophon on f. 138 provides a date and probable localization for this manuscript's completion: "Consumatum hoc opus manu mey Laurentij Nannis olim de Vgubio. Ciuis pisauri die xxij nouembris 1458 tempore dominj nostrj dominj pij pape tertij [sic] sub dominio Illustris ducis nostrj Allexandrj sforza" (This work finished by the

hand of myself, Laurentius Nannis, formerly of Gubbio, citizen of Pesaro, on the twelfth day of November, 1458, in the time of our lord, the lord Pope Pius the Third [this is presumably an error; Pius II was pope in 1458 whereas Pius III was pope in 1503] during the rule of our illustrious Duke Alessandro Sforza). The same Laurentius Nannis identified himself in another manuscript he copied in the previous year, Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Z 123 sup. (completed on 16 November 1457). Like this manuscript, the Biblioteca Ambrosiana manuscript features Boccaccio's work, specifically his *Corbaccio*. It also contains *Urbano*, a work that was for a time spuriously attributed to Boccaccio, alongside a brief, unidentified narrative and panegyric verses by Niccolò d'Arezzo Cieco. Nannis's self-identification here as a citizen of Pesaro, as well as his acknowledgment of the lordship of Alessandro Sforza, lord of Pesaro from 1445 to 1473, suggests that this manuscript was copied in that city or its environs. Notably, the unidentified novella at the end of this manuscript takes the region as its setting, indicating that its events transpire "in una citta della marcha" (f. 138v).

In its overall aspect and motifs this manuscript's binding is Italian, characteristic of the second half of the fifteenth-century, all of which suggests that this manuscript was bound not long after it was copied. It may have passed up the coast into northeastern Italy by this time, however. Its stamps bear the closest resemblance to those found in Venetian bindings of the period (see De Marinis, 1960, vol. 2: no. 1492, Venice 1471; no. 1606, Venice c. 1483; no. 1615, Venice 1489).

The parchment pastedowns and back flyleaf (continuous with the back pastedown) all derive from the same source, a record of payments(?) listing names, dates, and amounts paid(?). Names listed include, on the front pastedown, "Donna Matiola uxor olim Bonçolinj," "Nicolutius Blaxij," "Johannes Blaxij," and "Donna Catalina Muciarellj"; on the recto of the back flyleaf, "Petrus Francisschinj," "Andriolus Anestasij," "Heres(?) Giorgij de Faentia [Faenza] / Jacobus Giorgij poss[idendum?/essor?] nomine dicte heredis," and "Anthonius Fosschinj"; and, on the back pastedown, "Bartolinus Marescalcus," "Petrus Pisiachara Becanius," "Samperolus Muciolj," "Jacobellus Bothachiamus(?)," and "Johannes Amatoris." Further research on these names might yield further information on the manuscript's early whereabouts.

2. A Latin inscription on the recto of the back flyleaf, "Res est solliciti plena timoris amor" (Love is a thing full of anxious fear), was likely added by an early owner or reader of the manuscript. This line of verse comes from the first of Ovid's *Heroides*, from Penelope to Ulysses (I.12). Boccaccio's *Elegia* is heavily indebted to the *Heroides*, as this reader appears to have appreciated.
3. There is a partially effaced inscription in a fifteenth- or sixteenth-century humanistic cursive, upside down on the verso of the back flyleaf, "porto magh[era(?)]," alongside a list of numbers in series of three (more financial book-keeping, perhaps?). This might refer to Porto Marghera, suggesting that the manuscript was in Venetian hands at this time. All of these have been written over an area of parchment in which the earlier list of names was scraped away.

TEXT

ff. 1-138, [prologue, begins imperfectly], "//la tremante mano alla presente opera et cusi la facciamo possente che quali nella mente io ho sentite et sento langoscie cotale luna proferi le parole laltra piu a tale officio uolenterosa che forte la scriua"; [f. 1], *Capitolo primo nel quale la donna*

descriue chi essa fusse et per quali signiali li suoi futuri mali li fussero premostrati et in che tempo et doue et in che modo et di cui ella se innamorasse col seguito diletto, incipit, "Nel tempo nel quale la reuestita terra piu che tutto laltro anno si mostra bella ..."; ... [f. 135v], Capitolo 9° ultimo nel quale madonna fiammetta parla al libro suo imponendoli in che habito et quando et a cui elli debba andare et da cui guardarsi et fa fine, incipit, "O piccolo mio libretto tratto quasi de la sepultura della tua donna ... Viue adunque nullo ti po di questo priuare et exemplo eterno alli felici et a misari dimori delle anghosce della tua donna. Lavs deo. Consumatum hoc opus manu mey Laurentij Nannis olim de Vgubio. Cuius pisauri die xxij nouembris 1458 tempore dominj nostrj dominj pij pape tertij [sic] sub dominio Illustris ducis nostrj Allexandrj sforza";

Giovanni Boccaccio, *Elegia di Madonna Fiammetta*. Four leaves in chapter 8 (beginning f. 123) are now bound out of order. Based on their textual contents, their intended order would be ff. 131-132, 130, 129. No text is missing. Giovanni Boccaccio composed his *Elegia di Madonna Fiammetta* between the years of 1343 and 1344. The text has been edited in a number of modern editions, most recently that of Carlo Delcorno (1994). The *Elegia* was popular in the centuries following its composition and was widely copied in manuscript form. Delcorno (1983-84) lists 70 surviving manuscripts, though this manuscript and two others—one formerly in the collection of Cortland Field Bishop (De Ricci II.1658) and one formerly in the collection of Sir Thomas Phillipps (his MS 243; subsequently TM 116, now at Dartmouth University)—are not included in his list. Over three quarters of these manuscripts (55 by my count) are housed in Italian libraries, while three are held in North American libraries. Six copies of the *Elegia* have been on the market in the last century, three of which are now held in public collections and three of which remain in private hands. The text was first printed in Padua in 1472 (Hain 3291; *Gesamtkatalog der Wiegendrucke* 04456) and was reprinted in Northern Italy and in Naples in 1480 (*Gesamtkatalog* 04457-58) and in Venice in 1480, 1481, and 1491 (Hain 3292-94; *Gesamtkatalog* 04459-60). A Castilian translation of the *Elegia* was printed in Salamanca in 1497 (*Gesamtkatalog* 04461). The work continued in frequent print and in additional translations after 1500. A brief collation with the Delcorno edition reveals some slight variations in orthography, but otherwise this careful copy of the *Elegia* follows the text closely. The scribe has twice omitted a word in the transition from one folio to the next (once between ff. 49v and 50 and once between f. 111 recto and verso).

ff. 138v-140v, incipit, "[...?]v gia non molto tempo passato in una citta della marcha ... e tu intrassi nel letto come vno leone affamato e abbracciassi me e basiassi me come se mai da te pui non fusse stata ueduta ne//"

This unidentified Italian novella recounts a bawdy comic tale of a miller, a young man, and his wife. As in the other manuscript copied by this scribe (see Provenance, above), it seems that he is offering an assortment of different types of literature. Here the comic novella offers a lighter "love triangle" (the text seems somewhat akin to the Reeve's Tale/*Decameron* 9,6 in its nocturnal sexual misadventures, but with fewer characters), perhaps to offset the melancholy of the *Elegia*. The setting in the Marches might also indicate some tailoring of the texts to suit the manuscript's prospective owner. Further research on the identity and contents of this short text is certainly called for.

Giovanni Boccaccio, prominent Renaissance humanist, eminent figure in Italian letters, and friend and correspondent of Petrarch, was born in Tuscany (in Certaldo or Florence) in 1313, the illegitimate son of Boccaccino da Certaldo, a wealthy merchant. He received his early education in Florence, and following his father's relocation to Naples in 1327 he began studying canon law at the University of Naples in 1330. While at the university Boccaccio was able to

pursue his humanistic and literary interests, and within a few years he was producing some of his early work in Latin and Italian. He abandoned law for writing and moved back to Florence early in 1341, having already produced some works for which he is well known, including the *Filostrato* (c. 1335), an Italian verse tragedy, *Filocolo* (1336-38), a long Italian prose romance, and the *Teseida delle nozze d'Emilia* (1339-41), a twelve-book poem which Boccaccio pronounced the first martial epic in Italian.

Transitioning from works set in the classical world to those set in his own contemporary world, Boccaccio composed the *Elegia di Madonna Fiammetta* (1343-44), which straddles both worlds and sets aside the external orientation of the earlier literary modes favored by Boccaccio to depict "the secret mutation of a soul from one state to another" (Branca, 1976, p. 68). After witnessing the devastation of the 1348 outbreak of the bubonic plague in Florence, Boccaccio would go on to write his best known work, the *Decameron* (1349-51), which is a vast Italian prose frame narrative set in the midst of the plague. During that time he also became quite active in Florence's humanist circles and as a Florentine ambassador. He continued to write prolifically, producing, among other things, two Latin prose biography collections – *De Casibus Virorum Illustrium* (c. 1355-1360) and *De mulieribus claris* (1361-62) – and several works on Dante, for whose work he cherished a lifelong love. Boccaccio died in Certaldo in 1375.

The *Elegia di Madonna Fiammetta* tells the story of a beautiful and wealthy Neapolitan lady, Fiammetta, who falls passionately in love with a handsome young Florentine merchant whom she calls Panfilo, with whom she embarks upon an extramarital affair. He eventually concocts an excuse to leave Naples, and the rest of the *Elegia* traces Fiammetta's internal state as she gradually realizes that the fickle Panfilo has left her for another woman and as she struggles to extricate herself from her passion. Ultimately, she offers her book as a cautionary exemplum to future female readers.

The importance of women in the *Elegia* is evident in other works by Boccaccio as well. We can see this in his prominent literary depictions of women in *De mulieribus claris*, which adapts the literary model of the collected lives of famous men to recount the lives of famous women. His repeated choice to employ a female narrative voice is perhaps even more interesting, both in the *Decameron*, which includes a number of female narrators and was dedicated to women in love, and in the work included in this manuscript. Boccaccio wrote the *Elegia* solely in the voice of its protagonist, Fiammetta, and used Fiammetta's perspective to create what may be the earliest novel invested in the psychologies and realism of its middle-class characters. The text draws on the model of Ovid's *Heroides* – a series of epistolary poems written in the voices of mythological and literary heroines mistreated by their lovers – to give voice to Fiammetta's lamentation over lost love.

The *Elegia* was an enormously popular and influential text in the two centuries that followed its composition. Both its classical erudition and its elegant prose appealed to humanist readers of the fifteenth century, and many of the surviving manuscript copies date from this period. The text's use as stylistic model for young scholars and its influence on fifteenth-century poets like Poliziano and Pietro Bembo also contributed to its popularity with fifteenth-century readers, and it had even earlier imitators in writers of prose romances like the *Historia de duobus amantibus* of Enea Silvio Bartolomeo Piccolomini (later Pius II), the *Nicolosa bella* of Gianotto Calogrosso, and the anonymous *Panfilia*. Frequently reprinted in the sixteenth-century, the *Elegia* continued to exert a stylistic influence in Italian letters. It also circulated and was translated outside of Italy; it had a significant impact on the sentimental literature of Spain and France and, particularly in France, appealed to a growing audience of female readers. By the end of the sixteenth century it

had reached as far as Elizabethan England, where Bartholomew Young produced a translation, *Amorous Fiammetta*, in 1587.

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