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**PSEUDO-EUSEBIUS OF CREMONA, *Lapistola del beato Eusebio...del transito e morte del beato misser Santo Jeronimo* (Letter of blessed Eusebius ... on the passing and death of the blessed St. Jerome)**

**In Italian, decorated manuscript on parchment**

**Central or Southern Italy, c. 1475-1525**

*67 folios on parchment, modern foliation in pencil, 1-67, complete (collation i-viii<sup>8</sup> ix<sup>3</sup>), vertical catchwords in different scripts (majuscules, humanistic, minuscule), ruled in lead point, ruling on some pages added later in brown ink (justification c. 115 x 71 mm.), written in brown ink in an attractive humanistic bookhand in a single column on 19 lines, rubrics in red, modern addition in brown ink of a large initial on f. 1 and a 2-line initial on f. 2v, ink stain in the margin of f. 40, minor stains and signs of use, in overall very good condition. Bound in the eighteenth(?) century in vellum over pasteboards, both covers blind-tooled with a frame of double fillets, flat spine on which is inscribed in brown ink "No. 7" and above in paler ink "1688" (?), notes in brown ink on the back cover (see Provenance no. 2), covers stained, otherwise in good condition. Dimensions 146 x 107 mm.*

Now considered as a "pious fraud," this letter about the death of St. Jerome is a literary forgery dating from the fourteenth or fifteenth centuries. Immensely popular among Renaissance humanists in Italy and throughout Europe and spawned by the resurgence of the cult of Jerome, the letter was only discovered as spurious by Erasmus. Our manuscript is a previously unrecorded copy of the Italian translation of this text. The vernacular tradition of this influential text has never been studied in detail; our manuscript underlines the need for a new study based on an updated corpus of all surviving copies.

## PROVENANCE

1. The manuscript was copied at the end of the fifteenth or first decades of the sixteenth century, as suggested by the style of the script. Linguistic details indicate that it was copied in central or southern Italy (see below).
2. The current binding probably dates from the eighteenth century. On the back cover is copied a record of a monetary transaction in brown ink in an eighteenth-century(?) hand.
3. The ex-libris inscription in reddish brown ink on the front pastedown "Ex Bibliotheca Hundiana / sub Numero et Titulo: / 4487 / Quaedam Eusebij et Hieronymi, / Italice in Pergameno," appears to be in modern hand imitating an earlier script. It was probably added at the same time as the large initial on f. 1, the 2-line initial on f. 2v (note that the spaces for initials on ff. 3v and 4 were left blank) and the ruling in brown ink (e.g. ff. 9, 12v-13). Hundius is a rather common name, and there were individuals named Hundius who collected manuscripts, such as the German scholar Harald Hundius (b. 1939), a specialist of Thai and Laotian manuscripts. However, it has not been possible to establish to which collection the inscription refers, and it may be spurious.

4. Modern bookseller's note "119" in pencil on the front pastedown.

## TEXT

ff. 1-67v, *Comincia Lapistola del beato eusebio laquale mando al beato Damaso Vescovo de portuense e a theodonio senatore de roma del transito e morte del beato Misser Santo Jeronimo confessore e doctore excellentissimo*, incipit, "Al padre reverendissimo Damaso Vescovo di Portuense e al cristianissimo theodonio Senatore di roma eusebio discipulo che fo del sanctissimo gieronimo, ben che ora privato de luy yo abbia piatoso dolore ... allume de la sua sacratissima et intemerata fede, Amen," *Finito ellibro del glorioso transito de sancto Geronimo*.

Pseudo-Eusebius of Cremona, *Lapistola del beato Eusebio...del transito e morte del beato misser Santo Jeronimo*, Italian translation of the Latin *Epistola de morte Hieronymi* (Epistle on the death of Jerome); for the Latin version, see BHL 3866; Lambert, 1969, no. 903; Latin text printed in Migne, *Patrologia Latina* 22:239-282. For Italian translations, see *Biblioteca agiografica italiana (BAI)*, GirStr(15), nos. 1, 7, 9. An Italian translation of this text was first printed by the "Printer of Basilius" in Venice c. 1471 (GW 9455; preceded by the *Vita* of St. Jerome; 17 copies of the first edition are known, including one on parchment at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France; for a digitized copy in Florence, see Online Resources). The text was reprinted throughout the fifteenth century in nineteen different editions (GW 9456-9474).

This text by Pseudo-Eusebius was a best-selling text in the late Middle Ages and Renaissance. It was widely disseminated in manuscript between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries and was printed in several editions in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. It quickly spread outside of Italy: already in the fifteenth century it was printed in Catalan, Dutch, and Spanish. It also circulated in German, French, Danish, and English versions; more than 30 manuscripts in Middle German are known (Jaatinen, 1950). The text often was often accompanied by the two other letters on the life and miracles of St. Jerome, composed around the same time, although purportedly written by St. Augustine and St. Cyril. They were often printed with the genuine letters of Jerome, and usually preceded by the *Vita* of St. Jerome.

The earliest Italian translation of the *Epistola del transito* is Tuscan, and dates from the fourteenth century; the text was printed in 1824 based on one manuscript, with comparative notes from six additional manuscripts (*Volgarizzamento*, 1824; using the text printed in Manni, 1731). *Biblioteca agiografica italiana (BAI)*, lists 28 additional manuscripts of this translation (see also *BAI*, no. 15, listing 52 manuscripts as "other" witnesses, some of which may include our Ps.-Eusebian letter, although the texts are not specified). Our manuscript can be localized in central or southern Italy by its linguistic characteristics. Words that end with "y" in our manuscript (e.g. "luy", "yo" line 12, f. 1; "noy" line 1, f. 1v; "nuoy" line 2, f. 1v; "ay" line 12, f. 2v; "potrey" lines 1-2, f. 3; "suoy" line 2, f. 3) would have "i" in the Tuscan dialect. Furthermore, diphthongs found here (e.g. "nuoy", "suoy", for "noi" and "soi") are not present in the Tuscan dialect. Whereas the printed copies provide the Tuscan version of the text, our manuscript in central/southern dialect, and a manuscript dated 1473 in Sicilian dialect (Toledo, Archivo y B. Capitular (olim Biblioteca del Cabildo, MS 25/30), call for deeper study of the numerous surviving manuscripts of the Italian translation, or translations, of this important text (for a modern edition of the Sicilian version, see Di Girolamo, 1982). An early attribution of a translation of this letter to Domenico Cavalca (c. 1270-1342) is questionable (*BAI*, no. 7), but it underlines the potential interest of this topic of research.

This long letter on the death of Saint Jerome was purportedly written by Eusebius of Cremona, pupil and friend of Jerome, and addressed to Damasus, Bishop of Portus, and Theodosius, Roman senator. It was recognized as spurious by Erasmus of Rotterdam, and despite some disagreement on the place and time of origin, most modern scholars agree that it was written at the close of the thirteenth or the early fourteenth century in the Dominican circles in northern Italy (cf. Klapper, 1932, p. 5; Cavallera, 1922 p. 144ff., Lanzoni, 1920, pp. 37-40; Rice 1985, pp. 49-50, 63, 218-19; according to Bernard Lambert no manuscript copy dates before 1300, see Lambert, 1969, vol. 3). The relics of St. Jerome were transferred in the late thirteenth century from Jerusalem to the Basilica Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome, the event behind the intellectual and spiritual impetus to compose works related to the saint's death; this origin is also suggested by internal evidence in the text.

The dissemination of these texts was fundamental for the spread of the cult of St. Jerome in Renaissance Italy and Europe. The glorification of the scholar saint appealed to the humanists; they embraced the unparalleled contributions of Jerome, translator of the Bible, prolific author of polemical and historical writings and moral teachings and sought to raise him to the rank of St. John the Baptist (see Cavallera, 1922, p. 144 and Rice, 1985).

## LITERATURE

*Biblioteca agiografica italiana (BAI): repertorio di testi e manoscritti, secoli 13.-15*, eds. Jacques Dalarun, Lino Leonardi et al. Florence, 2003, II, pp. 360-1, 1; and 366, no. 7 (with dubbia attribution to Domenico Cavalco) and no. 9, and CD-rom, *GirStr(15)*, nos. 1, 7, 9; cf. 15.

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*Volgarizzamento della vita di San Girolamo: testo di lingua emendato con vari Mss*, Rovertò, Marchessani, 1824.

### ONLINE RESOURCES

Pseudo-Eusebius of Cremona, *Epistola de morte Hieronymi*, Italian translation, the first printed edition, Venice, c. 1471

British Library, Incunable Short Title Catalogue (ISTC)

<https://data.cerl.org/istc/ih00246000>

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