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PERSIUS, *Satires*, with extensive glosses; JOHANNES BRITANNICUS, *Commentary on Persius*; PLINY THE YOUNGER, *Epistulae*

Latin manuscript on paper

Italy (Cortona, Tuscany), after 1481 (likely after 1486 and before 1494)

ii parchment + 20 paper + ii parchment folios, outer parchment flyleaves a folded fourteenth-century document which comprised an original informal binding, single watermark at center fold of bifolium ff. 15-18 of three hills enclosed in a circle surmounted by a cross similar to Briquet 11931 (Pisa, 1479 and 1489, Pistoia, 1483-92, Palermo, 1484), modern foliation including paper flyleaves penciled in upper recto corners or outer margin on heavily annotated folios, missing two leaves (collation i¹² [beginning f. 2; missing a bifolium before this quire, with loss of text] ii⁶, plus ff. 1 and 20, bifolium wrapped around quires 1 and 2), ruled faintly in brownish-red ink wash, written in brown ink in 17-19 long lines by a single scribe in Humanist semi-cursive, virtually all marginal and interlinear space filled with unruled notes in a tiny Humanist cursive by the same scribe, slightly larger initials at beginning of each line decorated occasionally with split bars, one chapter title written in majuscules in red ink (f. 4), chipped corners and edges with no interruption of main text but some loss of marginal notes, some discoloration, spotting, original ink blots throughout, one minor hole unaffecting text on f. 12, extensive wear to outer surfaces and edges of folded parchment flyleaves, quires once tacketed together and to the document used as a wrapper, now unattached, but overall in fair condition. Slightly later (sixteenth century?) envelope-style limp parchment binding comprised of a single blank parchment sheet with all edges folded inwards and a curved-edge flap, twisted parchment and wood toggle fastened to center of front cover, spine reinforced with two strips of dark brown leather (now broken at inner spine), quires once tacketed to the cover, now completely unattached from book block, spots of modern paste on outer front cover and spine, outer cover worn with staining and discoloration, some cracking at spine, minor chipping on all edges, five lines of indecipherable text and large decorative 'B' on back cover, "1510 1511" (?) on front cover, indecipherable text, probably the title, written down the spine, overall in fair condition. Dimensions 220 x 145 mm.

This textbook uniquely documents the practice of education in the Renaissance. Written by a student in late fifteenth-century Italy, it contains a rare copy of the *Satires* of Persius with lecture notes packing the margins and filling spaces between lines. Some of these notes repeat commentaries of Johannes Britannicus (published 1481-1486), showing how contemporary works informed university teaching. Others are clearly the individual reflections of the student. Intact in its original binding, this manuscript provides a fascinating window into the Renaissance classroom.

PROVENANCE

1. Details of the text of the commentary, and the watermark, suggest a date after 1481, and likely after 1486, for this owner-produced manuscript copied by an Italian student who filled most of the blank spaces on every folio with an extensive gloss in tiny script. The document serving as its cover provides evidence which points to an origin in Cortona, Tuscany (discussed below).

Some of the manuscript's gloss (although not the text of the *Satires* themselves) is derived from the commentary by Johannes Britannicus (Brescia, 1481 and 1486), the second edition of which was printed by his brother Jacobus and enjoyed a wider audience than the first. The earlier popular commentary by Bartholomaeus Fontius (Florence, 1477) does not appear to have been a source. Both the Britannicus and Fontius commentaries were combined with one erroneously attributed to Persius's contemporary Cornutus and printed by Giovanni Tacuino in his *Persius cum tribus comentariis* (Venice, 1494 and 1499). As the gloss in our manuscript follows neither Fontius nor Cornutus, it suggests contact with the 1481 edition or, more likely, the 1486 edition of Britannicus alone, and not the 1494 or 1499 compilation of the three commentaries. As such, this manuscript most certainly dates after 1481, probably after 1486, and possibly (but not certainly) before 1494. This approximate production period agrees with the manuscript's watermark. Much of the gloss appears to be impromptu and is unidentified; this might indicate that the scribe transcribed commentary as it was spoken aloud, perhaps in a classroom setting.

The parchment flyleaves, made from a large sheet folded in half and then used as an outer bifolium, was the booklet's original binding. It reads on the outermost surface, in what is probably a sixteenth-century hand, "Explicit liber persii Deo gratia" and "est finito," along with some indecipherable notes or pen-trials written over the worn-off original text. Now loose from the limp binding, the parchment sheet can be unfolded to reveal a series of court judgements from Cortona, Tuscany, written in a documentary hand and dated to the fourteenth century. The left-hand side of each entry is scored through, perhaps as they were transferred to another record before this sheet was discarded. Cortona is the likely origin of this manuscript; a pen-trial, perhaps by the main scribe's hand, on f. 20v also mentions Cortona.

2. In the sixteenth century, owned by two men who added their *ex libris*: a Christofono bello Guido Carissimo (f. 19v), and Giovanni da Casentino (f. 20v), both of whom are further unknown but have left pen-trials on various folios throughout the manuscript. Christofono added "Yhesus" and "Maria" repeatedly at the head or tail of several folios and may be the scribe of Pliny the Younger's letters on ff. 18v-19v.

TEXT

f. 1, incipit, "Stat contra ratio in quasi adversaria parata est ... id est auro sub se es habente Sequenda ..." [ends abruptly];

Johannes Britannicus, *Commentarii in Persium* (Venice 1486, c iii [digitized edition pp. 56-57]). The commentary runs from "Stat contra ration" to "Ne qua subaerato mendosum tinniat auro?", ll. 96-106 of *Satire V*. This is the only part of the *Satires* for which an identified commentary appears continuously in this manuscript. Space in the upper and lower margins is filled with pen-trials.

f. 1v, incipit, "Thios [an]athematos id est deus immortalis ... Semper rogare rogata tenere tenta docere // Hec tria discipulum faciunt superare magistrum," etc.;

Several hands leave a variety of single Latin words, notes, and adages on f. 1v. The first four lines, set in verse, by the manuscript's main scribe are connected to Johannes Britannicus' commentary on *Satire IV*, l. 13 (see Venice 1486 d iii [digitized edition p. 44]). They may also be linked to an adage published by Erasmus in his *Collectanea Adagiorum*, first printed in Paris in 1500. While the opening of the second group of five consecutive lines is unidentified, the final

two lines (beginning "Semper") are a common Latin proverb (Wegeler, 1869, no. 643, p. 49). Single familiar lines are scattered around the folio, including "Non est vivere sed valere vita" (Martial, here misattributed to Varro), "Longa dies homini docuit parere leones" (Tibullus), and "Solertem tu me crede puella facis" (Ovid).

ff. 2-3v, incipit, "//Vos opatricius sanguis quos vivere fas est ... His mane edictum post prandia calliroendo [sic]";

Persius, *Satire I*, beginning imperfectly with line 61, with abundant gloss written in the margins from gutter to folio edge in a tiny script, including both simple interpretations of single words and more complex analysis of the poem's content. It does not seem to be derived the commentary by Johannes Britannicus (cf. Venice, 1486, b ii-b vi [digitized edition pp. 18-26]). *Satire I*, presented as a dialogue between Persius and a friend, connects his perceived devolution of Roman literature to declining morality and calls on his reader to reject current literature in favor of masters of the past.

ff. 4-5v, *SATYRA SECVNDA*, incipit, "Hunc macrine diem numera meliore lapillo ... Hec cedo ut admoveam templis et farre litabo";

Persius, *Satire II*, accompanied by extensive glossing, written by the same hand but applied in layers as though he had returned to the text multiple times; some of the gloss does accord with that of Britannicus (cf. Venice, 1486, b vi-c iii [digitized edition pp. 26-32]). *Satire II* uses the scene of a birthday party to critique the hypocrisy of praying for wealth and health while living wastefully and overindulgently and plotting superstitiously instead of enjoying the rewards of a moral life.

ff. 5v-9, *SATYRA TERTIA*, [f. 6] incipit, "Nempe hoc assidue [sic] iam clarum mane fenestras ... non sani esse hominis, non sanus iuret Orestes";

Persius, *Satire III*. Although the manuscript's orthography and abbreviations do not agree directly with the poem's text as found in Britannicus' 1486 commentary edition, they do share the unusual placement of the third *Satire*'s chapter title: it is placed at the end of *Satire II*'s text, while *Satire III*'s incipit follows on the next folio. This may indicate a connection between the manuscript and the printed edition despite their variances elsewhere. Some of the gloss agrees with that of Britannicus (cf. Venice, 1486, c iii-d ii [digitized edition pp. 34-42]). Notably, f. 7 (*Satire III*, ll. 39-57) contains very little gloss, unlike the rest of the poem, as though the scribe had missed a lecture or referred to a book with missing pages. In the third *Satire*, Persius uses medical metaphors to first deride himself for poor conduct while knowing better and continues by scorning those not yet enlightened by (Stoic) philosophy.

ff. 9-10, *Satyra Quarta*, incipit, "Rem populi tractas: barbatum haec crede magistrum ... tecum habita noris quam sit tibi curta supellex";

Persius, *Satire IV*. Although this is the shortest poem of the collection, these folios are the particularly heavily glossed, making the main text appear 'lost' within the extensive smaller annotations. Despite their abundance, none appear to derive directly from the abovementioned published commentaries. *Satire IV* is a commentary on self-awareness: one's own opinion of

himself is the only opinion that matters, and self-worth must be based on virtue alone, not wealth or fame.

ff. 10v-15, *SATYRra Quinta*, incipit, "Vatibus hic mos est centum sibi poscere voces ... et centum Graecos curto centusse licetur";

Persius, *Satire V*, accompanied by a substantial gloss, much of which derives from Britannicus (cf. Venice, 1486, d v-f i [digitized edition pp. 48-64]), with the exception of part of f. 13v and most of f. 14 (*Satire V*, ll. 130-153), which includes almost no gloss. *Satire V* praises Cornutus as a teacher, philosopher, and friend, and reflects on both the Stoic premise that all men (but the Stoics) are slaves to vice, and the meaning of true freedom (*libertas*).

ff. 15-17v, *Satyra Sexta*, incipit, "Admovit iam bruma foco te basse, Sabino? ... Inventus chryssippe tui finitor acervi; A. Persii Flacci Satyrorum Finis"; [f. 18 blank];

Persius, *Satire VI*, begins with extensive glossing, but it diminishes to almost nothing by line 22. There are no obvious references to Britannicus. *Satire VI* masquerades as a letter from Persius to Bassus, and presents a hypothetical dialogue with his own future heir: while not living extravagantly, Persius intends to enjoy a comfortable life, and the heir should be satisfied with whatever wealth is left behind. Whether the poem is complete has been the source of much scholarly debate.

ff. 18v-19v, *Plinius Septitio [Claro suo] S[alutem dicit]*, incipit, "Heus tu! promictis ad coenam: nec venis? ... mihi semper excusa; Vale"; [f. 19 blank]; f. 19v, *C. Plinius Cornelio tacito suo S[alutem dicit]*, incipit, "Idebis [sic for Videbis] et licet rideas ... quam Minervam inerrare. Vale."; "Preferri potuit et foemina nulla Lycori ... Tempora quid faciunt: hanc volo: te volui";

Pliny the Younger (c. 62-113 CE), *Epistulae*, Book I, Letters 15 and 6, added by a near-contemporary hand. In the first letter, from Pliny the Younger to Septicius Clarus, Pliny chides his friend for not coming to dinner and recounts the extravagant meal and entertainment he missed out on. The second letter, from Pliny to Tacitus, is about a hunting episode during which he was inspired to 'jot down notes' on his tablets. Pliny's letters were embraced in fifteenth-century Italy not only for their account of administration and day-to-day life in first-century Rome, but also as admired models of rhetorical style (on the manuscript tradition of the *Epistulae*, see Merrill, 1915). The first printed version, edited by Ludovico Carbone and printed by Christoph Valdarfer, appeared in Venice in 1471; it included only selected letters. The text of these two letters does not correspond to the *editio princeps*. The four-line poem by another hand following Pliny's Letter I.6 is a variant of Martial's epigram VI.40.

f. 20rv, pen-trials by several fifteenth- and sixteenth-century hands, including the main scribe and the scribe of Pliny's letters (Christofono bello Guido Carissimo), in Latin and Italian. These are sometimes single words, and in other instances, phrases and extracts of poems (including *Satire V*, l. 7, and Virgil's *Aeneid* I.71).

Aules Persius Flaccus (34-62 AD) was a Stoic poet and satirist from a noble family in the Etruscan city of Volterra, Tuscany. Relocating to Rome at age twelve to complete his education, he became acquainted with famous poets and scholars including Bassus, Lucan,

Seneca, and Cornutus, who was initially his teacher and later his friend. Persius died at age 28 and therefore produced few works. Following his death, the *Satires* circulated for centuries with considerable success. Their popularity peaked in the Carolingian era and again in the thirteenth century, going on to enjoy an even greater revival in the Italian Renaissance.

The *Satires* in this manuscript may have been copied from another manuscript, or perhaps by dictation, and not from a printed book; the orthography and text vary from several early editions of Persius's *Satires*, including those produced by Ulrich Han (Rome, c. 1473-1478) and Martin Flach (Basel, 1474). According to the ISTC, however, there are thirty editions of the *Satires* printed before 1490, many of which are not yet digitized and thus unavailable for comparison.

The earliest of the *Satires* surviving commentaries, known as the "vulgate tradition," date to the late ninth or tenth century and were pseudonymously attributed to Cornutus (Robathan and Cranz, 1976, p. 212). By 1612, at least fifty-three commentaries were composed, carrying the scholarly tradition well into the modern era (Robathan and Cranz, 1976, p. 311). A commentary by Renaissance scholar Johannes Britannicus (Giovanni Britannico) informs some of the glosses of this manuscript. Johannes Britannicus was born in the 1450s in Brescia. He had four brothers, two of whom, Jacobus and Angelus, were printers; Jacobus first in Venice, and then the pair together in Brescia (Takács and Tuhári, 2015, pp. xxi-xxii).

The popularity of Persius's work does not mean that it was unabashedly praised: although his audience was broad – influencing, among others, Saints Jerome and Augustine – the obscurity and "labored terseness" of his style has been criticized from antiquity through the modern era. The *Satires*, which lambast the perceived shortcomings of Rome and Romans in the author's time, are consistently underpinned by Stoicism, prizing the virtues of wisdom, courage, justice, and self-discipline above all (Ramage, 1974, esp. pp. 117-124). This manuscript was probably copied and used by a student attending lectures: its copious gloss, applied in layers in nearly all margins and interlinear space, suggests that it was quickly transcribed from dictation. This context is further supported by the gloss content, which is partially derived, but only in part and not always verbatim, from Johannes Britannicus's 1481/1486 commentary which may have been read aloud, along with other interpretations, by the master.

According to Scarcia Piacentini (1973 and 1975), there are some 600 manuscripts containing the poems of Persius; the Schoenberg Database of Manuscripts lists only about 110 manuscripts. Remarkably, there is only one other known manuscript – Basel, Universitätsbibliothek, Ms. F IV 34, ff. 1-32 – containing any of Britannicus's gloss on Persius; it is attributable to the sixteenth century, and thus post-dates this manuscript (Robathan and Cranz, 1976, pp. 268, 283). This manuscript's presentation – particularly utilitarian, rich in *scholia*, and preserved in its original binding – is unusual, as manuscripts such as this survive less frequently than do more "polished" copies. Its appearance, together with the lack of manuscript witnesses to the reception of Britannicus's commentary, and the overall scarcity of Persius manuscripts available for purchase, makes this a unique opportunity to acquire a true "working copy" from the Classical revival.

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