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REPRESENTING THE ANCIENT PAST IN THE FIFTEENTH-CENTURY MAFFEI TACITUS

(Copenhagen, Royal Library, MS GKS 496 2°)

BY

MARINA VIDAS

The splendidly illuminated Italian Renaissance manuscript MS GKS 496 2°, which resides in the collection of the Royal Library in Copenhagen, contains the text of *Annals* (Books 11–16, 35) and *Histories* (Books 1–5, 14) composed by the Roman historian Tacitus (c.55–c.120).¹ It measures 26.7 × 16.4 cm and has 196 folios with 31 lines of text per page, with the exception of the folios which follow f. 155r, which have 30 lines of text. The manuscript is illuminated with a full page frontispiece and ten miniatures at the opening of each of the books of Tacitus' works. These miniatures have been attributed by art historians to either Giovan Pietro da Birago (fl. c.1463–1513) or to the hand of an unknown master, who was influenced by Birago.²

The coats of arms which are found at the bottom of folio 1r clearly identify the owner of the manuscript as belonging to the Maffei family

¹ I would like to extend acknowledgement and gratitude to the Novo Nordisk Foundation for their support of my research. For constructive observations, I would also like to thank an anonymous peer reviewer.

² For these attributions see J. J. G. Alexander: Notes on some Veneto-Paduan illuminated books of the Renaissance. *Arte Veneta*, 23, 1969, p. 14; Laura P. Gnaccolini: Giovan Pietro Birago miniatore per re Mattia Corvino. A. Rovetta and G. Hajnoczi, (eds.): *Lombardia e Ungheria nell'età dell'umanesimo e del rinascimento: rapporti culturali e artistici dall'età di Sigismondo all'invasione turca 1387–1526*. Milan 2004, p. 140 and p.150, note 65, and Laura P. Gnaccolini: Giovan Pietro Birago. M. Bollati (ed.): *Dizionario biografico dei miniatori italiani. Secoli IX–XVI*, Milan 2004, pp. 104–110. For the earlier scholarship on the manuscript see C. Bruun: De illuminerede Haandskrifter fra Middelalderen i Det store kongelige Bibliotek. *Aarsberetninger og Meddelelser fra Det store kongelige Bibliotek*, 1870–1902, pp. 244–245; Ellen Jørgensen: *Catalogus codicum latinorum mediæ ævi Bibliothecae Regiae Hafniensis*, 1926, 324; Kåre Olsen and Carl Nordenfalk (eds.): *Gyldne bøger: Illuminerede middelalderlige håndskrifter i Danmark og Sverige*, 1952, p. 91 no. 190; José Ruyschaert: Recherche des deux bibliothèques romaines Maffei des XVe et XVIe siècles. *La Bibliofila*, 60, 1958, pp. 333–334, no. 70 and Erik Petersen (ed.): *Levende ord og lysende billeder: den middelalderlige bogkultur i Danmark. Katalog*. 1999, p. 67, no. 90.

of Rome.³ Further information about the provenance of the manuscript and its production is yielded by an inscription on f. 196r: “Hic liber visus et ut accuratius ex incuria temporu[m] fieri potuit eme[n]datus est per me Ludovicu[m] Regiu[m] Imolensem anno salutis M.CCCCLXXXVIII die v[er]o XXV^a septembris: [///] Innocentio VIII Pont[ifice] Max[imo].” These lines, which were written by the humanist scholar and scribe Ludovico Regio of Imola, who is known to have copied and/or annotated at least five manuscripts for Agostino Maffei (1431–1496), suggest that the Copenhagen Tacitus belonged to this member of the Roman branch of the Maffei family. The inscription also provides a *terminus ante quem* for the completion of the manuscript in 1488 when Ludovico emended the text. At the end of the seventeenth century the manuscript was in Venice, where it was bought along with various other books by the Danish bibliophile Frederik Rostgaard (1671–1745) in 1699.⁴ After Rostgaard’s death it was sold at auction and subsequently entered the collection of Count Christian Danneskiold-Samsøe (1702–1728).⁵ It was acquired by the Royal Library in 1732 at the auction of the count’s books.

The Intended Reader

The Tacitus manuscript was almost certainly made for Agostino Maffei, who was actively commissioning copies of and collecting manuscripts with texts by ancient Greek and Roman authors in Rome in the 1480s and 1490s. He was closely associated with Pomponio Leto, one of the leading classical scholars of his day, and his circle of humanists and their students. The members of Pomponio’s so-called first “Roman Academy” (1427–1468) were all highly dedicated to the study of antiquity.⁶ Many of the members of this network had, during the course of their professional careers, earned a living as scribes and had copied and/or emended Latin histories and literature.

³ Ruyschaert 1958, p. 323. The same coat of arms appears on his tomb in the Maffei chapel in the church of S. Maria sopra Minerva, Rome.

⁴ See the note on the verso of folio before f. 1r that states: “Fredericus Rostgaard emit Venetijs 1699.”

⁵ Bruun 1902, p. 245.

⁶ On the configuration of the “Academy” see Susanna De Beer: The Roman ‘Academy’ of Pomponio Leto. ed. Arjan van Dixhoorn and Susie Speakman Sutch (eds.): *The Reach of the republic of letters: Literary and learned societies in the in late Medieval and early modern Europe*, 1, Leiden 2008, p. 192.

Agostino Maffei was himself a professional scribe and was deeply versed in Latin – Pomponio Leto praised Maffei’s erudition and acclaimed him as a treasury of knowledge about ancient Rome.⁷ Agostino left his native city of Verona in the mid-fifteenth century for Rome to enter a career in the Curia.⁸ From 1455 onwards, he was engaged there as a writer and recorder of apostolic letters (*scriptor litterarum apostolicarum*) before being imprisoned from 1468 until 1470.⁹ The circumstances which led to his loss of freedom were tied to accusations that he and other members of Pomponio Leto’s first “Roman Academy” were conspiring to have Pope Paul II assassinated. Accused not only of conspiracy but also of paganism and heresy, Leto, Maffei, Platina and other humanists from the Pomponian circle were condemned to prison and confined under harsh conditions in the Castel Sant’Angelo.¹⁰ After the election of Sixtus IV in 1471, Maffei returned to the Chancery, serving as *lector in audientia litterarum contradictarum* (1472–1489), *magister plumbi* (1476–1496) and *abbreviator de parco minori* (1479–1496).¹¹ He was also free to fully pursue his humanist studies and patronage. The Palazzo Maffei in Via della Pigna which Agostino’s successful sibling, the humanist author and *abbreviatore* at the papal court, Benedetto Maffei,

⁷ For Leto’s dedication to: “AVGVSTINO MAFÆO RERVVM RO. THESAVRO POMPONIVS LAETVS” see Sallust’s *Opera*, Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Ott. lat. 2989, ff. 1r–2v and Ruyschaert 1958, no. 103. For bibliographic references to Agostino Maffei and a short biography see Giorgia Castiglione: Maffei, Agostino. *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, 67, 2006, <[www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/agostino-maffei_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/agostino-maffei_(Dizionario-Biografico))> and Patricia Osmond: Agostino Maffei. *Repertorium Pomponianum*, 2008, <www.repertoriumpomponianum.it/pomponiani/maffei_agostino.htm>.

⁸ Mara Minasi: *Rerum Romanarum thesaurus: Agostino Maffei e le origini della raccolta di antichità all’Arco della Ciambella*. Anna Cavallaro (ed.): *Collezioni di antichità a Roma tra ‘400 e ‘500*, Rome 2007, p. 106.

⁹ For the positions Agostino held in Rome see Thomas Frenz: *Die Kanzlei der Päpste der Hochrenaissance (1471–1527)*. Tübingen 1986, p. 291; Anna Bedon: I Maffei e il loro palazzo in via della Pigna. *Quaderni dell’Istituto di Storia dell’Architettura*, 12, 1988, p. 48, and Gaetano Marini: *Degli architetti pontifici*. I, Rome 1784, pp. 229–230.

¹⁰ No documents of the trial, if there was one, are extant. The humanists were mostly kept in solitary confinement and were deprived of reading and writing materials. For a discussion of the charges brought against Leto and his associates see Richard J. Palermino: The Roman Academy, the catacombs and the conspiracy of 1468. *Archivum Historiae Pontificiae*, 18, 1980, pp. 117–155 and Anthony D’Elia: *A sudden terror: The plot to murder the pope in Renaissance Rome*. Cambridge 2009. For Benedetto’s successful intervention to have Agostino liberated from prison see Minasi 2007, p. 106.

¹¹ Frenz 1986, p. 291 and Osmond 2008.

had purchased in 1468, housed a growing collection of manuscripts and incunabula with titles which attested to the brothers' strong humanist scholarly and antiquarian interests. On the basis of manuscript evidence, such as coats of arms and inscriptions, as well as in references in other records, José Ruyschaert was able to establish that fifty one volumes could be connected to Agostino and Benedetto and/or to their later heirs. It is likely that at the very least, twenty of these books, those dating from the second half of the fifteenth century and containing texts by antique authors or humanists, were produced for the two brothers.¹² It is possible that Agostino supplied the parchment for some of these works, as he is documented as paying a tax for importing 1,500 folios of this material in 1484 and conceivably could have bought it on other occasions as well.¹³ A number of the texts in their manuscripts were emended by learned scholars, some of whom were associated with the "Roman Academy". For example, Justinus' *Epitoma Historiarum Philippicarum Pompei Trogi* (*Epitome of the Philippic histories of Pompeius Trogus*, Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Ott. lat. 1243), which was annotated in a Pomponian hand.¹⁴ Agostino also sought out scholars with relevant expertise who resided outside of Rome to make revisions to his manuscripts in order to make them as correct and authoritative as possible. In 1488, he wrote to the eminent humanist scholar Angelo Poliziano to ask him to correct a copy of the translation of Herodian's *Historiae de vitis imperatorum* (*Histories*, Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Ott. lat. 1836) which the poet-scholar returned to him the following year.¹⁵

There were a number of manuscript projects with which we know Agostino was very closely involved. In collaboration with the scribe Giuliano Cecio (d. 1513), a pupil of Pomponio Leto, Agostino took on the immense philological task of producing an edition of Festus'

¹² For the books which were made for patrons other than Agostino and Benedetto Maffei and which wound up in the brothers' collection see Ruyschaert 1958, for example no. 94.

¹³ For Agostino's payment see Minasi 2007, p. 107, note 24.

¹⁴ For the copy of the *Priapeia* and of Martial's *Epigrammata* (Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Ott. lat. 2029) annotated in the Castel Sant'Angelo by Marco Lucio Fazini, one of the humanists arrested along with Agostino, see Ruyschaert 1958, no. 101. For the work by Platina copied by Fazini for the Maffei see Ruyschaert 1958, no. 107.

¹⁵ For a transcription of the letter see Ida Maïer: *Les manuscrits d'Ange Politien: catalogue descriptif, avec dix-neuf documents inédits en appendice*. Geneva 1965, pp.390–391. For the manuscript see Ruyschaert 1958, no. 93.

De verborum significatione (Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. lat. 5958, c.1490–1496) from the damaged manuscript discovered in the fifteenth century (Naples, Biblioteca Nazionale, MS IV A 3).¹⁶ On the basis of an inscription it has been suggested that Agostino himself might have partly emended the text of Terence's *Comoediae* (London, British Library, Additional MS 14085) which was in his collection.¹⁷ He also played an important role in the preparation of Latin texts for print, for example Sallust's *Opera* (Rome, Eucharius Silber, 3 April 1490) and Cicero's *Epistolae ad Brutum, ad Quintum fratrem, ad Atticum* (Rome, Eucharius Silber, after 17 July 1490).¹⁸

Agostino and Benedetto were also interested in the archaeological remains of ancient Rome and collected epigraphs and antique sculptures. Along with their books, these works were available to humanist friends and members of the Roman Academy, which was re-established by Pomponio Leto and his close associates.¹⁹ Agostino also hosted humanists in his home, for example Niccolò Cosmico.²⁰

The Annotator of the Tacitus: Ludovico Regio

The humanist Ludovico Regio, who spent parts of his life in Rome working as a scribe, editor and author, was a close associate of Agostino Maffei.²¹ He is known to have annotated or copied at least five works

¹⁶ Bracke Wouter: La première « édition » humaniste du *De verborum significatione* de Festus (Vat. lat. 5958). *Revue d'histoire des textes*, 25, 1995, pp. 189–215. For another humanist manuscript copied by Cecio and indexed by Bartolomeo Sanvito (Virgil, *Opera*, c.1499–1502, London, British Library, Additional MS. 11355) see Albinia Catherine De la Mare and Laura Nuvoloni: *Bartolomeo Sanvito: the life and work of a Renaissance scribe*. Paris 2009, p. 354 and p. 435, no. 114, note 9.

¹⁷ For this suggestion see Osmond 2008. The last line of the text on f. 198r by the scribe who copied the manuscript reads: “Gratias finito libro referamus Christo” while the note which is further down on the page in a different coloured ink and in another hand reads “Augustini Maffei scriptoris ap[ostolici]. See also Ruyschaert 1958, no. 72, who interprets the lines as an ownership note.

¹⁸ For the two incunabula see Ruyschaert 1958, no. 103 and no. 106, respectively.

¹⁹ Bedon 1988, p. 49 ; Minasi 2007, p. 109 and Osmond 2008.

²⁰ For Niccolò Cosmico's letter of 1477 in which he asked to have future correspondence sent to the house of Agostino Maffei, who was his patron, see David Chambers: *A Renaissance cardinal and his worldly goods: the will and inventory of Francesco Gonzaga (1444–1483)*. London 1992, p. 69.

²¹ See A. Fairbank: Ludovicus Regius, *The Journal of the Society for Italic Handwriting*, 47, 1966, p. 10 and J. Ruyschaert 1958, p. 334. For examples of Regio's letters addressed to Maffei see Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bod-Inc: C-285 and Bod-Inc: C-286.

for Maffei.²² Besides the Copenhagen Tacitus, Ludovico annotated an incunabulum of Cicero's *Epistolae ad Brutum, e ad Atticum* (Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Inc. Membr. II.16), wrote and annotated a manuscript of Herodian's *Historiae* (Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Ott. lat. 1836) and corrected a manuscript of Cicero's *De officiis* (Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Ott. lat. 1505).²³ The dedicatory letter for Agostino and marginal notes in the presentation copy of Cicero's *Epistolae ad Brutum, ad Quintum fratrem, ad Atticum* (Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana lat. 3250) were written in Regio's hand.²⁴

The Text

The text of the Copenhagen manuscript is derived from an eleventh-century copy, the so-called Second Mediceus of Tacitus (Florence, Biblioteca Laurenziana, Codex Laurentianus Mediceus 68.2) containing the *Historiae* (Books 1–5) and *Annales* (Books 11–16).²⁵ When and how the medieval manuscript, which is written in the Beneventan script of Monte Cassino, left the abbey has not been established.²⁶ Some scholars have argued that the Cassinese Tacitus was brought to Florence in 1360 by Boccaccio, who had used events described in the Roman historian's writings as a source for his own work postdating c.1361.²⁷ Boccaccio is also known to have bequeathed his vast personal library, which included a manuscript of Tacitus' writings, to the Augustinians of Santo Spirito in Florence.²⁸ However, the evidence connecting the Second Mediceus of Tacitus to the volume owned by Boccaccio is circumstantial. What we

²² For the manuscript of Propertius *Elegies* (Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Ott. lat. 1514), which Ludovico annotated and which might have belonged to Agostino Maffei see James L. Butrica: *The manuscript tradition of Propertius*, Toronto 1984, p. 304.

²³ See Ruysschaert 1958, nos. 75, 92 and 85 respectively. For MS Ott. lat. 1505 see also Lilian Armstrong, "Opus Petri: Renaissance illuminated books from Venice and Rome." *Viator*, 1990, pp. 405–406, and p. 412 no. 10 and Albinia Catherine De la Mare and Laura Nuvoloni: *Bartolomeo Sanvito: the life and work of a Renaissance scribe*. Paris 2009, p. 205.

²⁴ Ruysschaert 1958, no. 106

²⁵ For this manuscript see Francis Newton: *The scriptorium and library at Monte Cassino, 1058–1105*. Cambridge 1999, pp. 96–108, 260.

²⁶ R. J. Tarrant: Tacitus. L. D. Reynolds (ed.): *Texts and transmission: a survey of the Latin classics*, Oxford 1983, p. 407.

²⁷ Julia Haig Gaisser: *The Fortunes of Apuleius and the Golden Ass: A study in transmission and reception*. Princeton 2008, pp. 94–95.

²⁸ Gaisser 2008, p. 95.

do know about the provenance of the Monte Cassino manuscript is that it came into the possession of the Florentine humanist scholar, copyist and bibliophile Niccolò Niccoli and that soon after his death in 1427 it passed to the monastery of San Marco in Florence.²⁹ The *editio princeps* of Tacitus' works, which was printed in Venice in 1470 shortly after the first printing press was established there by Johannes (Giovanni) de Spira in 1469, included the material of the Second Mediceus. A copy of this first edition is found in the collection of the Royal Library (Copenhagen, Royal Library, Inc. Haun., 3821).³⁰

The Script

The text is written on a plain background and rests on vertical hard-point ruled lines. With the exception of the rubrication and initials, the original text of the Copenhagen Tacitus is written by at least three humanist scribes in cursive book script, an archaizing book hand which Niccolò Niccoli is credited with inventing by c.1420 for use in Classical and humanists texts. This form of humanist script is a modified cursive version of the formal book script invented by Florentine scholar-humanists in imitation of Caroline minuscule which was used in eleventh- and twelfth-century manuscripts read and copied by humanists. The scribal hand of the *Annals* is professional, regular, clear and steadier than the shakier first hand of the *Histories* which is visible from f. 91r and the more careless hand which is visible from f. 148r. The catchwords at the end of the *Annals*, f. 91v, read: "Hic multum deest" (Here much is lacking) and "Sequitur Li. XVIII" (Book XVIII follows).

Faceted initials, which appear to be three-dimensional objects cast in metal and are derived from lettering found on Roman imperial monuments, are placed at the beginning of each book of the Tacitus manuscript. These capitals in red or purple highlighted in gold are situated in landscapes accompanied by classically inspired figures and animals. The earliest faceted initials are to be found in Paduan manuscripts dating to around 1460.³¹ Also from around 1460 is the

²⁹ Tarrant 1983, p. 408.

³⁰ Mellor 2012, p. 139.

³¹ For the earliest Renaissance manuscripts in which faceted letters were employed see Jonathan J. G. Alexander: Initials in Renaissance illuminated manuscripts: The problem of the so-called "litera Mantiniana." Johanne Autenrieth (ed.): *Renaissance und Humanistenhandschriften (Schriften des Historischen Kollegs Kolloquien 13)*, Munich 1988, pp. 145–155.

earliest treatise we have on the design of these type of letters by the Veronese humanist and scribe Felice Feliciano.³² The faceted letter was soon afterwards used in manuscripts made in Rome, presumably as a result of the move of the celebrated Paduan scribe Bartolomeo Sanvito (1435–1511) to Rome and his work for Cardinal Francesco Gonzaga (1444–1483).³³

The headings and incipits of the *Annals* were executed in coloured epigraphic capitals in gold, silver, blue and violet and are similar to the letters used in the epigraphs the Maffei collected, as well as being very reminiscent of Sanvito, who rubricated at least one manuscript and possibly another for Agostino Maffei. The former is the manuscript with which Agostino was very closely involved, namely Sextus Pompeius Festus's *De verborum significatione* (Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. lat. 5958, c.1490–1496) while the latter is a volume of Cicero's *De Officiis* (Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Ott. lat. 1505) illuminated by Petrus V..., the miniature painter whose name is only partially known to us.³⁴

Agostino Maffei had social and business ties with Cardinal Francesco Gonzaga, who was an avid collector of manuscripts and antiquities and in whose household Sanvito resided.³⁵ Like Agostino, Sanvito had connections to Pomponio Leto and the "Roman Academy." The headings and incipits of the *Histories* in the Copenhagen manuscript are less accomplished than those of the *Annals* and, thus it can be assumed, were executed by a different scribe.

The various types of letters employed in the Copenhagen manuscript served both an aesthetic and practical purpose. The humanist patron probably took pleasure in viewing the antiquarian letters and, since manuscripts of this period were not paginated, the headings and miniatures helped him find the divisions in the book. The interrelationship

³² Jonathan J. G. Alexander: *Italian Renaissance illuminations*. New York and London 1977, p. 64.

³³ Alexander 1988, p. 152.

³⁴ For MS Vat. Lat. 5958 and MS Ott. lat. 1505 see De la Mare and Nuvoloni 2009, p. 243 and p. 205 respectively. For MS Ott. lat. 1505 as the work of the artist "Petrus V—," see Lilian Armstrong: *Opus Petri: Renaissance miniatures from Venice and Rome*. *Viator*, 21, 1990, pp. 405–406, and p. 412, no. 10.

³⁵ For Francesco Maffei, Agostino's younger brother, who was a member of the cardinal's household and for letters to and from Francesco Gonzaga indicating that Agostino was lending money to the Mantuan nobleman see Chambers 1992, pp. 16, 45–46 and pp. 16, 45–46 respectively.



Figure 1. Tacitus. *Annals*. Book XI. MS GKS 496 2°, f. 1. Frontispiece. (Photo: The Royal Library, Copenhagen).

between word and image, which we will discuss below, also enriched the experience of the time spent with the manuscript.

The Frontispiece, f. 1r

What differentiates the Copenhagen Tacitus from many other manuscripts in the Maffei library is that the area around the text block is illuminated and that it is painted in a very accomplished fashion.³⁶ In general terms, the design of the frontispiece owes much to its Paduan precedents, which tended toward the antiquarian and the sculptural.³⁷ The illusion is created on folio 1r (fig. 1) of text which hovers in a landscape above the remnants of a Roman architectural structure. To the far right of the text block and in between the taller broken column and two trees is a group of three young men in *quattrocento* dress. In the middle ground of the illumination is a green plain and a body of water, while off in the distance are mountains. Tree tops are visible above the upper part of the writing space while represented beneath it is the lower part of the Roman ruin.

The ruin depicted on folio 1r is composed of a multicoloured stone substructure with figurative reliefs and the remnants of two columns on gold circular bases. The left hand red-veined white column is broken very close to its base, while the right hand one is taller and more complete. The white sculptural reliefs depict tritons in various poses, in front of which stand two winged putti holding a shield with the coat of arms of the Maffei family of Rome.

Within the text space there is a square area illuminated with an illusionistic landscape, dominated by the faceted initial “N.” The tail of

³⁶ Most of the texts in Maffei’s library were simply copied out on ruled parchment and received little embellishment, with the exception of some books which contain decorated letters. Beside the Tacitus and the previously mentioned illuminated Festus and Cicero embellished by Petrus V..., the Maffei library in Rome included an illuminated manuscript of Justin’s *Epitome Historiarum Philippicarum Pompei Trogi* (Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Ott. lat. 1243). There is some disagreement about whether the *Chronicle of Eusebius of Caesarea* (Geneva, Bibliothèque de Genève, MS lat. 49, c.1480) with a frontispiece illuminated by Petrus V..., was in Agostino and Benedetto’s library. Ruyschaert 1958, no. 71 argued that it was made for the Maffei family of Rome while Armstrong 1990, p. 403, judged that the manuscript was produced for Celso Maffei.

³⁷ For this trend, which was first found in manuscripts produced in Padua in the 1450s, see Patricia Fortini Brown: *Venice and antiquity: The Venetian sense of the past*. New Haven and London 1996, p. 192.

a winged hybrid creature, half putto and half fish, is coiled around the upright stem of a letter and supported by its right hand. The putto-merman has a flesh-coloured face, arms and torso, pink wings and a purple and white tail. His gaze and hand gesture direct the viewer's attention towards the letters of the opening of the text.

The frontispiece reflects the trend evident in Italian Renaissance manuscripts in which the title of the work and the name of the author were placed at the beginning of the volume in an architectural structure.³⁸ Frontispieces of this type were first found in manuscripts produced in Padua in the 1450s and were often designed with illusionist variations on the triumphal arch. Frequently adorned with trophies, garlands and candelabra, they reveal a careful study of classical and Renaissance architecture.³⁹ In the Copenhagen manuscript, the decayed structure on the title page is not a triumphal arch or an accurate rendering of a single Roman monument. Rather it is a composite of components which are inspired by Imperial architecture and sculpture. In this respect it is similar to the structure in the lower part of the frontispiece attributed to Gaspare da Padova (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Suetonius, *Vitae duodecim Caesarum*, MS lat. 5814, 1475–1885), f. 1r.⁴⁰ In Gaspare's frontispiece the substructure is composed of two carved drums on either side of a plaque depicting a scene inspired by antique sculptural reliefs.⁴¹

The colours used in the depiction of the columns with red and yellow veining suggest the artist might have looked to antique architecture, which incorporates stones with veins such as pavonazzetto marble, as a source of inspiration. It is possible that one of the architectural sources for our artist might have been the Arch of Constantine, which he could have seen in Rome.⁴² As on the Arch of Constantine, the columns of the title page stand on bases, which are decorated with figurative reliefs. However, there are also differences. On the whole the triumphal arch in Rome is a much more grandiose work than the rather modest ruin in the

³⁸ Brown 1996, p. 199

³⁹ Alison Luchs: *The mermaids of Venice: Fantastic sea creatures in Venetian Renaissance art*. London 2010, p. 38.

⁴⁰ For the manuscript see Jonathan J. G. Alexander (ed.): *The painted page: Italian Renaissance book illumination 1450–1550*. London 1995, 1994, cat. 74.

⁴¹ For Gaspare da Padova, who in 1484 had been a member of Cardinal Francesco Gonzaga's household for 16 years, see Chambers 1992, p.58. For Sanvito, who was in the household from c.1469–1471, see Chambers 1992, p. 60,

⁴² For the copying and adaptation of the Arch of Constantine by artists in the Middle Ages and Renaissance see Phyllis Pray Bober and Ruth Rubinstein: *Renaissance artists and antique sculpture: a handbook of sources*. London 1987, p. 216.

Mirū hoc in homine: q̄; humani affectus signa dedit non cum letantes accu-
satores aspiceret non cum filios merentes. Iuuitque
obliuionem eius senatus censendo nomē effigies pri-
uatis & publicis locis demouendas: Decreta Narcisso &
stonā insignia leuissimū fastigij eius cum secundum
Pallantem & Calystum agerē: honesta quidem sed
ex quibus deterrima oriuntur tris itis multis.

CORNELII TACITI DE REBUS GESTIS



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DE MESSALINAE

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libertos certamine quis deligeret v-
xorem Claudio celibi uice in tonā
ti & coniugibus imperatoris obnoxio
Nec minore ambitu femine exarse-

rant suam queq; nobilitatem formam opes contendere
ac dignam tanto matrimonio ostentare: sed maxime
ambigebatur inter Lolliam Paulinam. M. Lollij consula-
ris & Tulliam Agrippinam Germanico genitam: huc
Pallas illi Calystus fautores aderant: At Elia petina
e familia Tiberonum Narcisso fouebatur: ipse huc mo-
modo illuc ut quemq; suadentium audierat promptus
discordantes in consilium uocat ac promere sententia
& adijcere rationes uide: Narcissus uetus matrimoni-
um familiam comunem Nam Antonia ex petina erat
nihil in penetibus eius nouum dufferbat si sueta con-
iunx recire haud quanq; nouercalibus odijs uisura bri-
tannicum & Octauiam proxima suis pignora: Calystus
improbaram longo discidio ac si rursum assumeretur
eo ipso superbam lonq; rectius Lolliam inducit q̄ndo
nullos liberos genuisset uacuum emulatione & priuigni

Consultatio de noua
coniuge ducenda

Figure 2. Tacitus. *Annals*. Book XII. MS GKS 496 2°, f. 11v. (Photo: The Royal Library, Copenhagen).

Copenhagen manuscript. Multicoloured marbles and classical columns were also incorporated into Renaissance architecture in Venice and the Veneto. On and in these buildings was sculptural decoration which drew on the visual vocabulary of antique monuments and which might to some extent have influenced the artist who painted the frontispiece.

In the Copenhagen manuscript the remains of the classical monument visualizes the Latin word “FRAGME[N]TUM” in the second and third lines of the text. More generally, the ruin placed in close proximity to the opening words of Book XI of the *Annals*, the first part of Tacitus’ work not to have perished, could have been understood by the viewer as a memorial to ancient Rome and to the learning of the past. The manner in which the monument is executed however visualizes the idea that antiquity survives in a very fragmentary form.

The frontispiece also employs imagery of funerary monuments. Tritons were found in the reliefs of Imperial sarcophagi as well as on Renaissance sepulchral monuments, particularly those raised in Venice and its territories. Putti with coats of arms were a regular, although not exclusive, feature of fifteenth-century tombs. The trees, bare as well as with leaves, are conventional symbols of death and resurrection, as for example those found in the paintings of the Venetian artist Giovanni Bellini (d. 1516).⁴³ The trumpet held by the red-winged putto might recall the instrument used by angels to wake the dead in depictions of Judgement Day and thus may have had associations with salvation and triumph over death. Additionally the trumpet, an attribute of Renaissance depictions of Fame who trumpets her tidings, could be regarded as a symbol of enduring glory. For the viewer these different components of the frontispiece could have carried a message both about Christian immortality and the immortality that comes from deeds, such as the production and perhaps patronage of great works.⁴⁴

⁴³ For trees in the paintings of Giovanni Bellini see Oskar Bätschmann: *Giovanni Bellini*, London 2008, pp. 115, 118, 120, 190, etc. See also the juxtaposition of withered and verdant trees in Andrea Mantegna’s *Agony in the Garden* (London, National Gallery).

⁴⁴ For hopes of immortality through deeds in antiquity and the Renaissance see, for example, Andrew Hui: *The poetics of ruins in Renaissance literature*, New York, Fordham University Press, 2016, pp. 2–4. The idea of Maffei’s custodian role is implied in the inscription on his tomb which reads: “AUGUSTINUS MAFAEUS PLUMBARII FISCII III UIR, ALIISQUE HONORIBUS EGREGIE FUNCTUS, BONARUM LITTERARUM CUSTOS, IN QUO FORTUNIS NON CESSIT UIRTUS HEIC SITVS EST VIX ANN LXV M VI D XXV.”

A superficial glance at the images in the area outside the text block of the Copenhagen frontispiece may lead us, at first, to believe that the antique ruin and mythic creatures provide a diversion to the reading of the text. On closer inspection however another interpretation seems more plausible. The verdant plain bound by distant mountains provides a setting far away from the distractions of the city for the young men in fifteenth-century dress. The youth who is furthest to the right gestures with the extended fingers of his raised hand in the direction of the monument, while the young man who is closest to the foreground appears to be shading his eyes. All three youths gaze upwards towards the top of the antique column framing the opening of Tacitus' work. Their intensely concentrated gaze and awed expressions might visualize the reader's engagement with the manuscript, his study of and reflection on the text as well as the past. Perhaps they might even depict the younger men in Agostino's circle, such as those who were students of Leto's.⁴⁵

The Illuminated Initials, ff. 11v–187r

Book XII of the *Annals*, f. 11v (fig. 2), is announced with a two-line heading "Cornelii Taciti De Rebus Gestis Imperator[um] Lib. XII." in epigraphic capitals of blue, violet and silver. The incipit in gold is preceded by a faceted initial "C" in red and gold behind which lies a recumbent deer, resting in a verdant plain with plants and small stones and a mountainous background. The animal's belly, chest and some parts of its head are white while the rest of the body is of a yellow golden hue. The deer might allude to the golden stag in the Maffei family's coat of arms (azure, a stag's head horned) displayed on f. 1r (fig. 1). Deer were ubiquitously represented in late fifteenth-century Northern Italian manuscripts and were usually shown in the company of mythical creatures, such as satyrs, fauns and putti. For example, in the frontispieces of Girolamo da Cremona (fl. 1451–1483) they are found in landscapes in which architectural façades are set.⁴⁶ While in Girolamo's illuminations the deer accompanying deities of the forest and woods evoke the world of antiquity, in the Copenhagen manuscript the deer is solitary.

⁴⁵ For Leto and his students see Paolo Cherubini: *Studenti universitari romani del secondo Quattrocento a Roma e altrove. Roma e lo Studium Urbis. Spazio urbano e cultura dal Quattro al Seicento. Atti del Convegno. Roma, 7–10 giugno 1989.* Rome 1992, pp. 69–87 and Maria Accame: *Pomponio Leto. Vita e insegnamento.* Rome 2008.

⁴⁶ For deer depicted in the frontispieces attributed to Girolamo da Cremona see, for example, Alexander (ed.) 1995, cat. nos. 94, 96, 97, 99, and 101.

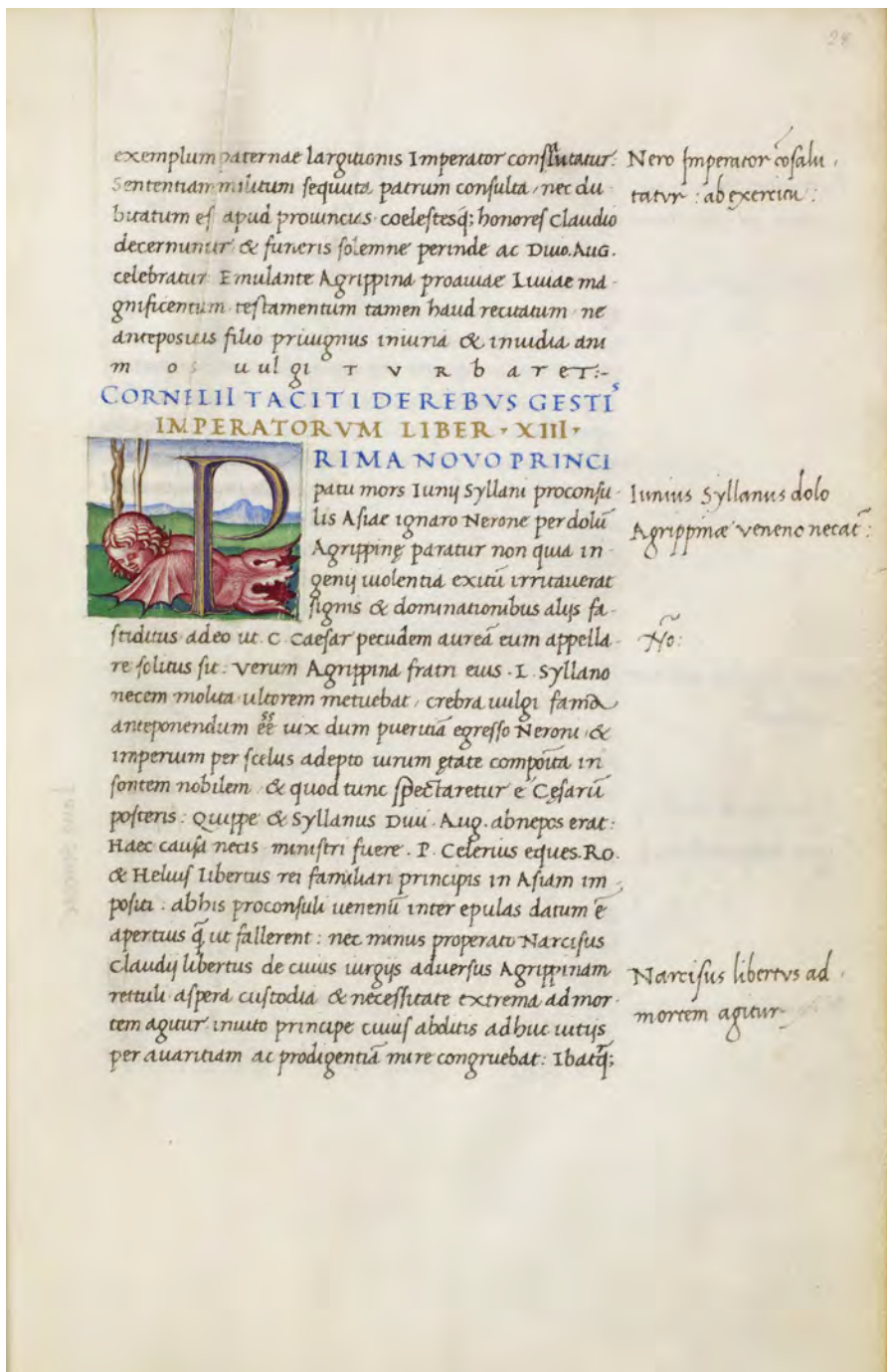


Figure 3. Tacitus. *Annals*. Book XIII. MS GKS 496 2°, f. 28r. (Photo: The Royal Library, Copenhagen).

Because of the belief that the animal had a taste for solitude it could symbolize prudence.⁴⁷ In Christian iconography it was a traditional symbol of the contemplative soul based on the verse of Psalm 41:2: "As the hart panteth after the fountains of water; so my soul panteth after thee, O God." Deer were also the subject of the vivid animal studies of early fifteenth century Northern Italian artists such as Giovannino de' Grassi and Pisanello, who, with great skill, illusionistically rendered the different shapes and textures of the animals' bodies as well as endowing them with character.

Solitary deer figure in other manuscripts associated stylistically with the Copenhagen Tacitus, for example in the *Legenda Aurea*, (Warsaw, Biblioteka Narodowa, Rps BOZ 11) f. 49r and in the *Hours of Bona Sforza* (London, British Library, Additional MSS 34294, 45722 and 62997), f. 62r. Landscapes with mountains and small stones strewn about with oval shadows are found in the paintings of Andrea Mantegna, an artist whose works were a source for the Copenhagen miniaturist. However, the exaggerated rock formations of the type depicted in Andrea Mantegna's landscapes and in the works of the two artists to whom the Tacitus has been attributed, namely Giovan Pietro da Birago or the Master of the Barozzi Breviary, are absent from the Copenhagen manuscript's simple empty rural scenes.

The heading "Cornelii Taciti De Rebus Gestis Imperatorum Liber XIII," f. 28r (fig. 3) is written in Roman majuscules on two lines, the first in blue and the second in gold. The text of Book XIII begins with the faceted letter "P" in purple and gold followed by the rest of the text of the incipit in blue Roman capitals. The miniature depicts an armless and legless scarlet coloured juvenile figure lying corpselike on his stomach, his head turned to the side and slightly lifted. From the figure's shoulders extend webbed wings and attached to his hips is an acanthus leaf skirt. These items resemble parts of ancient Roman armour, namely shoulder guards and a *pteruges*, a skirt made up of strips and worn in antiquity around the waists of soldiers. The figure's eyes are closed, his lips are slightly opened and his facial expression is peaceful. Although he seems to be asleep, there is, nevertheless, some ambiguity about the state of the male figure placed at the opening of text of Book XIII which reads: "Prima novo principatu mors" (The first death of the new principate) and describes the death of an unarmed and unsuspecting

⁴⁷ For the association of deer with prudence see Maryanne Cline Horowitz: *Seeds of virtue and knowledge*. Princeton 1998, p.128.

& arescente trunco deminutam prodigy loco habitum est. donec in nouos foetus reuiuisceret.

CORNELII TACITI DE REBUS
GE



STIS IMPERATOR. LIB. XIII.

AIO VIPSANO
Fonteio. cons. diu mediatum scelus non ultra Nero dissiulit. Vetusitate imperii coalita audacia & flagrantior indies amore Poppeae quae sibi matrimonium & disidium Octauius incolumi Agrippina

na, haud sperans crebris criminationibus aliqui per factias incusare principem & pupillum uocare & quissis alienis obnoxius, non modo imperii sed libertatis & indigeret: cur. n. differri nuptias suas formam scilicet displicere, & triumphales auos, an foecunditatem & uerum animum timere: Ne uxor saltem iniurias patrum, iram populi aduersus superbiam, auaritiamque matris aperiat: Quod si nurum Agrippina non nisi filio infestam ferre possit, reddatur ipsa Othonis coniugio ituram quocumque terrarum ubi audiret potius contumelias imperatoris quam periculis eius immixta: Hec atque talia lacrymis & arte adulterae penetrantia nemo prohibebat: cupientibus cunctis infringi potentiam matris, & credente nullo usque ad caedem eius duratura filii odia: Tradit Cluius Agrippinam ardore retinendae potentiae eo usque prouectam ut medio diei cum id temporis Nero per uinum & epulas incalesceret offerre se sepius temulento comptam & incesto paratam: Iamque lasciuia oscula & praenuntias flagitij

o scelus mandari

Figure 4. Tacitus. *Annals*. Book XIV. MS GKS 496 2°, f. 45r (Photo: The Royal Library, Copenhagen).



Figure 5. Tacitus. *Annals*. Book XV. MS GKS 496 2°, f. 62v. (Photo: The Royal Library, Copenhagen).

Roman youth. The red colour, with its immediate association with blood, supports an understanding of the figure as having been killed while the leafless trees also bear the connotation of death.⁴⁸ Yet the figure does not seem at all to be made of flesh or mortal. The visible hollow area under the acanthus skirt, along with the figure's red colour, might suggest that the physical material of which the figure is composed is metal, perhaps bronze covered by a coat of rust, while the areas of white on the figure's body give it a lapidary character. The incompleteness of the figure and the fact that it seems toppled brings to mind the remnants of ancient statues and buildings which were found in Rome and throughout the Italian peninsula and which were appreciated and studied by Agostino Maffei and other humanists.

For the following two-line heading with the author's name, title and number of the book, f. 45r (fig. 4), coloured Roman capitals were used. The first line was written in violet and the second in gold while the incipit of Book XIV of the *Annals* was executed in silver. Behind the faceted red and gold initial "C" a curly-haired, round-faced putto holds foliage scrolls. The colouring of his pudgy, legless body and of his seaweed skirt, a type of garment worn by tritons on Roman Imperial monuments, endow the figure with a lapidary quality. His head is tilted to one side and his expression seems wistful. If the figure accompanying the preceding book might be interpreted as a dead statue, then the one on f. 45r could be understood as a sculpture which has come to life. It seems like a living being, albeit somewhat mutilated. The state of the mutilated trunk of his body and the foliage he holds in his hands might visualize the words "arescente trunco" and "in novos foetus reviresceret," respectively, of the text: "et arescente trunco deminutam prodigii loco habitum est, donec in novos foetus reviresceret (and the withering of its stem reached a stage of decrepitude which was regarded as a portent – until it renewed its verdure with fresh shoots).

Roman capitals were used for the two-line heading in violet (Cornelii), gold (Taciti De Rebus Gestis Im) and silver (Perator Lib. XV), f. 62v (fig. 5). The incipit in gilt letters opens with the faceted red and gold letter "I" which is held by a seated ape. The animal looks over its shoulder, away from the text of Book XV of the *Annals* and thus appears disinterested both in the viewer and the written words. Its attitude is

⁴⁸ For vegetation symbolism in fifteenth-century Italian painting see Simona Cohen: *Transformations of time and temporality in Medieval and Renaissance art*. Leiden 2014, pp.157–158.

not unlike that of the ape in the hand-illuminated second frontispiece attributed to Girolamo da Cremona in Aristotle's *Works* (New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, ChL 907, printed in 1483), where the animal is depicted with its back turned to Aristotle and other philosophers, gazing straight ahead and out of the space of the picture. As if to be sure that the negative meaning is transmitted, the ape in the New York book wears the hood of a buffoon.

The image of the ape which the artist painted in the Copenhagen manuscript probably does not merely function as an emblem of foolishness, however.⁴⁹ Man's attempt to reproduce the forms of nature, art aping nature (*ars simia naturae*) was often represented in the pictorial arts as an ape. In the miniature in the Copenhagen manuscript the illuminator, like many other Renaissance artists, draws attention to painterly deception. Because the ape's feet are cut off at the edges of the miniature, this part of the animal's body appears to inhabit a space that continues beyond the frame. The viewer is thus led to reflect on the nature of the craft of painting and on the illusionistic devices which are employed by the artist.

The heading of Book XVI of the *Annals*, f. 83r (fig. 6), is written on two lines, the first in red and the second in gold. With the exception of the first letter, the opening line of the text of this book is executed in blue. Placed to the left of the purple and gold initial "I" are a Roman cuirass and shield. Projecting from the *pteruges* and diagonally behind the initial is a mace, a weapon which was used by Medieval and Renaissance soldiers but not by the Roman ones. The image might be an interpretation of the *tropaion*, a trophy of captured arms such as helmets, cuirasses and shields dedicated in antiquity to a god in commemoration of a victory. The spoils could be set up on a battlefield and assembled anthropomorphically. This motif appears in illuminations in other Renaissance manuscripts, including ones associated with Sanvito and well as in fifteenth-century tomb sculpture, especially those erected to military leaders.⁵⁰ The text which the image introduces deals with Nero's folly after hearing about a hidden treasure which belonged to

⁴⁹ For the ape's negative associations with lust and more generally with vice see Horst Woldemar Janson: *Apes and ape-love in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*. London 1952. Images of apes were rubbed out in the *Pontifical of Johannes Vitěz of Sirmione*, probably by a viewer who found the presence of these animals associated with vice inappropriate in religious scenes. See ff. 38, 89 and 97.

⁵⁰ See for example, f. 16r of Eusebius/ Jerome *Chronici canones*, of c.1483–1485, in De la Mare and Nuvoloni 2009, cat.77.

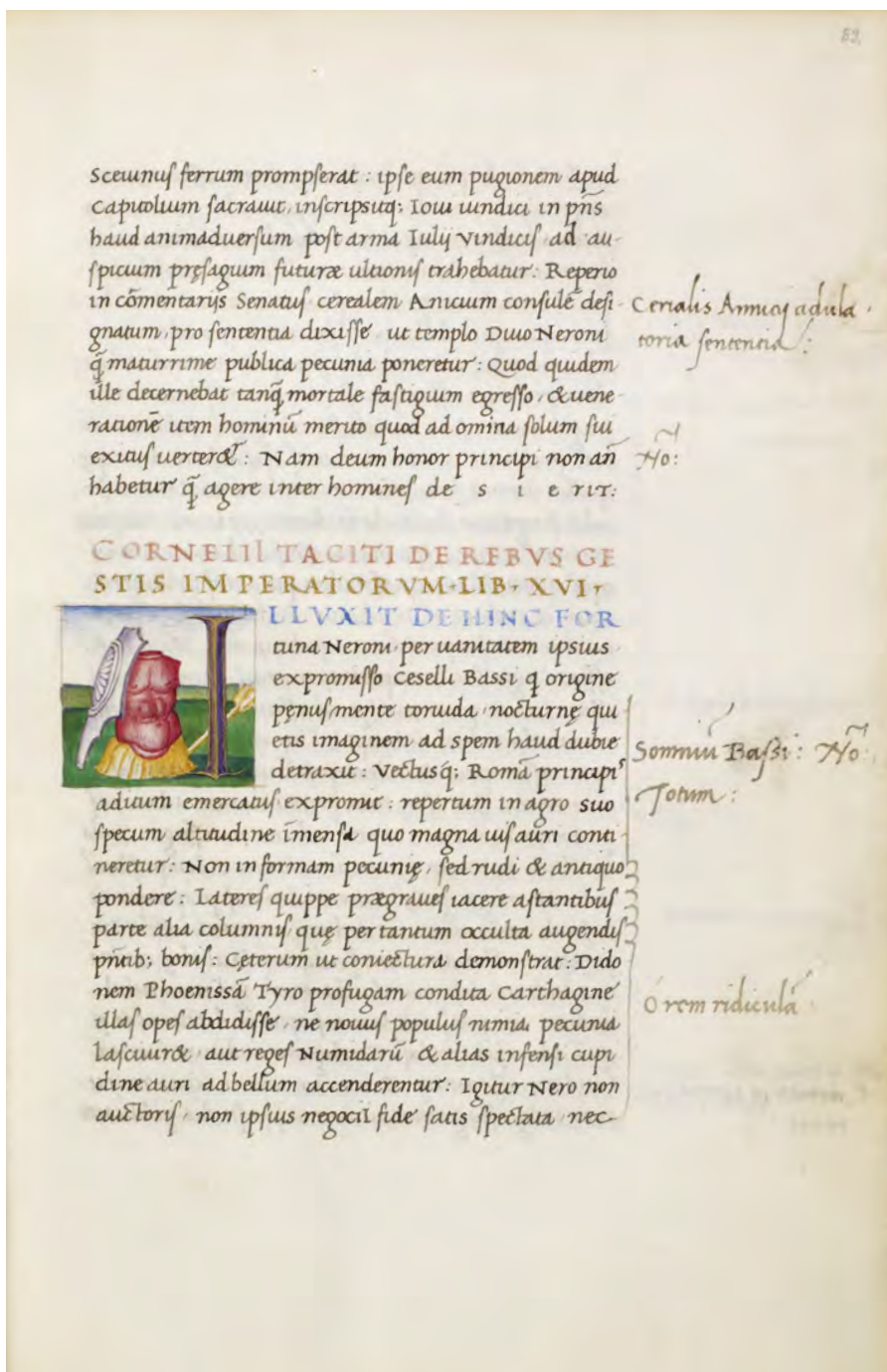


Figure 6. Tacitus. *Annals*. Book XVI. MS GKS 496 2°, f. 83r. (Photo: The Royal Library, Copenhagen).

Carthage's Queen Dido and which had been revealed to one of her countrymen in a dream. It is possible that the image, which represents objects associated with triumphant Rome, acts as a foil to the story of the emperor's foolishness and bogus treasure.

The first folio of Tacitus' *Histories*, Book I, f. 92r (fig. 7), is executed by a different scribal hand than the one that wrote the *Annals*. Spaces that were left for headings were not filled in. The incipit is written in capitals in the same colour ink as the text and has none of the beauty or elegance of the rubrication of the *Annals*. In a green meadow and to the left of the red and gold initial "I" is a hybrid putto-triton. Its upper body and baby's genitals are flesh coloured, while its scaled, coiled fish tail and the seaweed skirt attached to its hips are painted in violet and white. The putto-triton's left arm and hand rest on his round belly while his right arm is bent at the elbow and the fingers of his open hand are placed at the level of his forehead. The latter gesture might suggest that the creature is meant to be understood as looking at the Tacitus text or gazing into the distance. As with the illumination on f. 62r, the artist suggests that there is a continuum of space beyond the initial frame.

Four lines were left blank for a heading for Book II of Tacitus' *Histories*, f. 120r (fig. 8), but none was ever inserted. The first line of the incipit is written in Roman capitals alternating in red and brown, while the second line is written in red. In the miniature the faceted letter "S" in purple and gold is held by a legless, fleshy, red-winged putto. Although the creature is missing his lower extremities, he is shown unperturbed and standing. The webbed red skirt reminiscent of bat wings give his body a monstrous air which is in contrast to his sweet expression. Creatures which were part-human, part-animal populated ancient art and mythology but also the works of North Italian artists like Mantegna, for example in the *Battle of the Sea Gods* (Chatsworth, Devonshire collection, Chatsworth House, Album I, n. 38, engraving and dry point, before 1481), designed by him. Webbed skin of a colour other than that of flesh is also attached to the hips of the two winged putto triton found in the signed frontispiece by Giovan Pietro da Birago in the *Sforziada* (Warsaw, Biblioteka Narodowa, Inc. F. 1347). The creature's fantastic form also shows an awareness of marginalia from medieval manuscripts.

On f. 148r (fig. 9), the scribe left space for a two-line heading, which was never supplied. The first three lines of Book III of Tacitus' *Histories* are written in Roman capitals in ink of the same colour as the text. Behind the faceted initial "M" in brown and gold is the red upright torso of a putto with vegetal elements extending from its shoulders and hips. The

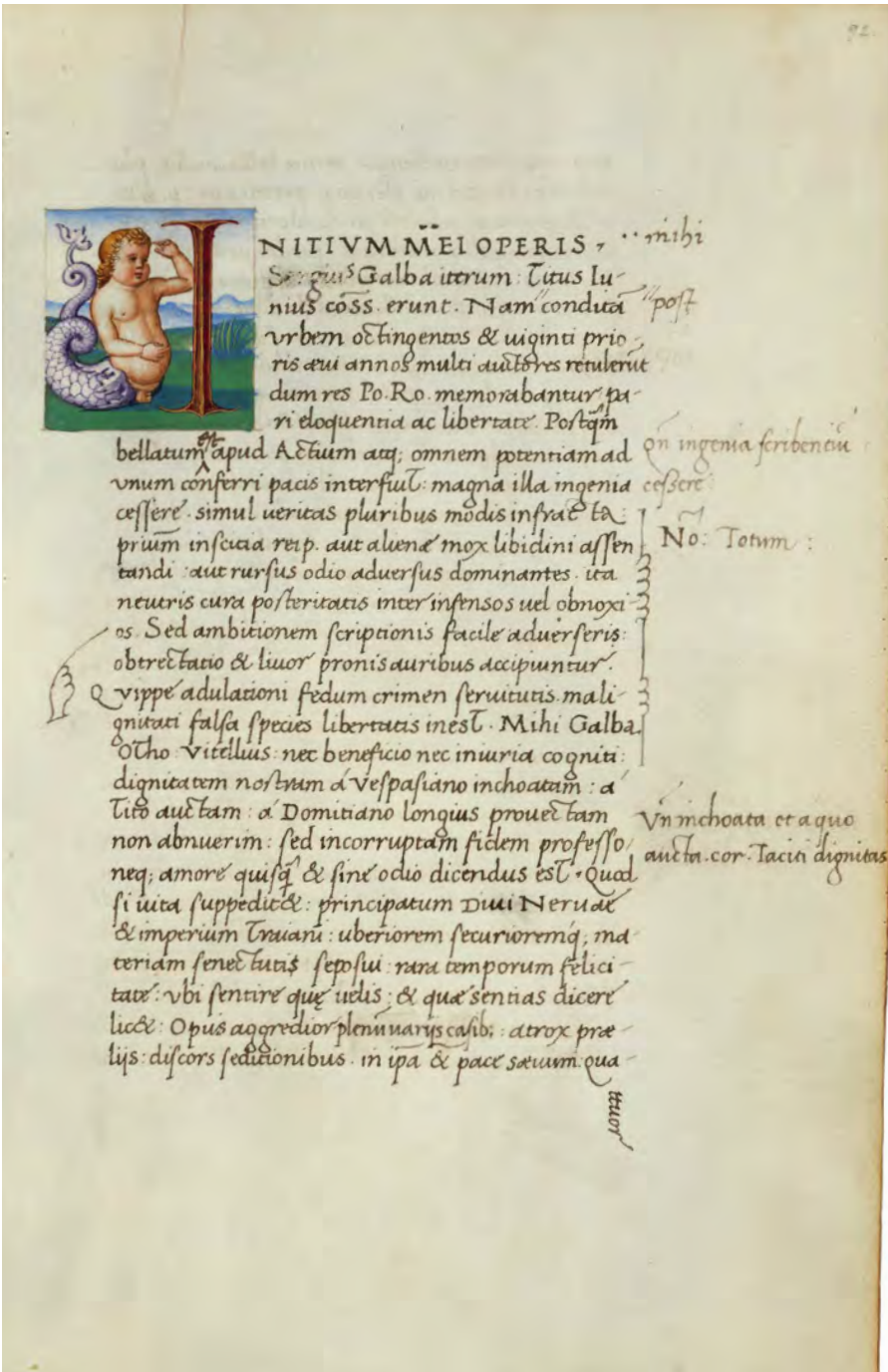


Figure 7. Tacitus. *Histories*. Book I. MS GKS 496 2°, f. 92r. (Photo: The Royal Library, Copenhagen).

creature's head is tilted to one side and its eyes are directed to the right and upwards towards the text. The form of the torso and head resemble those of the figure on f. 45r (fig. 4); however its colour, the shape of its extremities and the manner in which it is positioned on the ground are rather disturbing.⁵¹ The figure, with its references to the sculptures of antiquity, is a battered element from the past. While the viewer/reader might pause to gaze at the strange being in the miniature, the gaze of the creature draws their attention back to the contents of the text.

The heading for Book IV of the *Histories*, f. 172v (fig. 10) was never executed and the book opens with a purple and gold initial "I." On either side of it is a legless toddler in three-quarter view staring the other one down. Both have one hand raised with clenched fists and appear to be ready to engage in a fight. They may be intended to playfully visualize the confrontation which unfolds in the opening of Book IV: "Interfecto Vitellio bellum magis desierat quam pax coeperat (The death of Vitellius was the end of war rather than the beginning of peace. The victors raged through the city in arms, pursuing their defeated foes with implacable hatred.) Battling putti were the hallmark of the work of the Master of the Putti, who sometimes depicted them in a confrontational manner in response to the text; for example in the detached frontispiece of Livy's *History of Rome* (Vienna, Albertina, Inv. No. 2587) where the text discusses the Punic Wars, the artist depicted fighting putti.

Following the blank space left for a heading on f. 187r are seven lines of text in Roman capitals from the beginning of Book V of the *Histories*. They are placed next to the final miniature in the manuscript, which shows an upright, red-winged legless putto in a landscape. The creature has lowered his head onto his right arm, which rests on the central horizontal of the purple and gold initial "E." His left arm is extended by his side and his eyes are closed. His exhausted and oblivious attitude appears in direct contrast to the portrayal of the military exploits of the energetic Titus Caesar.

In the cycle of images executed for Agostino Maffei and discussed above, the artist did more than paint *all' antica* images to accompany Tacitus' *Annals* and *Histories*. He also draws attention to his own skill as a painter and to his creativity. Through his paintings, he imitates the materiality of natural forms, most plainly in his representations of

⁵¹ In Andrea Mantegna's destroyed fresco of the Martyrdom of St. Christopher (Padua) a fictive classical frieze with hybrids in the same standing position was painted. However, there was nothing unsettling about the stances of the calm and elegant figures from the Paduan fresco cycle.

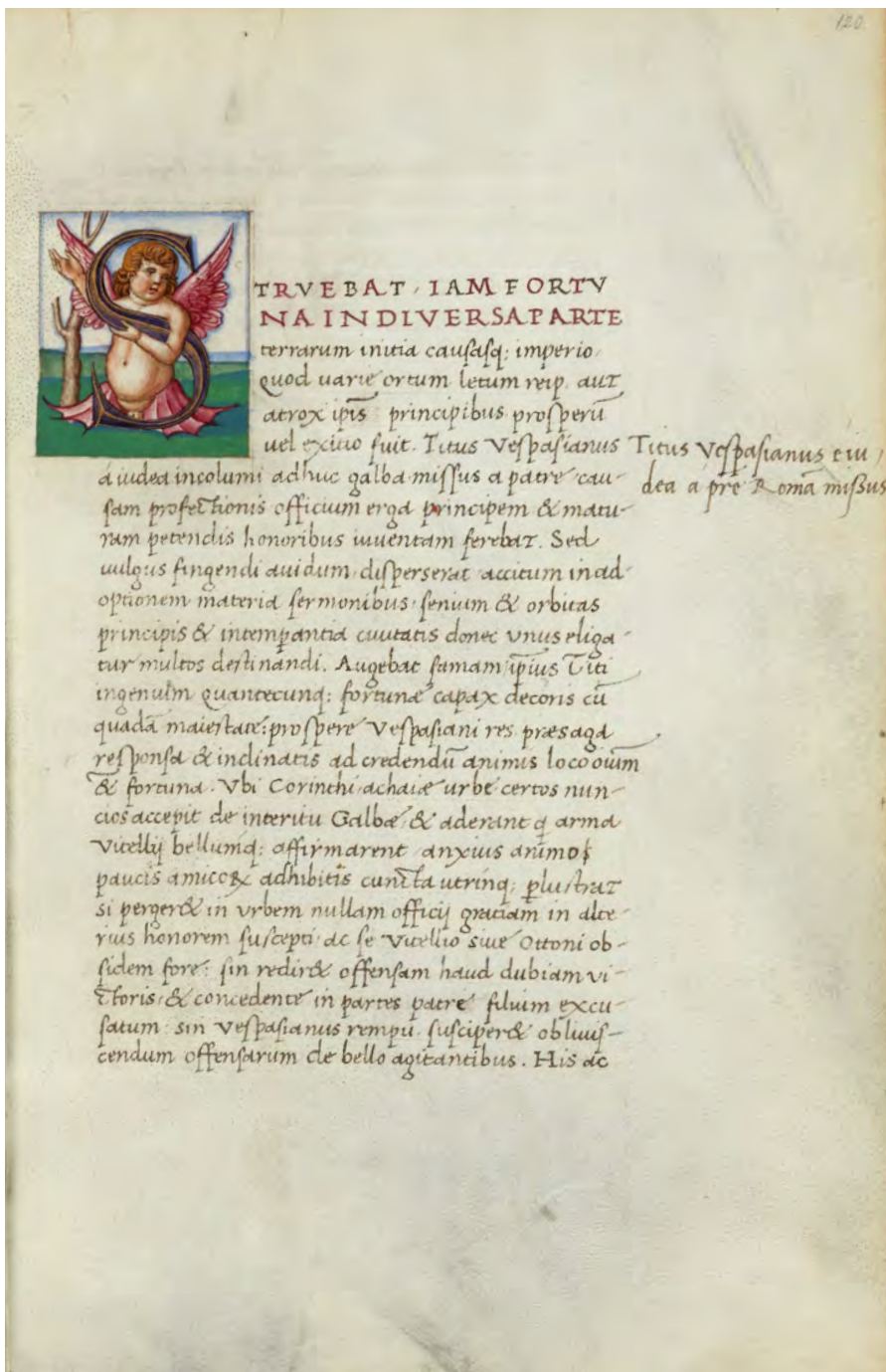


Figure 8. Tacitus. *Histories*. Book II. MS GKS 496 2°, f. 120r. (Photo: The Royal Library, Copenhagen).

animals but also stones, plants and mountains. In his deft rendition of natural phenomenon, such as the reflection of the mountains in water, he likely alludes to the contemporary idea that nature makes images.⁵² He also creates things not formed by nature, like sculptures and architecture. On the one hand these works were designed by the artist so as to give the impression that they were created in antiquity by Roman sculptors and architects, but on the other hand they demonstrate a self-conscious reflection on his image making – he is not just an imitator; he has the ability to invent. The tritons he depicts in sculptural relief in the frontispiece are not shown in a marine setting accompanying Neptune nor frolicking with nereids as on Roman sarcophagi.⁵³ Instead, they appear to be fish out of water and their facial expressions seem to express discomfort. The pose of the second triton from the left suggests that he is struggling, perhaps to free himself from the marble. Because the stone tritons are positioned just behind the flesh coloured putti with red feathered wings, attention is drawn to the differences in the physical matter in which the mythical beings are embodied.

The artist also paints scenes which have no parallel in visual reality and that call attention to the artifice of his compositions and his artistic imagination and virtuosity. The faceted letters stand upright in the landscape and some are held by mythical creatures, for example on f. 1r (fig. 1) where the putto holds the initial with his hand as well as wrapping his tail around it. The three-dimensional initials also heighten the visual impact of the state of the figures which accompany them. While all the faceted letters are erect and whole, some of the figures in the miniatures at the opening of the books are toppled over or missing parts. They reference the collapsed sculptures and buildings of antiquity, but might also allude by their placement in the opening miniatures of Tacitus' books to the mutilated and deteriorating manuscripts which humanists recovered. Through his choice of motifs, the artist shows us that he is able to suggest the passage of time, not only by depicting the young men's confrontation with the ruins and the text on folio 1r but also in the manner in which he frames the text and heightens the reader's awareness of the encounter with the writings of antiquity in present time. While the mythical creatures may be captured in paint

⁵² For example, discussed in Alberti's *De pictura* (1435). See Leon Battista Alberti: *On painting: A new translation and critical edition*. New York and Cambridge 2011, pp.48–49.

⁵³ As for example on the Roman sarcophagus with a portrait and marine creatures, Pisa, Camposanto and a sarcophagus with nereids and tritons visible in Rome in the fifteenth century. For the latter see Bober and Rubinstein, London 1987, p. 131.

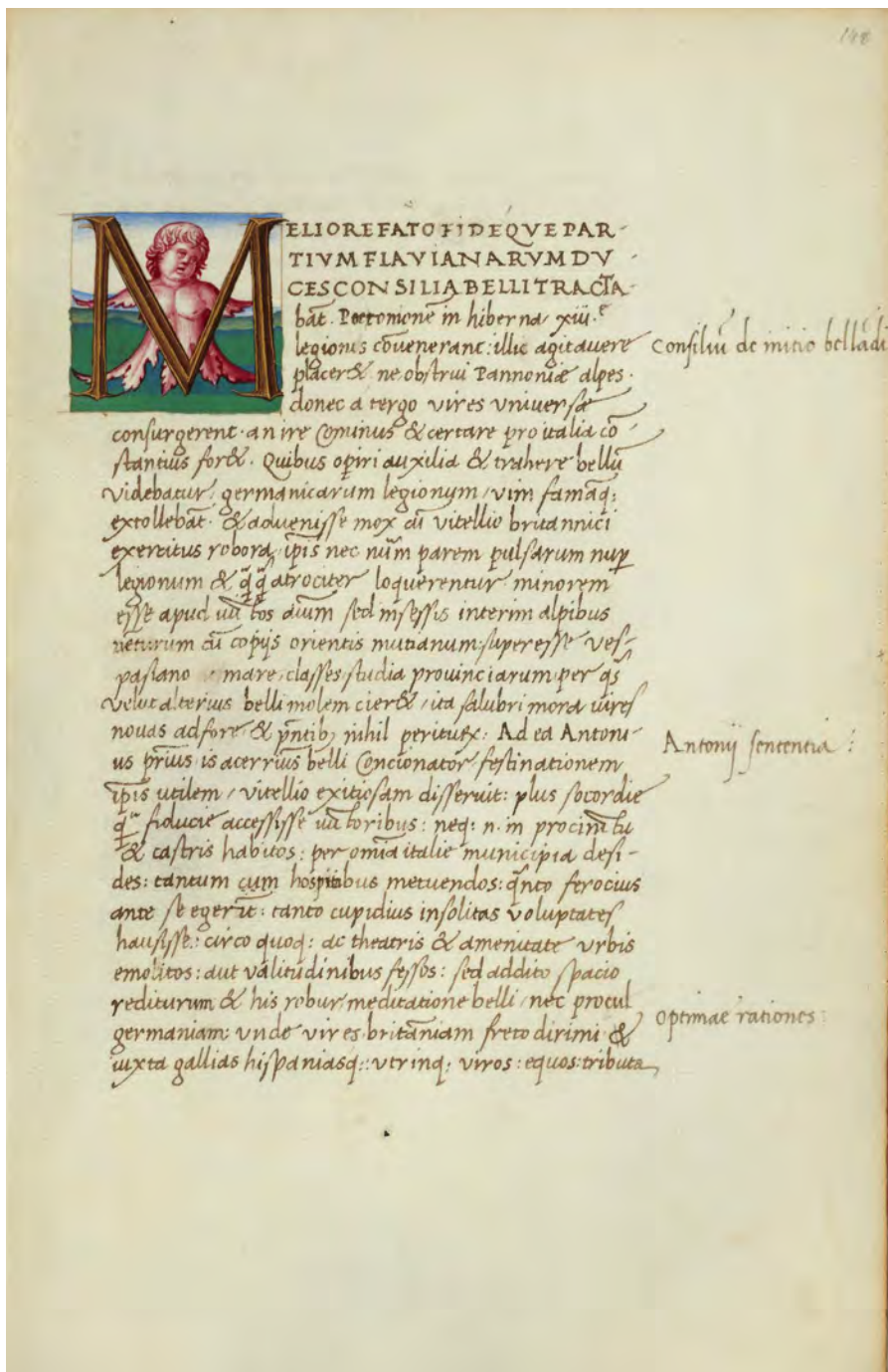


Figure 9. Tacitus. *Histories*. Book III. MS GKS 496 2°, f. 148r. (Photo: The Royal Library, Copenhagen).

in a fleeting moment there still exists the ambiguity of the time frame in which the viewer should place them. Do they inhabit the landscape of antiquity or have they survived into the present, intact and unaged?

The artist also draws the viewer's awareness to the space he has constructed in the frontispiece through juxtaposition (fig. 1). The rectangular text block, which is superimposed over a landscape where the principles of perspective are employed, appears to hover supernaturally above other elements on the page. Moreover, the space depicted behind the initial "N" is not aligned with the space outside the text block and thus there are two different perspectival spaces on the page, one inhabited by a mythical figure, the other by three young men in *quattrocento* dress. Furthermore, there is no suggestion of three-dimensional depth in the text space. The space the miniaturist constructs is different from the Albertian ideal of a picture as a pane of transparent glass through which the viewer looks into an imaginary space extending into depth. By constructing two receding spaces, one which is obfuscated by the text block, the miniaturist has exploited the possibilities of his own medium. In addition, the miniaturist has left areas of space uncoloured. While we can read the white field in the text block as parchment, the white space around the text block could be interpreted as light or sky. The play of contrasts between painted and unpainted parts in monumental painting was more common at a later date.

The Illuminator: Giovan Pietro da Birago or the Master of the Barozzi Breviary

The illuminations in the Copenhagen Tacitus have been attributed in recent scholarship to either Giovan Pietro da Birago (fl. c.1463–1513), who by 1490 was the leading illuminator at the Sforza court in Milan, or to the hand of an unknown master, who was influenced by Birago.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ For the extensive bibliography devoted to Birago and his artistic oeuvre see Laura P. Gnaccolini: Giovan Pietro Birago miniatore per re Mattia Corvino. A. Rovetta and G. Hajnoczi, (eds.): *Lombardia e Ungheria nell'età dell'umanesimo e del rinascimento: rapporti culturali e artistici dall'età di Sigismondo all'invasione turca 1387–1526*. Milan, 2004, 135–153 and Laura P. Gnaccolini: Giovan Pietro Birago. M. Bollati (ed.): *Dizionario biografico dei miniatori italiani. Secoli IX–XVI*, Milan 2004, pp. 104–110. For the attribution of the Copenhagen Tacitus to a Venetian artist very close to Birago with whom he collaborated on the *Hours of Bona Sforza* see J. J. G. Alexander in *Studies in Italian manuscript illumination*. London, 2002, pp. 115–117. Alexander attributes to this anonymous artist the following folia in the *Hours of Bona Sforza*: ff. 51r, 85v, 215r, 218r, 223r, 227r, 232r, 233v, 270r, and probably also ff. 46r, 53r, 54r, 55r, 56r, 81r, 84v, 88r, 213r, and 266r. Beside these two manuscripts Alexander identifies the hand of the

Giovan Pietro da Birago's name is known to us from his signature in two of his commissions: three choir books for the use of Brescia Cathedral dating to the early 1470s (Brescia, Pinacoteca Tosio-Martinengo, nos. 22, 23 and 25) and two copies of Giovanni Simonetta's life of Francesco Sforza, the *Sforziada* (Warsaw, Biblioteka Narodowa, Inc. F. 1347 and Florence Uffizi, Inv. 1890, nn. 843, 4423–4430).⁵⁵ His name suggests that he was from Birago, a town near Milan, or that he belonged to the Milanese family of that name.⁵⁶ Documentation of his participation in another manuscript exists in the form of a letter dated 6th April 1513, in which the artist discusses the illuminations he executed in a Book of Hours for Bona Sforza, duchess of Milan (London, British Library, Additional MSS 34294, 45722 and 62997, c.1490–1494 and 1519 and 1521).⁵⁷ There are no documented known works by Birago from the interim period between Brescia and Milan.

On the basis of stylistic similarities between Birago's documented works and illuminations with a Venetian provenance, it has been postulated that the painter might have been active in Venice during the 1480s.⁵⁸ Specific illuminations from Venetian commissions have been

anonymous artist in twelve other works: a Book of Hours for the use of Rome (London, British Library, Additional MS 35316); the *Panegyric on Doge Marco Barbarigo* (London, British Library, Additional MS 21463); the *Funeral oration for Doge Andrea Vendramin* (London, British Library, Additional MS 19061, ff. 2r–20r); a *Promissione of a Procurator of St. Mark* (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 811); the *Commissione of Giovanni Capello* (Princeton, Princeton University Library, Garrett MS 159); the *Barozzi Breviary* (Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Inc. 4, H.63); London, British Library, Additional MS 19061; *Legenda Aurea* (Warsaw, Biblioteka Narodowa, Zamoyski Codex, Rps BOZ 11); Cicero's *Orations* (Padua, Biblioteca Capitolare della Catedrale); Baptista Mantuanus, *Parthenice prima* (Budapest, National Széchényi Library, Clmae 445); Pietro Barozzi, *De ratione bene moriendi* (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Lyell 81) and a cutting with miniature with an allegory of mortality (Berlin, Kupferstichkabinett, 4208). Gnaccolini, 2004, p. 140 attributes the Copenhagen illuminations to Giovan Pietro Birago.

⁵⁵ For the choirbooks see Paola Bonfadini: *I libri corali del Duomo vecchio di Brescia (Santa Maria Maggiore de Dom)*. Brescia, 1998 and J. J. G. Alexander: Giovan Pietro da Birago, illuminator of Milan: some initials cut from choir books. D. S. Areford and N. A. Rowe (eds.): *Excavating the Medieval image: Manuscripts, artists, audiences: Essays in Honor of Sandra Hindman*. Burlington, VT, and Aldershot 2004, pp. 225–246.

⁵⁶ Mark Evans: *The Sforza Hours*. London 1992, p.17.

⁵⁷ Giuseppe Mongeri: *L'Arte del minio nel ducato di Milano. Archivio storico lombardo*, 12, 1885, p. 541.

⁵⁸ For the suggestion that Birago might have worked in Venice see J. J. G. Alexander: *The Painted Book in Renaissance Italy 1450–1600*. New Haven 2016, pp. 104–105, 121 and 128; Alexander 2004, p. 229 and Giordana Mariani Canova: *La miniatura veneta del Rinascimento, 1450–1500*. Venice 1969, pp.136–140, 166–167. More recently,

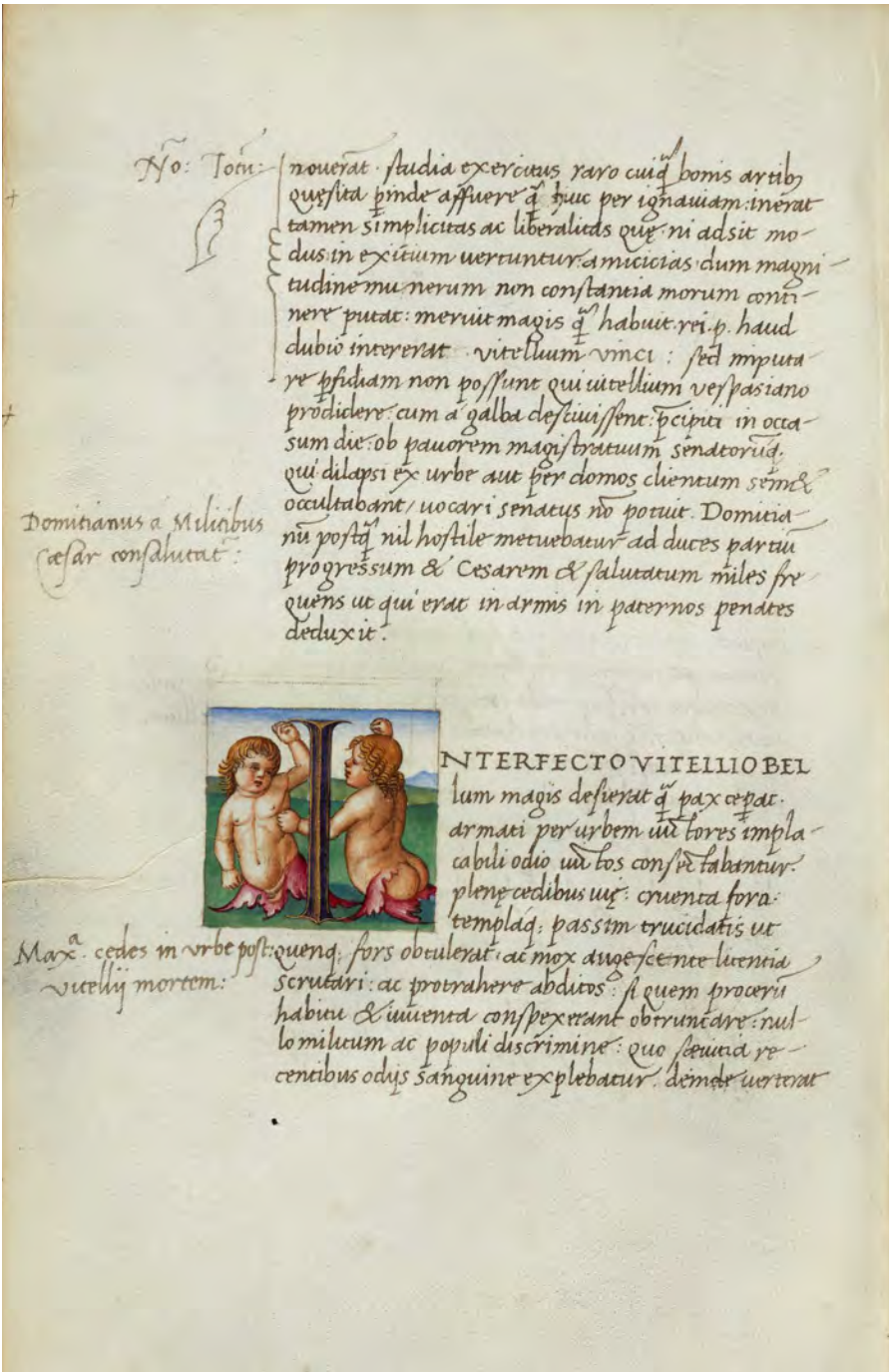


Figure 10. Tacitus. *Histories*. Book IV. MS GKS 496 2°, f. 172v. (Photo: The Royal Library, Copenhagen).

attributed to Birago in the past.⁵⁹ However, it has recently been debated as to whether some or any of these commissions were actually carried out by Birago, or if some or all of these miniatures should instead be attributed to a Venetian miniaturist who was strongly influenced by him. This artist, in recent scholarship, has been called the Master of the Barozzi Breviary, after the *Barozzi Breviary* (Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Inc. 4, H.63), which he illuminated.⁶⁰

Stylistic considerations have also led scholars to propose that Birago worked for a period in Rome before moving to Milan. More specifically, this hypothesis was put forth by art historians who identified illuminations close in style to Birago's in manuscripts with connections to patrons or their agents who were based in Rome, most notably the *Pontifical of Johannes Vitéz the Younger of Sirmione* (Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica, MS. Ott. lat. 501), commissioned by King Matthias Corvinus' ambassador to the Holy See.

There is a consensus in recent scholarship, one which I share, that Giovan Pietro da Birago and the master called the Master of the Barozzi Breviary collaborated on the *Pontifical of Johannes Vitéz the Younger of Sirmi-*

Giordana Mariani Canova in *La miniatura in Veneto*. Antonella Putaturo Murano, Alessandra Perriccioli Saggese (eds.): *La miniatura in Italia: Dal tardogotico al manierismo*, Vatican 2009, p. 358, discusses illuminations executed in the style of Girolamo da Cremona's Venetian period paintings in the *Barozzi Breviary* and the Warsaw *Legenda aurea*. These are miniatures which have earlier been attributed to Birago or to an anonymous Venetian master with whom Birago was in contact. Mariani Canova sees in the full-page miniatures in the *Barozzi Breviary* connections to the style of Birago's two signed works from the 1490s, namely the fragment in Florence and the hand illuminated incunabulum of the *Sforziade* in Warsaw. However, she judges that it is more difficult to find stylistic similarities between the attributed works, the Vienna Breviary and a number of illuminations in the Warsaw *Legenda aurea*, and the signed Brescia Choir Books of the early 1470s. Mariani Canova finds that she cannot exclude the possibility that a stay in Venice may have influenced Birago's style. Other books which she judges to be related to the Warsaw and Vienna works are a Book of Hours for the use of Rome in London, the *Panegyric* in London and the *Promissione* in Oxford. She also suggests that the frontispiece in the incunabulum of Ricardus de Mediavilla's *Commentarium super quarto sententiarum* (Padua, Biblioteca Capitolare della Cattedrale Inc 319) could be attributed to a Venetian follower of Birago.

⁵⁹ For an overview of the literature in which illuminated documents and books with connections to Venetian patrons have been attributed to Birago see Alexander 2016, p. 104–105, and especially Gnaccolini 2003.

⁶⁰ For the Master of the Barozzi Breviary see Laura P. Gnaccolini: *Maestro del Breviario Barozzi*. M. Bollati (ed.): *Dizionario biografico dei miniatori italiani. Secoli IX–XVI*, Milan 2004, pp. 485–487 and Alexander 2016, pp. 104–105 and p. 318, note 175.

one and the *Hours of Bona Sforza*, executed for the duchess in Milan. It is worthwhile comparing the illuminations in these commissions to those in the Copenhagen manuscript in order to come to some conclusions about who illuminated Agostino Maffei's Tacitus. I will, furthermore, compare the miniatures in the Copenhagen manuscript to those in the *Barozzi Breviary* and to the hand-illuminated signed frontispiece in Warsaw.

The *Barozzi Breviary*, which measures 10.2 × 16 cm, was printed in Venice in 1481 and was hand illuminated.⁶¹ It displays the arms of the Barozzi and was perhaps made for Pietro Barozzi, who was a member of this noble Venetian family and bishop of Padua from 1487–1507. As pointed out by Alexander and Mariani Canova, the breviary has stylistic similarities with a number of illuminated works for Venetian patrons and has been attributed to the master now called the Master of the Barozzi Breviary. In the opinion of Laura Gnaccolini, Birago executed a full-page illumination, an assessment which has been criticized.⁶²

There are very similar motifs used in the Copenhagen Tacitus and the *Barozzi Breviary*. For example, in the right margin of folio 127r of the second volume of the Vienna hand-painted incunabulum there is a juvenile armless and legless figure, from whose shoulders extend webbed wings similar to those borne by the figure in the Copenhagen manuscript on f. 28r (fig. 3). This figure in the Vienna book also wears a webbed skirt comparable to the one found around the hips of 120r in the Tacitus (fig. 8). However, the webbed flesh skirt is not exclusive to the *Barozzi Breviary*. It is also used by Birago to cover the hips of the flute-playing triton putto in the frontispiece of the signed Warsaw *Sforziada*.

The chubby infant wearing a leafy skirt in the Tacitus (fig. 3) is not all that dissimilar from the figure at the bottom of folio 77r in the second volume of the *Barozzi Breviary*, albeit the latter is flesh coloured, more muscular and appears older. On the whole, the juvenile figures depicted in the Vienna volumes tend to be older and more muscular than the chubby cheeked, pudgy bellied children in the Copenhagen manuscript.

The motif of the ape with cut-off feet is found not only in the Copenhagen volume (fig. 5) but also on folio 127r in the second volume of

⁶¹ H. J. Hermann: *Beschreibendes Verzeichnis der illuminierten Handschriften in Österreich*, 6/2, Leipzig 1931, pp. 150–157, no. 110.

⁶² For the illuminations which Laura P. Gnaccolini has attributed to Birago and the Master of the Barozzi Breviary in the Vienna volumes see Gnaccolini 2003, pp. 137 and 148, note 30 and Gnaccolini 2004, pp. 485 and 487. For Mariani Canova's criticism see Mariani Canova 2009, p. 358.

the *Barozzi Breviary* and in a badly effaced illumination on f. 97r in the Vatican Pontifical, attributed to Birago by Gnaccolini. However, the ape is more skilfully executed in the Copenhagen Tacitus than in the Vienna Breviary. The type of tree depicted on f. 9v in a miniature attributed to Birago by Gnaccolini in the first volume the *Barozzi Breviary* is also present in the Copenhagen manuscript. Despite the use of some similar motifs there are very noticeable differences between the Copenhagen and Vienna books, for example in terms of page design and depiction of space. Some of the objects and vegetal decoration in the borders painted in the *Barozzi Breviary* have a brittleness about them and they appear to have been influenced by metalwork. The colours employed in the *Barozzi Breviary* are similar to the palette of the Venetian painter Bartolomeo Vivarini and very different from those used in the Tacitus. However, this does not mean that the Master of the Barozzi Breviary limited himself in other commissions to the same range of colours. The artist's style developed with experience and by contact with other artists. Furthermore, the wishes of patrons outside of the Veneto probably played a role in the choice of colours and motifs employed in later commissions.

The miniatures in the two-volume incunabulum were executed by the Barozzi Master around eight years before those he painted in the *Pontifical of Johannes Vitéz the Younger of Sirmione*, a work of a very different scale and colour scheme. The latter measures 35.6 × 25.4 cm and although incomplete, it contains 24 large miniatures. It is dated 1489 on folio 145v by the text: MCCCCLXXXIX die p(ri)ma mensis Ianuarii Ego Io(annes) ep(iscopu)s Sirmiensis. Johannes Vitéz the Younger (died 1499) was bishop of Sirmium from 1482 until 1489, when he became bishop of Veszprém. Vitéz resided more or less continuously in Rome from 1476 until 1490 and was engaged as Matthias Corvinus' ambassador to the Holy See until the year of the king's death.⁶³ The Pontifical was a much more ambitious project than the Copenhagen Tacitus and the focus of its illuminations were services for sacraments administered by bishops rather than subjects related to classical antiquity. Elaborate frames enclose both the miniatures and the opening lines of the text. Although gold and a wider range of colours were employed in the scenes

⁶³ Joachim M. Plotzek: *Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana: Liturgie und Andacht im Mittelalter*. Stuttgart 1992, pp. 376–379, no. 79; G. Morello and S. Maddalo (eds.): *Liturgia in figura. Codici liturgici rinascimentali della Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, catalogo della mostra*, Rome 1995, pp. 244–248, no. 57, and István Zombori, Pál Cséfalvay, and Maria Antonietta De Angelis (eds.): *A thousand years of Christianity in Hungary*. Budapest 2002, p. 310.

populated mostly by ecclesiasts in various poses there are some similarities with the palette of colours used in the Copenhagen manuscript, like the blues, reds and especially the greens. There are also some similar motifs employed in the Copenhagen and Vatican manuscripts, such as coloured columns, apes and putti. A parallel figure to the legless monochrome juvenile with a vegetal lower body of the Copenhagen manuscript, f. 148r (fig. 9), can be found in the Vatican Pontifical at the top of folio 13r, which Gnaccolini has attributed to the hand of the Master of the Barozzi Breviary.

Shortly after working together on the Pontifical, the two artists were engaged on another project. The *Hours of Bona Sforza* is an incomplete manuscript which was executed in two major campaigns of work.⁶⁴ In its present state it includes 64 miniatures in a variety of colours as well as gold, 48 of which were executed between 1490 and 1494. The full borders from this period contain *all'antica* motifs while the lower margins include animals, putti and saints. In both the *Pontifical of Johannes Vitéz* and the fifteenth-century portion of the *Hours of Bona Sforza* an attempt was made to make the styles of the different hands as similar as possible, presumably so as to make their cooperation seamless. The artists employed the same palette of colours for each of these commissions as well as a similarly conceived page design and figure style.

One of the characteristics of the Copenhagen hand's figure style is that he painted the heads of the cherub faced creatures tilted slightly back or to the side and with their eyes gazing upward. The lashes of these beings are not rendered by separate strokes, rather the artist painted a dark curved line above the iris. We also find figures resembling these in the *Hours of Bona Sforza*, for example on f. 51r and f. 270r, painted by the hand which Alexander has attributed to the follower of Birago.

The Warsaw *Sforziada* is a luxurious book printed on vellum.⁶⁵ The coats of arms and devices displayed in the frontispiece suggest that it might have been intended as gift from Duke Ludovico Sforza to Galeazzo

⁶⁴ For the facsimile edition of the *Hours of Bona Sforza* see Mark L. Evans and Bodo Brinkmann (commentary): *The Sforza Hours: Add. MS. 34294 of the British Library*, London, Luzern 1995. A description of the Hours, digital images and bibliography are also available online at <www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Add_MS_34294>.

⁶⁵ For a discussion of the book and bibliography see Mark Evans: New light on the "Sforziada" frontispieces of Giovan Pietro Birago. *British Library Journal*, 13, 1987,

da Sanseverino, who was engaged to Ludovico's daughter Bianca in 1490 and married her in 1496.⁶⁶ In the frontispiece of the Warsaw *Sforziada*, Birago included juveniles with faces not unlike those in the Copenhagen manuscript. However, if we compare Birago's figures to those in the Maffei Tacitus we will see that those painted by Birago usually have more pronounced rolls of chubby flesh and more luxurious hair which tends to fall in fat, pert, clearly outlined curls. Furthermore, Birago's figures seem more lively, playful and animated than those executed by the Copenhagen artist. The latter's have more reserved expressions and less exuberant poses. In addition, some motifs are more skilfully painted in the *Sforziada*, for example the representation of the trophy (fig. 6).

In sum, motifs included in the Copenhagen manuscripts can be found in miniatures painted by the Master of the Barozzi Breviary and Birago. The figure style employed in the Tacitus is quite close to that of the master who painted the illuminations in the *Barozzi Breviary* and to that of Birago in his signed frontispiece now in Warsaw. However, there are some notable differences in the execution of hair, proportions of the figures' bodies and the degree of activity in the compositions in the Copenhagen and Warsaw volumes. My feeling is that the Maffei Tacitus was more likely to have been painted by the Master of the Barozzi Breviary than by Birago.

Conclusion

We have analysed the pictorial program for the Copenhagen manuscript and have seen that a number of the images in the Tacitus manuscript visualize lines of the text which they accompany. We have also seen that the Copenhagen master, like other Renaissance artists, used ancient buildings and sculptures as models for his own constructions. But while many architectural frontispieces in fifteenth-century Renaissance manuscripts have a monumental quality and a celebratory air, the opening page of the Copenhagen Tacitus exposes the fragmentary state of the remains of the past. The ruin, along with the truncated sculptures and mythological beings, might have been intended to provoke meditations on the past and a longing for the great things that once existed.

pp. 232–247. For images of the Warsaw incunabulum including its frontispiece see polona.pl/item/1520897/2.

⁶⁶ Evans 1987, p. 240.

The article has tried to shed light on the similarities and differences between the miniatures in the Maffei Tacitus and those in books attributed to Birago or to the Master of the Barozzi Breviary. It can be concluded that the master of the Copenhagen manuscript created a distinctive pictorial program for the illumination of the Tacitus. In comparison to the lavish illuminated pages of the *Barozzi Breviary*, the Vatican Pontifical and the *Hours of Bona Sforza*, we have seen that pictorial program for the Copenhagen manuscript was more modest and that the images did not detract the viewer's attention from the text to the same degree as in the devotional and service books. The palette of colours employed by the Copenhagen master and the manner in which the colours are used are also particular for this commission – they are not always mimetic but evocative. Rust and white coloured figures seem to be both living beings and dead statues – one is depicted corpselike on the ground (fig. 3) while the trophy seems like a decapitated figure (fig. 6). The illuminator's imaginative conceptions which we have analysed here in detail might be partly ascribed to the desire to display his skill and to please his learned patron. We know that Agostino Maffei was a man who was interested in many facets of the ancient past and involved in all aspects of manuscript production, from ordering the parchment to ensuring the copied texts were as correct as possible. It is conceivable that he might have expressed some ideas about how the Tacitus should be illuminated and that the manuscript which exists today in Copenhagen incorporates these wishes.

SUMMARY

MARINA VIDAS: *Representing the Ancient Past in the Fifteenth-Century Maffei Tacitus* (Copenhagen, Royal Library, MS GKS 496 2°)

The focus of this article is a splendidly illuminated Italian Renaissance manuscript, MS GKS 496 2°, in the collection of the Royal Library, Copenhagen, containing the text of *Annals* (Books 11–16, 35) and *Histories* (Books 1–5, 14) composed by the Roman historian Tacitus (c.55–c.120). The coats of arms, which are found at the bottom of folio 1r, clearly identify the owner of the manuscript as belonging to the Maffei family of Rome and an inscription on f. 196r states that the text was emended by the humanist scholar and scribe Ludovico Regio of Imola, who is known to have copied and/or annotated at least five manuscripts for Agostino Maffei (1431–1496). The article argues that the intended reader of the Copenhagen Tacitus was Agostino Maffei, who in Rome during the 1480s and 1490s was actively commissioning copies of and collecting manuscripts with texts by ancient Greek and Roman authors. The article discusses the context for the commission and subsequent annotations to the text undertaken by Ludovico. It is also pointed out that the hand which executed the headings and incipits of the *Annals* is very reminiscent of that of the celebrated Paduan scribe Bartolomeo Sanvito (1435–1511), who rubricated at least one manuscript and possibly another for Agostino Maffei. In addition, an in-depth analysis is made of the work of the illuminator: the full-page frontispiece, f. 1r, and ten miniatures at the opening of each of the books of Tacitus' works, ff. 11v–187r, which have been attributed by art historians to either Giovan Pietro da Birago (fl. c.1463–1513) who, by 1490, was the leading illuminator at the Sforza court in Milan, or to the hand of an unknown master, who was influenced by Birago.

The article discusses sources for the *all' antica* illuminations and points out the artist's reliance on pictorial precedents. But while many architectural frontispieces in fifteenth-century Renaissance manuscripts have a monumental quality and a celebratory air, the opening page of the Copenhagen Tacitus exposes the fragmentary state of the remains of the past. The ruin, along with the truncated sculptures and mythological beings accompanying the initials, might have been intended to provoke meditations on the past and a longing for the great things that once existed. It is also suggested that images in the Tacitus manuscript visualize lines of the text which they accompany and that attention is drawn to the artist's skill as a painter as well as to his creativity.

Light is also shed on the similarities and differences between the miniatures in the Maffei Tacitus and those in books attributed to Birago or to the Master of the Barozzi Breviary. It is assessed that the figure style employed in the Tacitus is quite close to that of the master who painted the illuminations in the *Barozzi Breviary* (Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Inc. 4, H.63) and to that of Birago in his signed frontispiece of the *Sforziada* (Warsaw, Biblioteka Narodowa, Inc. F. 1347). However, there are some notable differences in the execution of hair, proportions of the figures' bodies and the degree of activity in the compositions in the Copenhagen and Warsaw volumes. It is therefore concluded that the Maffei Tacitus was more likely to have been painted by the Master of the Barozzi Breviary than by Birago. Lastly, because Agostino Maffei was a man who was interested in many facets of the ancient past and involved in all aspects of manuscript production, it is suggested that he might have expressed some ideas about how the Tacitus should be illuminated and that the manuscript that exists today in Copenhagen incorporates these wishes.

