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# The First Roman Printers and the Idioms of Humanism

## *An Introduction*

Greek sir, is like lace; every man gets as much of it as he can.

—Samuel Johnson

**B**ETWEEN 1400 and 1600, literacy became a luxury commodity. Europeans, to the degree circumstances permitted, acquired books, read books, and made the consumption of written matter a prominent feature of both their private and social life. Two Renaissance phenomena are generally given credit for this development, printing and humanism. As here used, the term "printing" refers to the transcription of texts in multiple copies by means of movable type; "humanism," in turn, refers to individuals communicating with one another on the basis of a shared interest in the literary remains of classical antiquity.

Humanism and printing converged at Rome towards the mid-1460s; the encounter was not accidental. The quattrocento papacy was the only administrative system that covered all of Europe and also was by far its single largest employer of educated individuals. It was unique, moreover, in its near total reliance on verbal communication. Latin was its language of choice, and from about 1450 the vocabulary and syntax of classical Roman literature were accepted as the stylistic norm.

This already formidable antiquarian bias was strengthened by a wholly fortuitous event. Constantinople was conquered by the Ottomans in May 1453, and the subsequent flight of Byzantine scribes and scholars is comparable only to the intellectual exodus brought about by the advent of Hitler. Italy, and in particular Rome, was their chosen sanctuary. As a result, Greek, which had formerly been an exotic commodity, became among the humanists a staple of learned discourse.

There were more humanists, therefore, in Rome than anywhere else, most of them officials of the papal curia, and almost all of them

had at least a smattering of Greek. Weight of numbers, mode of employment, and special skills all combined to instill a sense of collective identity.

Printing is by nature a social enterprise. It operates on the assumption that books and readers exist in groups. Humanists, insofar as they were members of a community, were bonded by a consuming interest in particular clusters of texts: the church fathers, for example, and the Latin poets, orators, and historians. Such textual clusters served as the frame for the rational management of early Italian typography. According to the available data, the selection and distribution of texts during the first decade of printing at Rome was not left to chance. The pioneer printing enterprises were, from the outset, guided by humanists affiliated with the papal curia, and the books published were a direct reflection of humanist values.

The books were distributed along the international channels of curial administration. Humanism was, as a result, transformed from a narrowly Italian into a broadly European movement. The themes expounded in and about Rome by Lorenzo Valla, Leon Battista Alberti, Cardinal Bessarion, and Niccolò Perotti achieved cosmopolitan stature in the work of Erasmus, Palladio, Ronsard, and Scaliger. In this drawn-out interplay of theme and variations, the basic rules remained, however, the same. Roman type was the chosen instrument of intellectual communication; classical antiquity was the sanctifying model of scholarly and artistic creation; the laws of harmonious proportion were the key to a comprehensive understanding of natural phenomena; and authority could only be established by citing the classics.

This exhibition is designed to illustrate these themes. The fifteenth- and sixteenth-century book, insofar as it served as a vehicle of intellectual commerce, was an Italian invention; the pattern of such commerce was, moreover, laid out in a sequence of texts published between 1465 and 1473 at Subiaco and Rome by the prototypographers Conrad Sweynheym and Arnold Pannartz. Underlying this thesis is the more hypothetical proposition that printing was originally summoned to Italy by Roman curial humanists as a means of enhancing the status of their favored classical texts, and that this purpose both brought the Sweynheym & Pannartz firm into being and animated its subsequent course.

Evidence for this hypothesis is found in the tonic triad printed at Subiaco between 1465 and 1467: Cicero, *De oratore* (before 30 September 1465); Lactantius, *Opera* (29 October 1465); Augustine, *De civitate Dei* (12 June 1467). The choice of these three texts and the order of their publication was deliberately intended to display the harmonious relationship of the major elements of humanist scholarship: two seemingly antagonistic bodies, the literature of pagan Rome (Cicero) and the theology of the Latin church fathers (Augustine), and their mediating agent, the language of ancient Greece (Lactantius). The importance attached to this triad is attested to by the fact that all three texts were twice reprinted, each time at a crucial juncture in Sweynheym & Pannartz's career, first in 1468, immediately upon the transfer of their operations from Subiaco to Rome, and again in 1470, when their patronage once more changed.

This faith in a pagan-patristic synthesis, in which Cicero, through the agency of Greek wisdom, had been reconciled with St. Augustine, stemmed directly from a basic humanist tenet: Rome and, by extension Italy, had a divinely ordained mission. The polytheism of Greco-Roman antiquity was, the humanists believed, the precursor of the monotheism of Christianity. Pagan authors had been driven by scepticism and by a sense of profound despair. The agonies and doubts of these poets and orators, inchoate longings for man's prelapsarian bliss, had been resolved in the revelations of the gospels and the Latin fathers. The copiousness and vigor of pagan Latin pressed into the service of the primitive church had, in turn, insured the triumph of Christianity and the promulgation of its creed. Through the transformation of literary Latin into the language of the church, Rome had remained *caput mundi*, the head of the world.

As expounded in *Divinae institutiones* (ca. A.D. 308/9), the major work of Lactantius, the concept of pagan-patristic harmony had been hallowed by recourse to *prisca theologia*, the supposed religion of mankind's golden age and the lost paradise of Lucretius, Cicero, and Virgil. Fragments of what purported to be *prisca theologia*, prophecies foretelling the advent of a shepherd-savior-messiah and of the imminent reign of universal peace and enlightenment, circulated during the early Christian era throughout the eastern Mediterranean. Such fragments were variously ascribed to the Sybilline Oracles, Hermes Trismegistus, Orpheus, or Apollo, and were profusely cited by Lactantius, in what he and everyone else accepted as the original Greek.

**D**Eclaravi ut optior animam non esse solubilem. superest citare testes quorum autoritate argumenta firment. Neque nunc prophetas in testimonium uocabo, quorum ratio et diuinitas in hoc solo posita est: ut ad cultum dei et ad immortalitatem ab eo accipiendam creati hominem doceant, sed eos potius quibus istos qui respuunt ueritatem credere sit necesse. Hermes naturam describens ut doceret quomodo esset a deo factus huc intulit, και αυτο εξ εκατερων φυσων της τε αθανατου και της θνητης μιαρ επτολυι φυσιμ αμθρωπων του αυτορ τη μεμ αθανατου τη δε θνητου ποιησας και τον του φερων εμ μεσω θειασ και αθανατου φυσωσ και της θνητης και εν μεταβλητου ιδρυσειμα ορωσ απαρτα απαρτα και θαυμασιν. Id est, Et idem ex utraque natura mortali et immortalium unam faciebat naturam hominis: eundem in aliquo quidem mortalem in aliquo autem mortalem faciens: et hunc ferens in medio diuinae et immortalis naturae, et mortalis mutabilisque constituit, ut omnia uidens omnia miret. Sed hunc fortasse aliquis in numero philosophorum computet, quibus in deos relatis Mercurii nomine ab aegyptiis honoretur, nec plus ei autoritatis tribuat, quam Platoni aut Pythagore. Malus igitur testimonium requiramus. Polites quidam consuluit Appollinem Milesium: utrum ne maneat anima post mortem an resoluaat. Respondit his uersibus  
 ψυχη μεν μεχρι ουδισμοισ προσσωμα κρατειται φθαρτα μουνσα παθη θνηταισ αλγιδωσιμ εικει ηρικα δαρμολυσιμ βροτεημ μετασωμα μαρμθερωκιστημ ευρηται εσ αιθερα πασα φορειται αιεραγηρασ ουσ μερει δεισπαμαπατηρησ πρωτογομοσ γαρ του το θεου διεταξε προμοια. Id est passioes seniles mortalibus cedit doloribus. Cum uero solutionem humanam post corpus inueniet: facile abiens a terra nunquam senescit. Anima quidem quo ad uinculis corporeis tenet corruptibiles passioes seniles, mortalibus cedit doloribus. Cum uero humanam solutionem uelocissimam post corruptum corpus inuenit: omnis a terra fertur: nunquam senescens, et manet in eternum sine pena. Primogenita etenim hoc diuina disposuit praedicta. Quid carmina sibilina? Nonne ita esse declarant: cum fore aliquando denunciant: ut a deo de uinis ac mortuis iudicentur: quorum exempla post inferemus. Falsa est igitur Democriti et Epicuri sententia et dicearchi de animi dissolutione, quod profecto non auderet de iterum aiarum mago aliquo presente differere: quod sciret certis carminibus clere ab inferis animas: & adesse et prebere se humanis oculis uidentibus: et loqui & futura praedicere. Et si auderent, re ipsa et documentis presentibus

*The Milton S. Eisenhower Library, John Work Garrett Library, The Johns Hopkins University*

Lactantius, *Opera*,

Subiaco, Sweynheym & Pannartz, 29 October 1465. F. 141v

Greek was thus proclaimed by *Divinae institutiones* to be the language of divine mystery and the key to an effective understanding of Christianity's vital truths. The tone and content of this work and the fact that it was subsequently included in the patristic canon can be accounted for in terms of the political and cultural circumstances of its composition. *Divinae institutiones* was written shortly before the conversion of Constantine (28 October 312), and at a time when Christianity was gaining widespread acceptance among the ruling class of the Roman Empire. Members of this class were, by and large, bilingual in Greek and Latin, and the relationship of the two languages reflected the social patterns of the third- and fourth-century Mediterranean world. Latin was the language of law, administration, and record; Greek the medium of commerce, refined perception, and mystagogical revelation.

Lactantius was himself a recent convert. He was, by vocation moreover, a teacher of rhetoric, and was thus, almost by professional reflex, impelled to expound the factors behind this change of faith for the benefit of his upper-class clientele. His dedication had its reward. Upon the public conversion of Constantine, Lactantius was summoned to the imperial court and appointed tutor to the heir-apparent. *Divinae institutiones*, under such sponsorship, gained widespread acceptance as the patrician's version of the dogmas of the Christian church. In the western Mediterranean, Christianity had up to then been expounded in rather coarse Latin. The presence of Lactantius in the ranks of the church fathers could, therefore, be attributed to chance and to the conscientious fulfillment of his professional obligations.

Neither chance nor personal behavior can, however, account for the fact that Lactantius was the first Christian author to be printed in Italy. He is not notable for miracles, zeal, or learning, nor was his life one of exemplary devotion. Although frequently cited, he was not, in any sense, venerated. Among quattrocento students of theology, both lay and clerical, Ambrose, Augustine, and Jerome—every one of them, in contrast to Lactantius, a saint—were the church fathers who were quoted in authoritative fashion and held up as models of a holy life.

Luck and professional zeal, upon a closer reading, turn out to be intellectual virtues. Lactantius was redeemed by the tools of his trade. His rhetoric was responsive to chance and was sustained by the

conviction that language *qua* language was a decisive force and by the complementary belief that, in his polyglot Mediterranean society, two and only two languages had this power: Greek, the language of mankind's golden age, and Latin, the language of its ultimate and redeeming empire—in short, Paradise Lost and Paradise Regain'd. In actual practice, this conviction and its complement were expressed in two ways: an addiction, on the part of Lactantius, to citing Greek as the clinching phrase of an argument, and his attendant assumption that the language in the process of perfection at the time of his Savior's birth was neither the Aramaic of Galilee nor the Hebrew of the Old Testament, but the Latin of Lucretius, Cicero, and Virgil.

Lactantius was primarily a dealer in words. His public had a consuming interest in the relative values—the exchange rate, so to speak—of the two main ingredients of their upper-class culture, Greek and Latin. In the system of Lactantius, Greek was the medium of theosophical mystification, while Latin served as the voice of sovereign authority. Insofar as the curial humanists were concerned, the eminence of Lactantius and his right to be published as the peer of both Cicero and St. Augustine was based on solid professional achievement: the establishment of a mutually advantageous relationship between ostensibly competing cultural traditions.

This relationship was founded on yet another fundamental humanist tenet: Truth is the daughter of Time, the more ancient the source, that is to say, the greater was the weight of its authority. Latin, on this scale of reckoning, was more substantial than the vernaculars, classical Latin more authentic than its medieval variant, Greek more mysterious than Latin, and the hieroglyphs of timeless Egypt more sacred than Greek.

The inclusion of *Divinae institutiones* in the humanist canon and the acceptance of Lactantius as a role-model, was based on interpretative principle. Both the theology of this Latin church father and the enthusiasms of the humanists rested on a linguistic and textual hierarchy in which objective age rather than arbitrary tradition was the determining factor. This ran counter to Scholastic practice. Because Jerome was a saint, it had been assumed throughout the Middle Ages that his Vulgate was divinely inspired. In Lactantius the humanists found a hallowed precedent for what, tautological as it may now appear, was in 1460 a radical thesis: the study of the New Testament should begin with the surviving Greek manuscripts, i.e., the more

ancient the language and the earlier the script, the stronger the claim that the text in question is the primal source.

There was, in addition, an accidental but nonetheless compelling parallel between the contradictions Lactantius believed he had resolved and the circumstances of curial humanism. The rhetorician of late antiquity and the rhetoricians of quattrocento Rome were mirror images: Lactantius reconciling his ideal of Christianity with the realities of imperial Rome, the humanists seeking to accommodate their ideal of imperial Rome with the realities of Christianity.

Between 1438 and 1450, a succession of political and theological events made the relationship of Greek and Latin once more a matter of vital concern. Under the mounting threat of what was to be the final Ottoman assault, the Byzantine emperor sought an accommodation with the West. The Council of Ferrara-Florence (1438-1439) was convened as a desperate effort to reunite the Eastern Orthodox and the Roman Catholic churches. The delegates dedicated themselves to reconciling the verbal ambiguities of the Greek and Latin creeds. Their concordance was, however, rejected by the aroused populace of Constantinople; its principal Greek Orthodox contributor, Bessarion, fled the city and returned to Italy in 1440 to become a cardinal of the Roman Catholic Church.

The council had, nonetheless, enhanced the authority and prestige of the papacy, and by the mid-1440s the pope was again able to take up residence in Rome, ending some one hundred and thirty-five years of exile and schism. Pope Nicholas V (1447-1455) thought of himself as the ruler of Rome as well as the primate of Christianity. He was a friend and patron of the humanists and regarded the restoration of the city's former splendor as part of the duties of his holy office. Two members of his curia, Lorenzo Valla (ca. 1406-1457) and Leon Battista Alberti (1404-1472) were, at that time, conducting independent and far-ranging investigations into the respective merits of Greek, Latin, and the vernacular European languages.

Valla, by birth a Roman, was the founder of critical philology. His mission was to re-establish the primacy of Latin; his model society was the late Roman republic and early empire, when literary skill was readily convertible into public office. He made his mark with his *Donation of Constantine* (*De falso credita et ementita Constantini donatione declamatio*), 1440. It demolished the pope's claim to Italian sovereignty

on the grounds that the basic papal document was bad Latin and therefore could not have come from a Roman emperor.

Arguments based on language were also used in support of the claims of Italy and its humanists to European hegemony. In Valla's words: "We lost Rome, her power and domination, not through our own fault, but through force of circumstances. Yet we continue to hold sway in much of the world by this other power. Italy is ours, Gaul, Spain, Germany, Pannonia, Illyria, and many other peoples; for the Roman Empire exists wherever the Roman language is in force." This declaration occurs in the preface, written in the early 1450s, to Book I of *Elegantiae*, Valla's casebook of philological research.

All roads, therefore began at Rome, whose language, it appeared, was and always had been Latin. The powers inherent in Latin had created an empire, civilized Europe, and paved the way for Christianity. Rome, Latin, civilization, and Christianity were, for Valla, virtually synonymous. The triumph of barbarism and monasticism, each equally the antithesis of civic culture, was, accordingly, a universal calamity. In late antiquity the Empire had collapsed, Latin had been corrupted, civilization extinguished, and Christianity debased.

The practice of humanism was, for Valla, the active pursuit of public office. The election in 1447 of a humanist pope, therefore, quickened his ambitions. Nicholas V regarded himself as the heir and custodian of Rome's imperial past. His patronage converted the Curia into a humanist institution and *Elegantiae* into a manual of bureaucratic procedure.

The method of *Elegantiae* was archaeological. The text is a compendium of examples drawn from classical Latin literature. Valla codified these examples according to the parts, applications, and rules of syntax of the Latin language and, in the process, established a hierarchy of linguistic proficiency. With humanists in sufficient number, each with a copy of *Elegantiae* in hand, the original force of the Latin language would be restored, the church would be reformed, and Rome would regain its imperial stature.

The underlying premise of Valla's method was an isomorphic cosmos. Latin language and literature, taken as a whole, constituted the fully articulated realization of the harmonious principle first given voice in Greek. For every decorous thought or sensation—any experience, that is to say, worthy of a gentleman of Roman descent—there



*Kress Collection, National Gallery of Art*

Self-portrait of Leon Battista Alberti (bronze, 20.1 x 13.6 cm.)

was a precise and felicitous Latin locution; conversely, every word or phrase in the corpus of Latin literature had, by a similarly providential design, its apposite human experience. This unrivalled correspondence of words and things was more than a philologist's toy: it was compelling evidence of Rome's divine favor.

This belief in the elevating power of Latin was shared by Valla's curial colleague, Leon Battista Alberti, architect, philosopher, painter, and poet. For Alberti, however, the genius of the language of ancient Rome resided more in the harmonious proportions of its grammar and syntax than in the wealth and specificity of its vocabulary—which, in the practice of architecture he, at any rate, had found defective. The loss of "our ancient and noble Latin language" was, Alberti agreed, a greater calamity than the loss of Empire (Proem, Book III, *Libri della famiglia*, 1437–38). Alberti, in contrast to Valla, however, regarded man as a social rather than a political animal. To his mind, therefore, the magnitude of the calamity lay not so much

in the degeneration of institutions as in the impoverishment of personal relations.

A desire to raise the tone of the Tuscan language and Florentine daily life dominates the earliest known Italian grammar, Alberti's *Regule lingue florentine*. Although rediscovered and printed only in 1964, *Regule* was probably written between 1443, the year of the papacy's return to Rome, and 1454, when Alberti undertook construction of the Tempio Malatestiano in Rimini. Alberti had composed his *grammatichetta* so as to illustrate two points: the vernacular was governed by rules, and these rules stemmed directly from the grammar of the Latin language. *Regule* was conceived on hierarchical principles analagous to the arguments employed by Lactantius and was modelled on one of the most widely circulated classical Latin grammars, Priscian's *Institutiones grammaticae* (ca. A.D. 500). *Institutiones* opens with a detailed description of the rules governing the transposition into Latin of the Greek alphabet and syllabary. *Regule* sought to demonstrate that Tuscan was in similar fashion generated from classical Latin and was the heir, accordingly, of Greek.

There is no record that *Regule* was read or discussed during Alberti's lifetime, and the manuscript dropped into anonymous obscurity shortly after his death. The influence of Priscian and of his belief that Latin grammar can be derived from Greek linguistic usage is however discernible in a later and more influential essay of Alberti's, *De componendis cifris* (ca. 1466). *De cifris* was an exposition of the construction and application of his recently invented cipher wheel, with explicit reference to Priscian's rules for the transposition of Greek letters and syllables into their Latin equivalents. Grammar and encoding were, for Alberti, analogous procedures in that both entailed transposition from a designated master alphabet into derivative systems.

*De cifris* was dedicated to Leonardo Dati, an old friend who in 1466 was confidential secretary to Pope Paul II. It was written with practical applications in mind. As if to emphasize its practicality, Alberti in his preface reminds Dati of their witnessing together "the new German invention that enables three men to produce two hundred volumes in one hundred days." This is the earliest known reference to Italian printing.

The date and tone of the preface to *De cifris* support the hypothesis that Dati and Alberti had together visited Sweynheym & Pannartz

in Subiaco and observed them at work. Alberti had presumably been struck by the similarity of the printing press and the cipher wheel. Both were based on movable letter faces, and, in Italy in 1466 at any rate, both were employed in the transmission of more or less esoteric messages.

The beliefs that quickened a notion of professional vocation among the curial humanists were thus, in essential respects, identical with the propositions implicit in the Sweynheym & Pannartz printing program at Subiaco: (1) antiquity is the source of authority; (2) Greek is the original tongue of the spiritually aroused man; (3) the Latin language is the heir to Greek and the instrument of humanity's spiritual redemption; (4) the genius of the Latin language resides in the harmonious correspondence of its syntax and vocabulary with man's noblest and most profound thoughts and experiences; (5) the divine nature of this correspondence is demonstrated by the complementary relationship of the literature of pagan Rome and the theology of the Latin church fathers; (6) the medium of Rome's unique mission has thus always been the Latin language; (7) the uniqueness of this mission is attested to by the virtually uninterrupted fifteen-hundred-year span of the spiritual and intellectual primacy of the city and its language. The making of books, insofar as it was carried out in or about Rome must therefore, of necessity, be authentically roman in form and appearance, and exclusively Latin in language and subject matter.

Forty-odd miles of rude and mountainous roads lay between the press at Subiaco and its readers. In 1467, Sweynheym & Pannartz moved to Rome and eliminated this inconvenience. They were again under humanist sponsorship and their in-house editor has recently been identified: Johannes Andreas Bussi (1417–1475), one-time private secretary to Nicholas of Cusa and the friend to whom Alberti dedicated his *De statua* (ca. 1464).<sup>1</sup> Sweynheym & Pannartz announced their presence by once more publishing works of Cicero, *Epistolae ad familiares* (1467) and *De oratore* (1468), *Opera* of Lactantius (1468), and Augustine's *De civitate Dei* (1468).

What passed without incident in Subiaco was subject to scrutiny in Rome. In the immediate orbit of the papacy, every reference to the history of the eternal city and the foundations of Christianity had

<sup>1</sup> M. D. Feld, "A Theory of the Early Italian Printing Firm, Part I: Variants of Humanism," *Harvard Library Bulletin*, 33 (1985), 352.

polemical overtones. The official reaction was not long delayed. During the early months of 1468, some of the most prominent local humanists were taken into custody and imprisoned in the Castel St. Angelo on assorted charges of Platonism, sodomy, heresy, and sedition. The behavior about this time of Sweynheym & Pannartz suggests a connection between their recent move to Rome and this police action. They adopted what is best described as a conciliatory posture, and between February of 1468 and the middle of the year they printed what was, until November 1471, their sole non-humanist edition, *Speculum vitae humanae* ([after 28 February] 1468). The author of *Speculum*, Rodericus Zamorensis was, at that time, *castellan* of St. Angelo and chief of the local police.

Divergent views as to the significance of classical culture lay at the root of the repressive measures of Pope Paul II (1464–1471). He was not in any sense an admirer of pagan philosophy and literature. The ancient Greek and Latin authors were, to his mind, both immoral in precept and heretical in spirit; more concretely, they were an incitement to lascivious behavior and republican sedition.

Local lay humanists had, on the other hand, the habit of referring to the literature of pre-Christian and imperial Rome as if it were divine revelation and represented a level of truth superior to scholastic theology and canon law. Paul II, on assuming the papacy, had purged his Curia of such individuals, dismissing in the process Leon Battista Alberti. Several of the purged humanists along with other ardent admirers of the literature and civic ritual of pagan Rome had formed a secret society, the Academy of Pomponio Leto. This academy, and Leto in particular, were the targets of Pope Paul's police action. Leto, judging from his relationship with Bussi and from the role he played in subsequent Sweynheym & Pannartz editions, had had a hand in the move from the Abbey of Santa Scholastica in the hills above Subiaco to the Palazzo Massimo in the heart of Rome.

Mutual animosity notwithstanding, Paul II and the Pomponcian humanists were in fundamental agreement: Latin literature was, for both parties, primarily a moral code and school of manners. The crucial difference lay in the fact that the pope read his Latin authors in a literal mode and believed that they meant what they apparently said while, for at least some of the humanists, the syntactical complexities and verbal subtleties of Latin literature were encoded expositions of esoteric knowledge. In this respect Paul II was, ironically

enough, closer to the humanism of Lorenzo Valla than the "radical" humanists of the Pomponian cell. Following the logic of Paul's premises, men who tried to write and speak the Latin of Cicero and Brutus—or of Virgil or Ovid, for that matter—would, by the inherent force of classical Latin feel impelled to think and behave like these authors.

Language thus lay at the heart of the matter. Rome, for the pope, was an extension of his apostolic persona, and the Latin of the Curia was the major instrument of his personal and institutional claims. For the humanists, on the other hand, the Latin of the classical authors with its entailed contrast between the Rome of Caesar and Augustus and the city they now inhabited was a running indictment of the current papacy. The publication in the city itself, without authorization, of the works of Cicero, an author who had since the time of Petrarch been the mainstay of local republican and anti-papal sentiment, must have been the ultimate provocation.

What happened next was a triumph of mimetic adaptation. Sweynheym & Pannartz, along with those of the humanists who had escaped imprisonment, must have come to realize that in Rome, unlike at Subiaco, all things Latin, by right of eminent domain, belonged to the pope. It was of the utmost importance, therefore, that their own publications be, in some highly visible way, affiliated with the pontifical administrative apparatus. Each of their subsequent editions was accordingly equipped with what amounted to a quasi-official covering-letter: a preface written in proper curial Latin, where the themes and contents of the text were described in terms of the sovereign pontiff's presumed interests and policies.

The printers were here inspired by the example of an eminently successful curial careerist, Rodericus Zamorensis. Sweynheym & Pannartz's propitiatory edition of his *Speculum vitae humanae* is the first printed book with a dedicatory preface. Rodericus used the occasion to address Paul II in terms of unmeasured adulation. Bussi, Sweynheym & Pannartz's editor and the author of their subsequent introductions, later wrote that Paul II never read prefaces. Read or not, these introductions, written by a bishop of some local standing and personally addressed to the pope, were a posted bond to the effect that the printers had nothing to hide.

Such introductions were literally "bonded," i.e., published as an integral component of the printed edition. The prefaces are,



*Scuola di S. Giorgio degli Schiavoni, Venice*

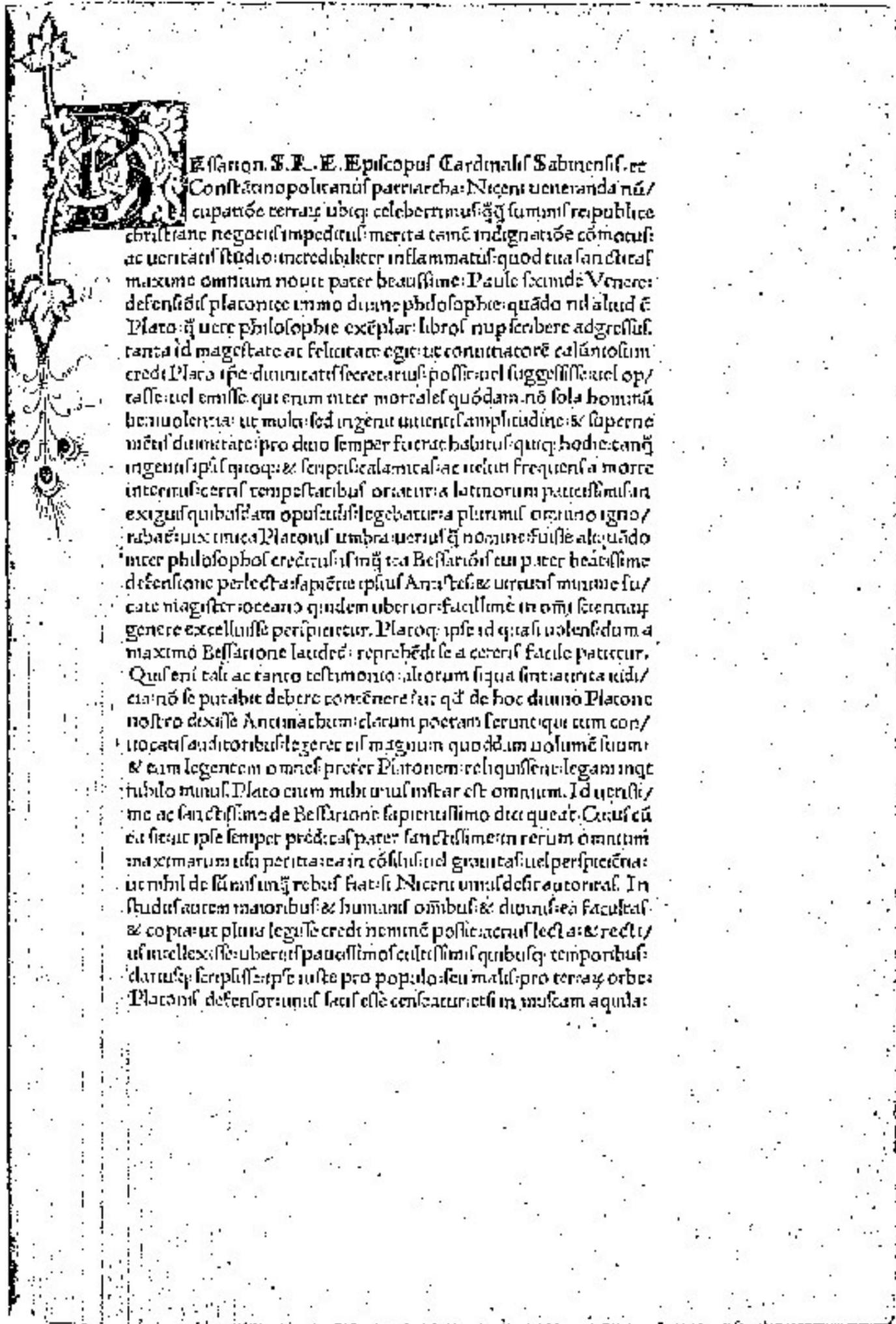
Vittore Carpaccio, Bessarion as St. Augustine

therefore, a unique documentary resource. They constitute, by design, a running, first-hand commentary on the machinery of patronage and on the doctrines guiding the prototypographers in their selection of texts.

The Sweynheym & Pannartz *editio princeps* of the *Opera* of Apuleius (28 February 1469) is a case in point. Apuleius was the first pagan author in the series published with Bussi's prefaces. As in his two preceding prefaces to Jerome's *Epistolae*, the remarks are formally addressed to Pope Paul II. This preface to Apuleius is, however, unique in that Bussi's opening sentence makes it obvious that he has someone other than the pope in mind: "Bessarion of the Holy Roman Church," it begins, "Cardinal Bishop of Sabina and Patriarch of Constantinople, resoundingly acclaimed throughout all the lands by the venerated name of Nicaea," etc.

Bessarion, as Bussi meant to make clear, was the actual protector of the revived printing enterprise. Bussi's preface had, however, a more complex intent, the legitimization of Plato and Platonism. In the process of identifying his sponsor, Bussi laid out the background and logic of the cardinal's patronage so as to convert the philosophical convictions of Bessarion into an extension and reinforcement of papal policy. With the opening sentence, Bessarion is hailed on three counts: as the personification of the universality of the Christian religion (Nicaea was the site of the first ecumenical council, A.D. 325, the source of the doctrine of the Trinity, accepted by both the Greek Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches); as guarantor of the essential unity of Christianity's various creeds (being Patriarch of Constantinople, Bessarion was the titular head of the Greek Orthodox church); as visible proof of the primacy of the See of Rome (being Cardinal Bishop of Sabina, Bessarion was by oath and function the faithful lieutenant of the pope). These honors notwithstanding, Bussi goes on to explain, Bessarion's eminence is more than the sum of his titular dignities. The cardinal's reputation is the direct consequence of his missionary labors on behalf of the philosophy of Plato.

Platonism was, in the 1460s, a novel philosophy, part of the suspect baggage of exile. Byzantine neo-Platonism in the person of Giorgio Gemisthos Plectho, its chief exponent and Bessarion's acknowledged master, was demonstrably pagan. Bussi's preface is thus polemical; it was designed to defend the orthodoxy of Bessarion. The key to



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Lucius Apuleius, *Opera*,  
Rome, Sweynheym & Pannartz, 28 February 1469. F. 1r



*Sammlung August Lederer, Vienna*

Gentile Bellini, Portrait of Bessarion (detail of reliquary cover)

Bussi's defense was the notion of Plato's dual nature: both rigorously rational mathematician and daemionically inspired prophet. Read solely as a philosopher, Plato displays the human mind at the height of its powers; studied in the perspective of Christian revelation, the Platonic persona becomes the voice of humanity's awakening to the awareness of the existence of an immortal soul.

These twinned Platonic strands were endowed by Bussi with appropriate pedigrees. For Plato "within the bounds of human reason," he drew a line starting at Aristotle and culminating in the magisterial Latin of Cicero. The family tree of daemonic Plato was equally imposing, beginning with Hermes Trismegistus and ending

with St. Augustine, with Socrates and Apuleius as the vital links. The dice in this fraternal competition were loaded in favor of daemonic Platonism: the line through Aristotle to Cicero began with logic and ended in scepticism and despair; the ascent from Hermes Trismegistus to Augustine, on the other hand, charted the progress from poetic intimations of immortality to the dogmatic certainties of the City of God.

The *Opera* of Apuleius, the first item in this Bessarion-sponsored series, includes two crucial texts. The first, a translation, erroneously attributed to Apuleius, of *Asclepius* of Hermes Trismegistus, was the sole text then available in Latin recounting the wisdom of ancient Egypt. The second was Apuleius's *De Deo Socrate*, the most widely read Latin exposition of daemonic Platonism. Apuleius of Madura, dubbed Apuleius Platonicus by his fellow North African, St. Augustine, was the chief classical Latin source for what curial humanists held to be quintessential Platonism. The attribution of both *Asclepius* and *De Deo Socrate* to the same author supported the humanist contention that Hermes Trismegistus was the primitive forerunner of Socrates. Taken in conjunction with the documented fact that Apuleius is the sole pagan neo-Platonist mentioned by St. Augustine in non-adversarial and even benevolent terms, the *Opera* becomes a compelling demonstration of Plato's catalytic role in the transformation of *prisca theologia* into patristic Christianity.

One month and a half later, Bussi and Sweynheym & Pannartz issued the second in their Bessarion series, *Noctes Atticae* of Aulus Gellius (11 April 1469). Aulus Gellius (A.D. 130–180) had written this work to demonstrate that a thorough knowledge of Greek language and literature was necessary for those who aspired to the status and role of a Roman gentleman. *Noctes* had therefore been a widely used quattrocento pedagogical text. Bussi, in his preface, however, goes one up on his author. A knowledge of Greek, he asserts, was a decisive political instrument. How else, he asks, could republican, Roman ancestors of humanism and Aulus Gellius have read and interpreted the Sibylline prophecies?

In his preface to the second volume of the *Epistolae* of St. Jerome, Bussi had drawn up a list of books he and Sweynheym & Pannartz intended to publish in the coming months. Apuleius, Aulus Gellius, and Macrobius were background reading for the forthcoming defense

of Plato. Their Macrobius was never printed, and we can only speculate why. Two works have been attributed to Macrobius (ca. A.D. 375–ca. 425): *Saturnalia* and *Somnium Scipionis* (Commentary on the Dream of Scipio). The text for the *Commentary* was a passage from Cicero's *De re publica*, at that time lost, and since partially recovered.

In the context of quattrocento Rome it is easy to understand how Macrobius had acquired the reputation of an incendiary author. Book I of the *Saturnalia* is a history and discussion of the Roman calendar, and it attempts to derive all forms of worship from the Sun. *Somnium Scipionis* is based on a hypothetical account by Scipio Africanus of the immortality he was to gain by heroic service to his native city. Scipio belonged to a family that symbolized the virtues and achievements of republican Rome. He was claimed as a direct ancestor by Sigismondo Malatesta, a celebrated *condottiere* and ruler of Rimini (1417–1468). The transformation of Rimini and the other papal fiefs of the Romagna into an independent city-state was Sigismondo's driving ambition. This and his undisguised paganism made him anathema to every pope, and especially to Paul II. Sigismondo had, in 1453, commissioned Leon Battista Alberti to design and construct a temple that would fuse his notions of paganism, primitive Christianity, and Scipionic Rome into a civic cult.

Alberti used Macrobius as a pattern book. The decorative scheme of the Tempio Malatestiano was drawn from Plato's myth of Er and Cicero's dream of Scipio, and the monumental theme of the Tempio was the Sun in its various aspects: god of victory, image of virtue, source of knowledge and light. Macrobius, in short, represented what Paul II most feared and detested, paganism and republican sedition. In place of Macrobius, Sweynheym & Pannartz printed the *Commentarii* of Julius Caesar (12 May 1469), with an afterword by Bussi. In it Bussi apologizes for his recension and explains that the printers had not allowed him enough time. Caesar was, of course, the individual responsible for the Roman republic's demise.

There is additional evidence of a disruption in the scheduled flow of Sweynheym & Pannartz editions. Bessarion's *In calumniatorem Platonis*, the crowning volume of their series, appeared sometime before 18 August 1469, without colophon or any other overt note of place, date, or printer. A collection of Bessarion's orations, also announced in the Bussi prospectus, was never published in Rome.

The first edition of his *Orationes* was, instead, printed in Paris in 1471 by another Bessarion-affiliated venture, the Sorbonne press of Guillaume Fichet. Bessarion's *In calumniatorem* and *Orationes* were, as their contents indicate, intended to be published and read in tandem. *In calumniatorem Platonis* documented the magisterial function of Plato in Greek and Latin philosophy, science, and theology, the flowering of all that had passed before, and the seedbed of everything that had since been written. *Orationes*, proceeding from this premise of the central role of Greece in Christian spiritual and political life, exhorted the princes of Italy and western Europe to join together in a crusade for its reconquest.

The failure to publish a Roman Macrobius, the muted circumstances of *In calumniatorem Platonis*'s appearance in print, and the decision to print *Orationes* as far as possible from Rome, are signs of an increasing caution on the part of Cardinal Bessarion. From late 1469 on, the operations of Sweynheym & Pannartz became more conventional. Bussi wrote eighteen more prefaces and edited fifteen more books, but his remarks in this later phase tended towards formulaic courtesies; and his authors were selected from the established humanist curriculum.

The themes presented by analogy and inference and then made explicit and elaborated in the prefaces to Apuleius and Aulus Gellius enjoyed nonetheless a vigorous after-life. Although Platonism may have become an unprintable subject in Rome, translations and expositions of Plato and the neo-Platonic canon came out with increasing frequency throughout the rest of Italy. The notion of a cosmic harmony, sustained by supernatural intermediaries and revealed to mankind in the literature and language of Greece became, in essential respects, identical with the ideal of Christianity and of a Europe revived and strengthened through renewed contact with classical antiquity.

In the process of their retrenchment Sweynheym & Pannartz were able to fall back on the expanding market for Latin literary texts, a market which they themselves had helped create. With or without Platonic overtones, Latin literacy was now an acknowledged component of the administrative apparatus of the Roman Catholic church. Paul II had been offended by the pretensions of his Curia and had sought to impose limits on its size and jurisdiction; his attempt was, however, the exception. Starting in the 1450s, the papal curia entered

a sixty-year period of expansion, swelling in the process from something under 500 in number to 2,000. The effects of this change became apparent during the papacy of Sixtus IV (1471–1484), when rhetoricians were appointed members of the papal household and set speeches in florid Latin became a fixture of ceremonial routine.

The increase in curial numbers had an institutional impact. Humanism was transformed from an association of contentious enthusiasts, debating the finer points of their relationship to Christianity and classical antiquity, into a professional body obsessed with the recruitment, indoctrination, and assignment of its members. Technical proficiency rather than indiscriminate erudition became the standard of humanist virtuosity.

Sweynheym & Pannartz were at first slow to respond to this development. The innovative impulse was instead taken up by rival Roman firms, in particular that of Giovanni Filippo de Lignamine. Lignamine entered the printing trade with the *editio princeps* of the basic Roman handbook of curial rhetorical practice, Quintilian (ca. A.D. 35–ca. 95), *Institutiones oratoriae* (3 August 1470). Not long afterwards he issued the *editio princeps* of Lorenzo Valla's adaptation of Quintilian to quattrocento circumstances, *Elegantiae* ([before July] 1471). With the election of Sixtus IV (9 August 1471), Lignamine made these rhetorical principles commercial practice and devoted his press exclusively to works written by the pope himself, and by other members of the Curia, Lignamine included, all resounding with the virtues and accomplishments of Sixtus IV. Lignamine's press became, in effect, an official organ of the papacy; this achievement propelled its proprietor into the upper ranks of the Vatican bureaucracy.

The Sweynheym & Pannartz firm was, nonetheless, granted one final creative outburst. Sometime about the beginning of April 1472, Bussi became Vatican librarian. The position of in-house editor to Sweynheym & Pannartz was assumed by Niccolò Perotti.

Perotti, Archbishop of Siponto, had been for many years secretary to Cardinal Bessarion. The first half of his editorial tenure is notable for its reprints of earlier Sweynheym & Pannartz editions, all with their original Bussi prefaces excised. Upon the death of Cardinal Bessarion on 18 November 1472, Perotti received from Sixtus IV the gift of two of his late protector's most lucrative benefices.<sup>2</sup> He cele-

<sup>2</sup> Giovanni Mercati, *Per la cronologia della vita e degli scritti di Niccolò Perotti, arcivescovo di Siponto* (Bologna, 1925), "Paralipomeni Perottini," p. 2.

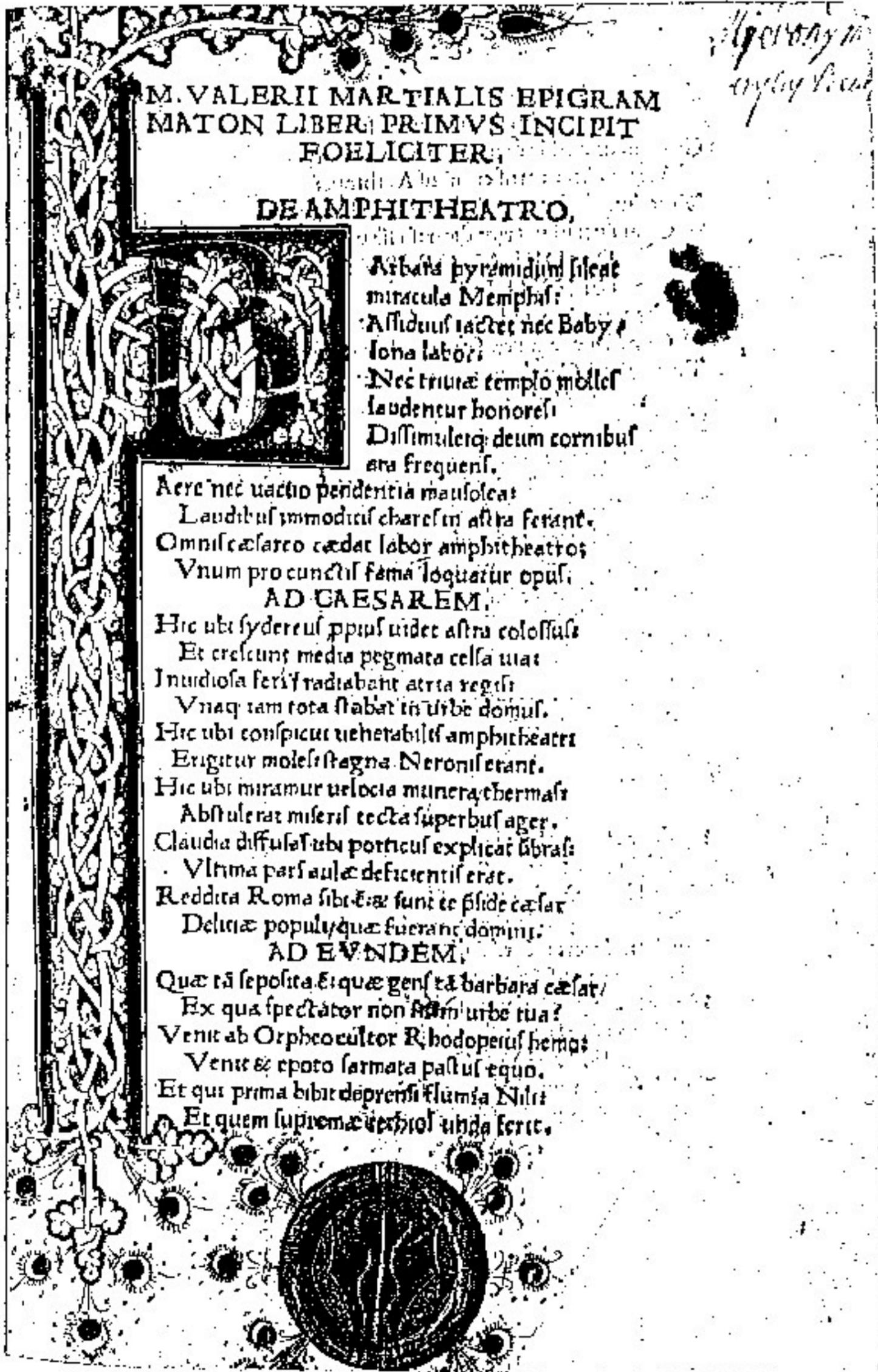
brated this windfall with the self-subsidized publication of his hitherto unprinted works: Polybius, *Historiae* (translation and preface by Perotti, 31 December 1472); Nicolaus Perottus, *Rudimenta grammatices* (19 March 1473); Martialis, *Epigrammata* (ed. Perotti, 30 April 1473); Plinius Secundus, *Historia naturalis* (ed. Perotti, 7 May 1473).

*Rudimenta* embodies the most innovative and distinctive aspect of curial humanism, the marriage of grammar and rhetoric. The work is divided into three parts, each of which had already been the subject of other humanist manuals: an elementary morphology, i.e., noun and verb paradigms, definitions of parts of speech, etc.; a discussion and illustration of the rules of verbal syntax; and a handbook of epistolary composition and style. Perotti's unique contribution was to treat all three as parts of a coherent whole. The notion that the morphology and syntax of a language dictate the manner and method of its use had, of course, been implicit in the work of Valla and Alberti; prior to the publication of *Rudimenta grammatices*, however, this thesis had not been subjected to systematic analysis and exposition.

The other three Perotti texts printed by Sweynheym & Pannartz illustrate the professional applications of this doctrine. The translation of Polybius (ca. 202–120 B.C.) and its preface were written between 1452 and 1454 for Pope Nicholas V. Polybius's *Historiae*, the first major Greek text to appear in print, described how and why Rome had become Greece's political and cultural heir.

Perotti believed that in the act of translation he had revived this special relationship of Greece and Rome. Composition in Latin was for him as it had been for Valla the supreme creative act. In his preface he takes issue with the belief that translation is a mechanical routine: the Latin text, he declares, is as much his original contribution as it is a faithful rendition of Polybius's text.

Perotti's two critical editions, Martial and Pliny, are gestures in the opposite direction. Each was printed without preface or any other note of proprietary scholarship. If the original manuscripts of these recensions had not survived, the identification of the editor would have been, at best, problematic. These omissions were deliberate. Perotti, as we learn from his letters, objected violently to overt traces in the actual text of a hand other than the author's. His editorial practice was governed by the principle that a classical masterpiece is, by definition, a self-sufficient entity, and that its style, syntax, and



M. VALERII MARTIALIS EPIGRAMMATON LIBER PRIMVS INCIPIT FOELICITER.

DE AMPHITHEATRO.

Arbata pyramidum sileat  
 miracula Memphis:  
 Assiduus iacet nec Baby-  
 lona labori  
 Nec trivæ templo molles  
 laudentur honores  
 Dissimuletoq; deum cornibus  
 ara frequens.

Aere nec uactio pendentiâ mausoleat  
 Laudibus immodicus charis in astra ferant.  
 Omnis caesareo cædat labor amphitheatros  
 Vnum pro cunctis fama loquatur opus.

AD CAESAREM.

Hic ubi sydereus ppius uidet astra colossus  
 Et crescunt media peggmata celsa uias  
 Inuidiosa feris radiabant atria regis  
 Vnaq; tam tota stabat in urbe domus.

Hic ubi conspicit ueherabilis amphitheatra  
 Eugitur moleis stagna Neronis erant.

Hic ubi miramur uelocia munera chermas  
 Abstulerat miseris tecta superbus ager.  
 Claudia diffusas ubi porticus explicat libras  
 Vltima pars aulae deficientis erat.

Reddita Roma sibi esse sunt ee slide caesar  
 Deliciae populi quæ fuerant domini.

AD EVNDEM.

Quæ rã seposita est quæ gens rã barbara caesar  
 Ex qua spectator non sum urbe tua?  
 Venit ab Orpheocultor Rhodoperus hemus  
 Venit ex epoto sarmata pastus equo.  
 Et qui prima bibit depresso flumina Nilis  
 Et quem supremæ cæciol unda ferit.

Mrs. John D. Gordon

Marcus Valerius Martialis, *Epigrammata*,  
 Rome, Sweynheym & Pannartz, 30 April 1473, F. 1r

vocabulary all move in concord with a unique internal harmony. Dissonance, therefore, betrayed the intrusion of an alien hand.

The full significance of Perotti emerges only when the four of his works printed by Sweynheym & Pannartz are studied in conjunction with his posthumously published *Cornucopiae sive Commentarii linguae latinae* (1489). *Cornucopiae* is a thesaurus of classical Latin based on Book I of Martial's *Epigrammata* (ca. A.D. 86). The Latin of Martial was, for Perotti, the language of Rome at its apex of empire, language at the height, that is to say, of its powers of description, persuasion, and command. *Cornucopiae* is the legacy of his lifelong study.

In *Cornucopiae*, Perotti surveyed the linguistic and syntactical cosmos of classical antiquity in a manner analagous to his method of editing Martial and Pliny, as something to be apprehended and reconstructed from within. Greek was once more the key. In July 1478, the date of the manuscript's completion, *Cornucopiae* was the first commentary in which the language and literature of ancient Greece were employed as essential adjuncts to the interpretation of a classical Latin text. Perotti's recourse to Greek foreshadows the far more substantial achievement of Angelo Poliziano (1454–1494). Greek was for both an Archimedian device, enabling the Renaissance scholar to step out of his contemporary frame into another era, and thereby to read Latin texts with pagan eyes.

Sweynheym & Pannartz's sequence of Perotti editions was thus doubly climactic. It was the final act in the recorded history of their partnership, and marked, as well, the transformation of humanism from a personal style into a professional service. The implications of this development can be seen in the contrast of the behavior of Roman curial humanists during the successive papacies of Paul II (1464–1471) and Sixtus IV (1471–1484).

Throughout the papacy of Paul II, Cardinal Bessarion had been the animating focus of Roman curial humanism. With Bessarion, the study of Greek and Latin literature was subordinated to his notions of theological and ecclesiastical priorities. The salvage and reconstitution of classical antiquity had been pursued by Bessarion as a means of reinforcing his own status as the resident arbiter of orthodox Christian dogma.

With Sixtus IV, the emphasis was reversed. The Latin of imperial Rome became an absolute standard, the ultimate criterion of political legitimacy. Through the agency of resident humanists, the language

and ritual of the Vatican were modified so as to approximate this ideal. Bessarion wished to be taken for a conforming Christian; Sixtus IV hoped to be confused with an emperor.

Within the framework of curial humanism, the reconstituted past was infinitely preferable to the orthodox present. The process of reconstitution was, in itself, a claim to possession of objective, analytical skills. The past was malleable and could, by means of this humanist technology, be fabricated on demand. This last point was not lost on the rulers of the various Italian principalities. To an increasing degree, they extended their patronage to individuals versed in the classical languages and literatures, and the ceremonial display of such knowledge became a regular feature of public administration.

Perotti's trinity of autonomous texts, comprehensive manuals, and encyclopedic compendia became institutionalized. In various editions and adaptations, these set the standard for the education of gentlemen, the licensing of scholars, the practice of literature, law, warfare, and the arts, and the etiquette of courts. The display of classical Latin and of its derivative, ornate, vernacular style became a token of upper-class behavior. The history of the Renaissance is a record of the progressively wider reception and application of humanism's apparatus of printed examples and instructions.

As the distance grew between the sites of professional humanism and the city of Rome itself, Latin lost its immediacy. In the course of this transformation, the languages of ascending nation-states each in turn laid claim to the imperial role. Like Greek and presumably like hieroglyphs, Hebrew, and Sanskrit at an even earlier date, Latin became the language of mystery and revelation.