

*Branko Jozić*MANUSCRIPT M 169 IN THE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY, SPLIT
(Benedicti de Acoltis Aretini *De bello contra barbaros a Christianis gesto...*)

The University Library in Split holds an acephalic manuscript in Latin previously known only from its description in the catalogue, Benedicti de Acoltis Aretini *De bello contra barbaros a Christianis gesto, pro Christi sepulchro & Iudaea recuperandis, libri IIII*. This is one of the nine extant copies of the history of the First Crusade written by the Florentine humanist Benedetto Accolti the Elder (1415-1464). The work went through six printed editions in Latin and six in translations (Italian, German, Greek and French). The present paper gives a codicological description of the Split manuscript as well as facts about the author and the contents of the work. Suggestions are made concerning who might have copied and illuminated it as well as about the time and place of its creation. At the end the possible context of how the codex arrived in Split is discussed.

Today, after its restoration in 1998/99, the codex is bound in cardboard covered with dark red artificial leather (235 x 140 x 35 mm) and comprises very fine parchment sheets, one hundred of which have been written on, while five have been left blank. The beginning and ending of the text are missing. The Split manuscript is here compared with the copy of the work kept in the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana in Florence (BML Plut. 54.6, digital version online) and with the first printed edition (Venice. 1532), and it is determined that twelve sheets are missing at the beginning and four at the end. In addition, between f. 8v and 9r a part of the text that would fill one page is missing (an empty page was inserted during the restoration) and a page each is missing between ff. 16 and 17 and 25 and 26. Apart from that, from f. 80 to the end the codex is damaged by damp, and a considerable part of the text is illegible. The structure of the quires has been constructed on the basis of certain regularities of the appearance of the signature marks; in its current state, the codex consists of 11 quaternions.

Since it lacks the beginning and ending folios, this codex naturally wants the title and the name of the author, the contents page, the dedication and the colophon. The text in Latin is written in brown ink in a humanist script in a single column, very regularly, in twenty six lines per page. It was written with great care by a skilled hand, very clearly and, considering the space available, fairly economically. The text runs without a break, with no chapter or paragraph breaks; there is only the division into four books, the beginnings and endings of which are clearly indicated.

Three lovely polychrome initials with floral elements have survived: a square blue ground for the initial letter in gold filled in with red and green fields and interwoven with leafing vine tendrils in white (»bianchi girari«). On the left hand side the initials extend upwards and downwards, and with them the floral white

parts, which end with a sometimes open and sometimes closed floral calyx and a stamen in gold. It is assumed that there were originally two more initials – one at the beginning of the dedication and another at the beginning of Book One. As well as having an aesthetic contribution, they are also functional signs, marking the borders between the individual books. The fine quality of the parchment, the meticulous precision with which the text has been written and the freshness of the initials lead to the conclusion that this was a luxury edition.

As well as the damage mentioned above, this manuscript has some other characteristic features. For example, there is the regular writing of *y*, *ch* and *et* instead of *i*, *c* and *&*, and so on. A comparison of texts determined that there are some copying errors, the omission or repetition of some words, all of which can be useful in the determination of the filiation. There are no subsequent interventions by other hands, apart from traces of reading (underlinings with graphite pencil, vertical lines or the mark >> in the margins).

Benedetto Accolti the Elder was a lawyer, the chancellor of the Florentine Republic and a humanist. As well as his poetic works in Italian, he wrote two works of history in Latin. In his polemical and apologetic *Dialogus de praestantia virorum sui aevi*, as opponent of the cult of antiquity, he endeavours to show that people of the modern age surpass in all things those celebrated in antiquity. The Split codex has a copy of Accolti's account of the First Crusade, which he wrote with the intention of backing efforts to start a new crusade. He wanted to prove to the papal court the commitment of Florence to the defence of Christianity, hoping at the same time that he could spur his contemporaries to follow the examples of the heroes of yore.

In an endeavour to respond to further questions about the codex, we are faced with a number of unknowns. We do not know who copied it or the year of its ending. Compared with two other copies of this work, from the pens of Gherardo da Giovanni del Ciriagio (1412/1413-1472) and Peitro Cennini (1444-1484), both of Florence, the Split manuscript is in some of its elements more similar to one and in others to the second copy. For the moment it can only be assumed to have been created in Florence. This would tend to be supported by the ornaments of the initials that are typical of the Florentine illumination of the time, the style of which is connected with Francesco d'Antonio del Chierico (1433-1484), Florentine goldsmith and accomplished illuminator. It has not been possible to establish who the owners of the codex were, or how it came to Split.

Key words: Manuscript codex, Split University Library, Benedetto Accolti the Elder, First Crusade