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PSEUDO-CICERO, *De proprietatibus terminorum* or *De differentiae verborum*
([Thesaurus] On the properties of endings, or On the differences of words)

In Latin, illuminated manuscript on paper

Italy, northern (?), dated 1445

93 folios on paper, quires reinforced with strips of parchment, modern foliation in pencil top outer corner recto, octavo format, watermarks are fragmentary but include a dragon, of the same type as Gavell Watermark, dragon 24.1, 26.1, 32.1, respectively Reggio Emilia 1432, Reggio Emilia, 1432-1436, and Genoa, 1445, and others, complete (i-viii¹² viii¹² [-10 through 12, three cancelled blanks]), vertical catchwords with quire signatures in roman numerals at the end of each quire, ruled in hard point, probably by means of a ruling board, with the top two and bottom two horizontal rules full across, full-length double vertical bounding lines (justification 96 x 55 mm.), written by one scribe in a humanist minuscule with long 's' extending below the line, red rubrics, two-line initials alternately red and blue, nineteen 3-line gold initials (f. 33 [A], 46v [B], 49 [C], f. 56v [D], f. 60v [E], f. 62 [F], f. 66 [G], f. 67v [H], f. 68 [I], f. 70 [L], f. 72 [M], f. 74 [N], f. 75 [O], f. 76 [P], f. 80 [Q], f. 81 [R], f. 82 [S], f. 85 [T], 86v [V]), on divided grounds of green and blue with small gold and silver dots, one 4-line gold initial, f. 1v, with white vinestem decoration on a ground of green, pink, and gold, with silver and gold dots, framed in dark blue, bottom outer corner of ff. 1-29 repaired with modern paper (very slight damage to the text, usually a single letter or so), remaining corners are original and show some wear through f. 42, edges darkened and with a bit of foxing, but overall in very good condition. Bound in modern blind-tooled brown leather, spine with three raised bands, in excellent condition, title copied on bottom fore edge in an early hand. Dimensions 152 x 105 mm.

Slightly smaller than a modern paperback, this handy little reference book – a kind of antecedent to Roget's Thesaurus – includes distinctions between words of similar meanings or synonyms. Multiple versions of the text in this manuscript circulated from the early Middle Ages, attributed to Isidore, through the Renaissance, attributed to Cicero. The present version lacks a critical edition. This attractive volume with its lovely painted white vine initials and neat readable humanist script is signed and dated by the scribe-illuminator. No doubt is served a Renaissance student or scholar well.

PROVENANCE

1. Copied in 1445, when it was signed and dated by the scribe and artist. His charming colophon, found on f. 88v, is transcribed below; in translation one reads: "This convenient little book is mine <erasure> of St. Peter, which I wrote and illuminated by my own hand in 1445 and finished at the ninth hour in the month of October when Matins was ringing" (his first name has been thoroughly erased).

An origin in Northern Italy seems likely given the style of the script, decoration, and watermark, but it is not certain. The only recognizable watermark is a dragon, but it is fragmented and impossible to identify exactly. Dragons were a common watermark in Italy in the fifteenth century, and Briquet noted that they are found in paper made between the towns

of Cremona, Verona, Ferrara and Bologna, including Parma, Reggio Emilia, Modena, and Mantua, and then spread to the North, West (including Genoa), and Tuscany.

2. Title and date recorded on f. 1 in ink in a modern hand, and "0111," added in pencil; no other evidence of previous ownership.

TEXT

[f. 1, blank]; ff. 1v-88v, *Plurimorum uerborum nominum ue[l?] differentiæ non inutiles necessarie, lege felix*, incipit, "Inter polliceri et promitem hoc interest quod promittimus rogati ...; f. 33v, A, Inter abundare et superfluere ...; ... f. 46v, B, Inter Basium et osculum et suauium. Basium pietatis est, osculum amicitie suauium luxurie, ...; ... f. 86v, V, Inter uallem et collem ...; f. 88v, Inter uesper et uesperum et uespera, hoc interest quod uespera et uespere nomina sunt... item est secunde declinationis," *Iste peropportuntunus libellus est mei <erased> de sancto petro quem scripsi et miniaui prop[pri]a manu anno Mcccc4v et expleui hora ix mensis octobris dum matutini pulsabantur.*

Ps. Cicero, *De proprietatibus terminorum* or *De differentiae uerborum* (On the properties of endings, or On the differences of words) or *Differentiarum liber*, "Inter polliceri"; the text includes two sections, which in this manuscript follow one another without a rubric or other indication of separation; the second section, here beginning on f. 33v ("Inter abundare"), is alphabetical.

The Oxford Classical Dictionary defines *differentiae* as "distinctions between words of similar meaning (e.g. *metus*, *pavor*) formulated by rhetoricians and grammarians to foster precise diction." Classical rhetoricians like Cicero and Quintilian mention the principles of these "differentiae," but in classical times scholars generally agree that the lists existed only orally, and collections of "differentiae uerborum," listing synonyms, homonyms, and homophones, were written down and "published" only in the early Middle Ages. Our text, for example, discusses the differences between the various Latin words for kiss on f. 46v, "basium," a dutiful kiss ("pietas est"), "osculum," a kiss of friendship, and "suauium," a love kiss (literally a kiss of luxury or extravagance). Elsewhere, our text explains the difference between "horrendum" and "horribile" (horribly) saying that the first refers to the physical aspect, and the second to the soul.

Our text is very close to the incunable edition probably printed in Cologne by Ulrich Zel, about 1470-1472, GW 7024, ISTC ic00668000, where it is attributed to Cicero, and titled, *De proprietatibus terminorum* (and presumably to the other incunable editions, GW 7025-7030). On this text and manuscripts, see Brugnoli, 1955, 31, 41-43, on p. 43, listing eight fifteenth-century manuscripts; Bertalot, 1990-2004, vol. 2, no. 9831 (as reported in Mirabile, Online Resources); and Macé, pp. 31-38, on p. 34, mentioning three manuscripts in the Vatican. The attribution to Cicero is late and not trustworthy, and there has been no comprehensive recent survey of the surviving manuscripts of this version of the *Differentiae*. The origin of this pseudonymous attribution to Cicero, and its relationship to other recensions circulating in the fifteenth century, are questions that remain for further research.

The transmission of various *Differentiae* is complex, and since incipits are not always reliable identifications of different versions, it can be confusing. The text edited in Uhlfelder (1954) and also printed in Migne, *Patrologia latina*, vol. 83, col. 1319-1332, begins with the same incipit as our manuscript, but the texts are different. In particular, at least in terms of the order of the entries, our text does not appear to agree with either of the two fifteenth-century recensions

described by Uhlfelder: ‘v’, humanist manuscripts deriving from Colucio Salutati’s copy, or ‘T’, the manuscript prepared by Lucius of Spoleto, Trivulzianus 771. This text circulated as Isidore’s, an attribution no longer accepted (CPL no. 1226 lists this text under Isidore “dubia and supria”; see Uhlfelder, 1954 and Andrés Sanz, 2001).

“Differentiae verborum” are experiencing a modern revival. There is a contemporary project at St. Andrews University in Scotland to develop modern lists of Latin synonyms to use in teaching Latin (in Latin), and to facilitate modern computer-based comparisons of ancient texts that depend on comparisons based on similarity of meaning, rather than exact verbal matches. As the project website explains: “While existing programs currently detect similarity of meaning between texts as based on the English translation of Latin words, the dictionary of Latin near-synonyms makes it possible to refine the digital detection of semantic intertexts by providing reliable lists of Latin synonyms that significantly reduce the linguistic and semantic gap generated by the Latin-English translation of words” (Online Resources). And to that end, the project is drawing on synonyms found in texts such as the one we have here.

LITERATURE

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<http://www.obrascaticas.com/livros/Linguas/De%20Proprietate%20Sermonum%20vel%20Rerum%20Uhlfelder%201954%20American%20Academy%20in%20Rome.pdf>

ONLINE RESOURCES

The Thomas L. Gavell Watermark Archive

<https://www.gravell.org/index.php>

Incunabula Short Title Catalogue: ISTC ic00668000, Cicero, Marcus Tullius:
De proprietatibus terminorum, [Cologne, Ulrich Zel, about 1470-1472]
GW 7024

<https://data.cerl.org/istc/ic00668000>

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<http://www.mirabileweb.it/title/de-proprietate-sermonum-vel-rerum-title/172>

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[https://risweb.st-andrews.ac.uk/portal/en/datasets/the-first-online-dictionary-of-latin-nearsynonyms\(3cf644e6-86b8-44d0-a50a-b33c7ca86072\).html](https://risweb.st-andrews.ac.uk/portal/en/datasets/the-first-online-dictionary-of-latin-nearsynonyms(3cf644e6-86b8-44d0-a50a-b33c7ca86072).html)

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