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ANTONIO DE' PAZZI, tr. *Battaglia di topi et di rane* (The Battle of the Frogs and Mice), translation of the PS.-HOMER, *Batrachomyomachia*; Two anonymous sonnets

In Italian, manuscript on paper

Italy, c. 1590-1650(?)

ii (paper) + 28 + ii (paper) folios on paper, laid paper with unidentified watermark, modern foliation in pencil top outer corner recto, complete (collation i² ii¹⁶), no ruling, horizontal creases through the middle of each leaf (justification 165-145 x 125-105 mm.), written in an informal but very legible cursive script with two eight-line stanzas on each page, no decoration, some foxing, but in very good condition. Bound in the nineteenth-century in brown leather tooled in gold with an outer border of four filets framing a gilt coat-of-arms on the upper board and an monogram on the lower (see Provenance), smooth spine, tooled in gold, and with title, "Homer/ Batrach/ Myoma/ chia/ MS," rebaked with spine laid down, pastedowns and facing endleaves lined with machine-marbled paper, some wear to corners, a few scuffs, cracking along the joint, upper board, but overall in good condition. Dimensions 220 x 145 mm.

A late sixteenth-century Italian translation of a playful Pseudo-Homeric epic that parodies the Iliad with a one-day battle between frogs and mice in part presided over by the Gods, Athena and Zeus. It was a favorite among the humanists of Renaissance Italy and has continued to amuse people down to the present day. This translation appears to survive in only two manuscripts, of which the other one in Florence was used for the nineteenth-century edition. The rediscovery of this manuscript opens new avenues of research for scholars interested in the transmission of Homeric tales and the career of the understudied poet, Antonio de' Pazzi, Knight of Malta, and member of the famous Pazzi family of Florence.

PROVENANCE

1. Evidence of the script suggests a probable date at the end of the sixteenth or the first half of the seventeenth century, c. 1590-1650. However, since this type of informal cursive script is very hard to date closely, a date later in the seventeenth century is not impossible. The watermark unfortunately has not been identified but will potentially allow for a more exact dating.

It is therefore possible, but by no means certain, that this is close in date to the lifetime of the author of the translation, Antonio de' Pazzi (active, late sixteenth century), a Knight of the Order of Malta.

2. Belonged in the nineteenth century to a knight of the Order of Malta, likely in England, based on evidence of the binding, which includes a spine title in English, an unidentified coat of arms on the front cover in the usual form of the Order's heraldry, with a crown and the eight-pointed star behind the shield, and a monogram on the back cover.
3. Front flyleaf, f. i verso, "HL," stamped in blue ink, enclosed in a circle.
4. Sold at Swann, New York, October 16, 2018.

TEXT

f. 1, blank; f. 1v, incipit, "Batrachomyomachia/ Battaglia/ Di Topi e di Rane/ Di Homero/ In lingua Toscana" [laid out in short lines, like a title page, and preceded on the front flyleaf by an identification of the author of the translation, in another hand], f. i, "Pazzi. Ant";

ff. 2-18, incipit, "Quegli io che grave un tempo, e duro esiglio/ Sostenni, e ne dettai rime dolenti/ ... [LXVIII], Talche de Topi l'infelice schiere/ ... Fini col fin dun di questa gran guerra"; [ends mid f. 18, remainder and f. 18v, blank];

Antonio de' Pazzi, translation into Italian of the Ps.-Homeric *Batrachomyomachia*; ed. Moreni, 1820. The short comic tale recounts how a Mouse-Prince crossed a lake with a Frog-King on his back, and when the Mouse-Prince dove to avoid a water snake, the Frog-King, who could not swim, drowned. The frogs attempt to avenge the death of the King against the mice. Athena refuses to take sides, and the Gods watch the battle from the sidelines. The mice prevail, but Zeus summons an army of crabs to prevent the complete destruction of the frogs, and the mice retreat.

The poem is widely known in many languages and has been much discussed. It is variously characterized as "the Illiad in a nutshell," as "the best as well as the oldest burlesque in the world," as "the greatest epic ever written about mice," and as a lesson on "the foolhardiness of war. The title, "batrachomyomachia," has come to mean a "trivial altercation" and even used to describe such debates in politics from the Reagan era.

In our manuscript, the copyist omitted two stanzas, f. 16v, no. LIX (ed. p. 30) is followed immediately by no. LXII (ed. p. 32). Copied in a legible, sometimes rather quick cursive, without erasures, crossed out text, or notes. A quick comparison suggests this is very close to the 1820 edition with a few spelling differences (e.g. 'hor' for 'or', 'et' for 'ed'; and occasional variants, note "gran guerra" at the end, which in the edition is "aspra guerra").

This translation was not printed until 1820, and was previously known only in a single manuscript, used by its nineteenth-century editor: Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Fondo Magliabechiano, MS 1293 (*Iter italicum*, vol. 2; Online Resources), described by Kristeller as a poetic miscellany including poems by Luigi Alamanni, Laura Battiferra, T. Tasso, and Antonio dei Pazzi's translation (ff. 143-160v) on parchment from the sixteenth/seventeenth century. A possible third manuscript was included in the 1842 *Catalogue de la bibliothèque de feu M. de Lambarty (d'Aix)*, lot 838, where it was described as being in Antonio de' Pazzi's own hand, and not the same as the manuscript used by the 1820 edition. The description in this sales catalogue is too brief to allow an identification with an actual manuscript.

f. 19, incipit, "O di niuitto[?] grand' Avo alto Nepote/ O di saggio e gran Padre altero figlio/... Nel primo giovanil nostro bel fiore/ Speme di far per noi chiare difese";

Sonnet by an unidentified author (Antonio de' Pazzi?), which seems to be in praise of a leader, and mentions "Giovanni" in line 10 ("di Giovanni Immortal d'ambo il valore").

f. 19v, incipit, "Hor si che il Tosco mio Paterno Terreno/ ... Mi terranno ancor qui nimiche stelle;" [ff. 20-28, blank].

Sonnet by an unidentified author (perhaps Antonio de'Pazzi?), which speaks of the author's old age.

The *Batrachomyomachia* or the "The Battle of Frogs and Mice" is a short mock epic about a war between mice and frogs with battle scenes echoing the *Iliad*. Attributed to Homer since late Antiquity, its actual author is unknown; most modern scholars agree that it was probably written in the late Hellenistic period, not before the last century B.C. Extremely popular, it was adopted as a school text that served as a short and entertaining introduction to Homer and used to teach Greek. One, and perhaps two, Italian translations of the *Batrachomyomachia* were in circulation even before the publication of the *editio princeps* of its Greek text with the Latin translation by Carlo Marsuppini (Brescia, perhaps in 1474, n.d., ISTC ih00300800): one in 1456 by the humanist Aurelio Simmaco de Iacobiti from Tossicia in Abruzzo, which survives in the author's autograph; and the other by Giorgio Sommariva, printed in an edition variously dated by modern scholars either to 1470 or c. 1475 (ISTC ih 00304400). Numerous translations followed. In 1744 Antonio Lavagnoli famously claimed that the number of translators of this short mock epic was almost equal to the number of its verses.

Little is known about the life of the translator of the text in our manuscript, Antonio de' Pazzi, who lived in the late sixteenth century. From a wealthy and powerful Florentine family, he is said to have been accused of involvement in a conspiracy against Francesco I de' Medici, the Grand Duke of Florence (governed from 1564, as Grand Duke from 1574-1587) and exiled to Malta, where he evidently landed on his feet, and attracted the patronage of the Grand Master of the Knights of Malta and entered the order (perhaps in 1571; Moreni, ed., introduction, esp. p. xlv). The Pazzi family is famous today for their role in the Pazzi conspiracy of 1478, a failed attempt to overthrow the Medici rulers of Florence which resulted in their banishment and the confiscation of their property. They were allowed to return to Florence after the overthrow of Piero de' Medici in 1494. It is curious that tradition records Antonio de' Pazzi involved in yet another conspiracy against the ruler of Florence in the later sixteenth century. He was well-known in his lifetime as a poet, although most of his works circulated in manuscript and were not printed. His verses in response to Torquato Tasso, "in biasimo ed in lode delle donne" (In praise and blame of women), have been the subject of a recent study (Rosinni, 2019). We have not identified the two sonnets in our manuscript among Antonio de' Pazzi's printed poems, but it seems possible that they are by him.

The Knights of Malta (also known as The Order Sovereign Military Hospitaller Order of St. John of Jerusalem of Rhodes and of Malta, their formal title today, or simply as the Knights Hospitallers of St. John), date back to the eleventh century. Originally an order charged with caring for pilgrims to the holy land in their hospital. By the twelfth century it had evolved into a military order dedicated to assisting the poor and the sick. After the loss of holy land in 1291, the Order moved to Cyprus, and then in the fourteenth century, to Rhodes, with members from the nobility across Europe. In 1530, the Knights were established in Malta. The Order continues its mission to serve the poor and the sick today.

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