A Manuscript from the Library of Péter Váradi: Physical Features

The only manuscript remaining from the library of the Hungarian humanist and archbishop Péter Váradi is today in the library of the University of Bologna. Providing insight into the literary interests of one of the most prominent humanists in the court of Matthias Corvinus, the book contains a Latin text written by Gregorius Nyssenus. The work *De vita Moysi* was translated from Greek to Latin by another prominent figure of the time, Georgius Trapezuntius, also known as George of Trebizond.¹ These circumstances make the manuscript even more special for us although today it is not kept in Hungary. During my Erasmus studies in Bologna, I had the opportunity to have a look at the manuscript myself, thanks to the help of Professoressa Chiara Faraggiana, while at the end of my BA studies, I also made an attempt to clarify the background of the codex. After I had come back to Hungary, Edit Madas provided me with great help and ample resources. Now that it is possible to continue my research thanks to the Hungarian Scientific Research Fund, I would like to extend my investigation beyond my MA studies and to do so, I find it essential to give an account of how far we have got already.

In my paper, I wish to shed light on the provenience of the codex and find links between its history and physical features. Therefore, I would like to analyse the characteristics that support the theories about its path to Bologna and help us trace the codex back to its first proprietor – Péter Váradi. Talking about physical features, I also wish to provide a brief description of the humanist handwriting of the scribe of the main text. Finally, to raise the question of re-binding the book, I would like to demonstrate

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that different page numbers suggest that there might have been attempts to restructure the gatherings or to reconstruct the whole structure of the manuscript.

As the paper flyleaves suggest, the parchment codex must have been re-bound, but it still bears some physical characteristics that help us draw conclusions of its provenience. First of all, the verso of the original flyleaf tells us that, after it was brought to Bologna, the codex might have been in the library of a certain chiesa di San Salvatore (hereby referred to as ‘San Salvatoris’). The number 490 might stand for the inventarium number of the book in San Salvatoris. There is another number, number 562 on the pastedown. Although there is a certain chiesa di San Salvatore today in Bologna, I could not contact them, but the librarians of the Biblioteca Universitaria could confirm these assumptions in connection with the history of the codex. Even though we do not know much about how the book might have been brought to Bologna, it is attested that the codex was already in Italy in the middle of the sixteenth century, and it is for certain that after being in San Salvatoris (bearing firstly the inventarium number 490, then 562), the book became propriety of the Biblioteca Universitaria.

The stamps that can be seen in the book today might take us even further in the reconstruction of its history: besides the stamp of the Biblioteca Universitaria di Bologna, we can also find the stamp of the Bibliothèque Nationale of Paris on recto 1 and recto 100. As we can tell from historical data, in 1796 a new republic was established in Northern Italy called Repubblica Cispadana and its capital was Bologna. Although it existed only for a year, since the establishment of this new state was supported by Napoleon himself, we can easily see the link between the French national library and that of Bologna. The French started to bring books from Italian libraries as early as June 1796, and during the reign of Napoleon, approximately five hundred manuscripts were brought from Bologna to France. In the 19th century, these manuscripts were given back to the previous proprietors.

2 I am grateful to Rita De Tata (Sala dei Manoscritti, Biblioteca Universitaria di Bologna) for the detailed information and confirmation of the data concerning the provenience of the codex. For further information, see also FRATTI, L.: Indice dei codici latini conservati nella R. Biblioteca Universitaria di Bologna. Firenze 1909.

3 DELISLE, L.: Le cabinet des manuscrits de la bibliothèque imperiale. Paris 1868. 33.: “Le traité d’armistice conclu avec le pape au mois de juin 1796 nous autorize a prendre cinq cents manuscrits dans les bibliothèques de Bologne.” I am grateful to Edit Madas for providing this information.
thanks to the intervention of the Pope: Bologna regained her collection on 23 October in 1815.

As we concentrate on the other characteristics of the book, we can say that the handwriting of the manuscript is a fairly usual humanist minuscule; we do not know anything about its scriptor. The illumination (the so-called bianchi girari) suggests that it was illuminated in Florence. The scriptor applies very few abbreviations: he uses the nasals most commonly. He either writes the full diphthong ae or replaces it with an e-caudata. In some cases, the diphthong ae can be seen in a contracted form, (for example, on the second verso, in line sixteen: praestabat). The Latin counterpart of the Greek theta can also be found in a nexus, like on the second verso, in line twenty-one, in the word Themistocles. The i is dotted only if it is contrastive: when the scriptor has to make a distinction between the letter i and the strokes of the letter u in a u-i connection (for this, see recto 44, line 6: iussit). In case there are two i-s next to each other, the second one has a longer descender. The distinction between u and v is the following: the scribe uses u for minuscule letters (either u or v, as is common among humanist scribes) and applies for a V when writing capital letters at the beginning of a sentence. The ligatures st, ct are also typical in the manuscript. Being at the end of a word, the transversal of t and e are prolonged (for example in line 15 on recto 44 the word esse). Separator signs at the ends of lines are also used and sentences are also separated by colons. Since they are written in a different ink, commas were supposedly added later by Péter Váradi himself.

There are only two initials in the manuscript. To make the beginning of a new paragraph more visible, the scribe writes the first letter closer to the margin, as observable on the 2nd recto, in line 8. The codex consists

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5 Delisle (n. 3) 33.: “Les manuscrits de Bologne et ceux du Vatican furent restitués au Souvrain Pontife le 23 octobre.” I am grateful to Edit Madas for providing this information.


8 Verso 2, line 8: Summos
of a hundred parchment folios which are numbered on the rectos. Besides this numbering, we can find other attempts to number the rectos. Although much of this numbering is missing today, as the book was re-bound and some parts of these numbers had been cut off the pages, there are still some traces that may help us to see the order of them. To understand the structure of these numbers, we need to take a closer look at the places they occur. Thus we can learn that these numbers can only be found in two fasciculi, namely the fourth and the fifth quaternion. This numbering is not random: following the pattern provided by the numbering, we can restructure the two gatherings the following way. The fourth quaternion might be a more complicated one, since after re-organising the order of the leaves, we see the following structure:

![Diagram of folios numbering]

Here, the different lines are intended to indicate that the two rectos add up to one leaf together; which practically means that there is a leaf (recto number thirty-two and thirty-three) which holds the others together, but the leaves put in it are not put into one another – only put on one another. To put it another way: after the re-ordering we do not get a gathering that could be bound together, it is not a real fasciculus.

The reconstruction of the fifth gathering is an easier task: as we can see, here there is only a slight change: the leaf with thirty-seven and forty-four recto numbers, which is originally the one that holds the others together, can be put into the middle of the gathering. But it is still a gathering, so to say.
There is one more page in the codex where we can find a trace of this numbering: on recto seventy-four, the number forty-four also appears. This might refer back to the fifth quaternio, the last recto of which was recto number forty-four, but it is fairly unlikely that this number on recto seventy-four indicates a connection between two parts of the text itself. Taking the hypotheses about the re-structuring of the gatherings into consideration, it seems more probable that the numbers were written on the rectos before binding the book. We might also assume that the right recto numbering is the latter and the other, mysterious ones are more or less successful attempts to put the leaves together.⁹

To conclude what I have said so far, the provenience of the manuscript and the physical features, such as the page numbers, still raise many questions. Even though I did not have the opportunity to access it, we can be sure that the manuscript was brought to San Salvatoris around 1530, but we know little about why it might have happened. The different page numbers, however, take us even further in time – to the point at which the manuscript was still to be bound and someone may have attempted to restructure it – probably because the leaves were not in the correct order before binding. Be that as it may, this manuscript that can be seen as ‘fairly usual’ is still worth further research thanks to its enigmatic past.