

ALDUS MANUTIUS THE YOUNGER, *De antiquis numerorum notis* [Concerning ancient writing of numbers]; *Interprætatio numerorum quibus in ratione pecuniaria veteres utebantur* [The meaning of numbers which the ancients used in monetary reckoning]

In Latin and Italian, manuscript on paper

Northeastern Italy, Veneto (Vicenza? Venice?), c. 1550-1575

6 folios on paper (with watermark similar to Briquet no. 51, "Agneau pascal": Vicenza, 1551, Carniola, 1551 and no. 52, "Agneau pascal": Vicenza 1556), modern foliation in pencil, top outer recto, 1-6, complete (collation, i<sup>o</sup>), ruled with full-length vertical bounding lines produced by folding the leaves lengthwise into quarters, text written in brown ink in an elegant, slanted humanistic cursive script in one or two columns of twenty-five lines (ff. 1-3v written in one column; ff. 4-6v written in two columns), diagrammatic tables or charts on ff. 1 (letter M), and 4-6v (on monetary quantities), in very fine condition. Bound in contemporary, slightly waterstained. Dimensions 211 x 60 mm.

This elegant and fascinating humanistic booklet contains unique manuscript copies of two short arithmetic treatises by Aldus Manutius the Younger, classical scholar, printer, and owner of the eminent Aldine Press. These texts were quite possibly copied before either was first printed, and the second treatise displays some significant differences from the print version. Both are worth closer study as early works of classical scholarship, for their connection to the Manutius family, and as possible witnesses to Manutius's compositions before they went to press.

## PROVENANCE

1. Evidence of script, watermarks, and ruling practice all point to this manuscript's origin in Italy in the second half of the sixteenth century. The watermarks suggest that it was produced in the Veneto region around or just after the middle of the century. One of these texts was printed in the name of Aldus Manutius the Younger in 1575 and the other in 1576. Given the date of the watermarks, it seems very likely that both of these texts were copied here before the first of them was first printed. It would therefore be worth investigating whether this manuscript was copied by or at the behest of Manutius himself. Both texts are presented here in clean, handsome copies and the scribe has imitated some of the *mise-en-page* common to printed books of the period.
2. Private European Collection.

## TEXT

ff. 1-2, *De Antiquis Numerorum Notis*, incipit, "Numerorum notas ueteres uariarunt . . . vnde M. deriuatum, quo pro mille quoque hodie utimur, cum olim nota non litera";

This text was included in the *Epitome orthographiæ* of Aldus Manutius the Younger, first printed in 1575 by the Aldine press in Venice (pp. 201-5 in that edition). There Manutius identifies his father as his source: "Sumpta ex Paulli Patris Commentario in Epistolas Ciceronis Familiares, Epistolarum. Lib. II" (p. 201). In the 1575 edition this brief text immediately follows the content reprinted from Manutius's earlier publication, *Orthographiæ ratio* (1561). A collation of this text with that of the 1575 edition reveals only a few minor variations.

f. 2v, blank;

ff. 3-6v, *Interpretatio Numerorum Quibus in ratione pecuniaria veteres utebantur*, incipit, "Quattrino. Quadrans, qui erat quarta pars Assis ... 300000, millioni. Centies millies millies. Trecenties millies centena millia."

This text was printed under the title *De sestertiis, ad Johannem Cratonem a Crafftheim* in the *De quaesitis per epistolam* of Aldus Manutius the Younger, first printed by the Aldine Press in 1576 in Venice (book 3, pp. 81-86 in that edition). The printed version includes a brief prefatory dedication to Johannes Crato von Krafftheim (1519-1585), a German humanist and court physician. No such preface precedes the text copied here. In other respects, the edition presents a somewhat simplified version of the text found here, particularly in its tables presenting the relative value of Roman and Italian coinage, specifically, the Roman *sestertii* and Italian *scudi*; unlike the printed tables, the tables on ff. 4-6v include references to monetary quantities mentioned in classical sources as well as Italian translations of some of the large numbers written out in Latin.

Aldus Manutius the Younger was born in 1547 in Venice, the first son of Paulus Manutius and Caterina Odoni. Paulus Manutius was then running the Aldine Press, founded by his own father, the famous printer Aldus Manutius. The younger Aldus Manutius was precocious in his youth, beginning in the family business while embarking on his lifelong career as a published author, all at the age of eleven: his first book, *Eleganze della lingua toscana e latina* was published in 1558 and his second, *Orthographiae ratio* in 1561. It has been suggested that Paulus Manutius, a respected scholar in his own right, not only encouraged but was involved in these early efforts. Still, after Paulus Manutius left Venice in 1561 at the pope's invitation to set up shop in Rome, Aldus Manutius managed the Aldine Press in Venice and continued to publish his own work and annotated editions of classical texts at regular intervals, sometimes to the detriment of his administrative responsibilities. At his father's death in 1574, the press was left to him. He published his *Epitome orthographiae* (1575) shortly before taking a lectureship in Venice in 1576 and published his *De quaesitis per epistolam* in that same year. He would spend the next twenty years writing, publishing, and holding lectureships in various northern Italian cities and in Rome. His marriage to Francesca Lucrezia Giunti in 1572 allied him to another prominent family of printers, but he left no heirs to run the Aldine Press after his death in 1597.

Manutius printed both of these short treatises within collections of his works offering a variety of highly specific information pertaining to the classical world. His *Epitome orthographiae* contains an assortment of pieces devoted to Latin spelling and systems of notation, while the texts collected in his *De Quaesitis per Epistolam* address a wider range of subjects of historical interest, from the toga to the liberal arts to the various bodies of water that once flowed into the city of Rome. *De antiquis numerorum notis*, like other texts within the *Epitome*, has a practical function, identifying all of the numerals used in the Roman system and furnishing a careful explanation of how that system works. Manutius concludes in a less practical vein with an account of how the numerals came to take their present forms. The *Interpretatio numerorum* offers several reckonings of comparative value between ancient and modern coinage, but focuses chiefly on the Roman *sestertius* because, as Manutius notes, "it pleased the ancients to name *sestertii* more than other coins in monetary reckoning." He devotes most of the text to assessing the comparative value of *sestertii* and *scudi*, the currency of comparable prominence in sixteenth-century Italian reckonings. One of the engaging aspects of this text absent from the 1576 edition are the references throughout to passages in classical texts -- including those of Suetonius, Cicero, Valerius Maximus, Pliny, Strabo, and Plutarch -- that include monetary reckonings in *sestertii*. Thus, for example, Manutius notes that the pearl that Julius Caesar gave as a gift to his mistress Servilia, valued at 6 million

*sestertii* in Suetonius's account, would have cost 180,000 *scudi*. Asides such as this suggest that this treatise could be used as a handy reference for readers of classical Latin texts, in which capacity the accompanying treatise on Roman numerals would have served a complementary purpose.

In conclusion, it may be useful to note that this does not look like a printer's copy (the presentation is very clean and there are no marginal notes or corrections) and, as mentioned above, there are other indications that suggest this was not copied from the printed editions. Both manuscript texts are slightly more elaborate than the print versions, and the print versions seem more likely to have subtracted these elaborations than a scribe would have been to add them. For example, in the first text where the manuscript identifies five earlier forms of the numeral used to signify 1000, the print edition has to approximate several with the type available; unless the scribe were independently knowledgeable of the history of the numeral M, it seems unlikely that he could have known how to transcribe some of the print approximations. (Also, the manuscript contains a diagram containing six earlier forms of the numeral that does not appear in the printed edition.) As mentioned above, the opening section of the second treatise makes reference in both manuscript and print versions to sums of *sestertii* found in classical books, but only the manuscript actually contains these references. Certainly the possibility that the texts preserved here are versions that predate the printed texts is an exciting one, and one that call for further investigation.

## LITERATURE

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