

# THE DUKE OF URBINO'S LIBRARY

Vespasiano da Bisticci (1421–1498), Florentine Bookseller

c. 1490

...Coming to the holy doctors, who are in Latin, he wished to have all the books of the four doctors; and what letters! What books! And how excellent! Having no regard for expense. The four doctors having been finished, he<sup>1</sup> then desired all the works of Saint Bernard, and all the holy doctors of antiquity; he desired that none should be wanting: Tertullian, Hilary, Remi, Hugh of Saint Victor, Isidore, Anselm, Rabanus Maurus, and all the holy doctors of antiquity that have ever written.

Coming from the Latins to the sacred writings of the writers which are converted into Latin, he desired in Latin the works of Dionysius the Areopagite, of Saint Basil, Cyril, Gregory of Nyssa, Eusebius, all his works, Ephraem the Monk, the most excellent writer Origen. Coming to the Latin doctors, as well in philosophy as in theology, all the works of Saint Thomas Aquinas, all the works of Albertus Magnus, all the works of Alexander of Hales, all the works of Scotus, all the works of Bonaventura, the works of Richard of Mediavilla; all the works of the Archbishop Antoninus, and all the modern doctors who are of authority he wished to have, down to the *Conformities* of Saint Francis; all the works upon civil law, most beautiful texts; all the lectures of Bartolo, in kid-skin, and many writers in civil law.

The Bible, most excellent book, he had done in two pictured volumes, as rich and fine as might be made, covered with gold brocade, enriched with silver; and he had this done so elegantly, as the first of all writings. And all the commentaries, those of the Master of the Sentences, of Nicholas de Lyra, and all the doctors of antiquity who have written commentaries, as well the Latins as the Greeks, and all the glossary of Nicholas de Lyra; this is a book like to which in this age no other has been made.

All the writers of astronomy and their commentaries; all the works on geometry with commentaries; all the works on arithmetic; all the works on architecture, all the works *De Re Militari*, all books treating of the machines of the ancients for conquering a country, and those of the moderns, which was a very remarkable volume. Books of painting, of sculpture, of music, of canon law, and all the texts and lectures and the *Summa* of the bishop of Ostia, and more works in this department. *Speculum innocentiae*. In medicine all the works of Avicenna, all the works of Hippocrates, of Galen, the *Continente* of Almansor *plus quam commentum*, all the works of Averroës, both on logic and on natural and moral philosophy. A book of all the ancient councils; all the works of Boetius, as well on logic as on philosophy and on music.

All the works of the modern writers, commencing with Pope Pius. He has all the works of Petrarch, both Latin and vulgar; all the works of Dante, Latin and vulgar; all the works of Boccaccio in Latin; all the works of Messer Coluccio; all the works of Messer Lionardo d'Arezzo, both original and translations; all the works of Brother Ambrogio original and translations; all the works of Messer Gianozzo Manetti, as well originals as translations; all the works of Guerrino, original and translations; all the works of Panormita, as well in verse as in prose; all the works of Messer Francisco Filelfo, both in prose and in verse, original and translations; all the works of Perotti, translations and original; all the works of Campano, in prose and in verse; all the original works of Maffeo Vegio; all the works of Nicolò Secondino, translations and original, he who was interpreter for the Greeks and Latins at the council of the Greeks in Florence; all the works of Pontanus, original and translations; all the works of Bartolomeo Fazi, translations and original; all the works of Gasparino; all the works of Pietro Paulo Vergerio, original and translations; all the works of Messer John Argyropolus, translated, that is; the whole of the *Philosophy* all the works of Messer Francisco Barbaro, translations and original; all the works of Messer Lionardo Giustiniano, both original and translations; all the works of Donato Acciaiuoli, original and translations; all the original works of Alamanno Renuccini; all the original works of Messer Cristofano da Prato

---

<sup>1</sup> Federico da Montefeltro (1422–1482), Duke of Urbino (1474–1482)

Vecchio; all the works of Messer Poggio, both translations and original; all the works of Messer Giovanni Tortella, both original and translations; all the translations of Messer Francesco d'Arezzo, who lived at the court of King Ferrando; all the works of Lorenzo Valla, translations and original.

Having acquired all the books of every department which were to be found, written both by ancient and modern doctors, and translations as well in every branch, he desired to have all the Greek books that were to be found; all the works of Aristotle in Greek; all the works of Plato, each volume bound in the finest kid-skin; all the works of Homer in one volume, the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey* and the *Balracomiomachia*; all the works of Sophocles; all the works of Pindar; all the works of Menander; and as well all the poets that were to be found in the Greek tongue; all the Lives of Plutarch, in one most excellent volume; the Cosmography of Ptolemy, with illustrations, in Greek, a most excellent book; all the moral works of Plutarch, a most worthy book; all the works of Herodotus, of Pausanias, of Thucydides, of Polybius; all the works of Demosthenes and of Æschines; Plotinus the philosopher, all his works; all the commentaries that are found among the Greeks, as for example the commentaries upon Aristotle; all the works of Theophrastus, the *Physica de plantis*; all the Greek lexicographers, the Greek with the Latin explanation; all the works of Hippocrates and of Galen; all the works of Xenophon; part of the Bible in Greek; all the works of Saint Basil; all the works of Saint John Chrysostom; all the works of Saint Athanasius, of Saint John of Damascus; all the works of Saint Gregory of Nazianzus, of Gregory of Nyssa, of Origen, of Dionysius the Areopagite, of John Climacus, of Saint Ephraem the Monk, of Æneas the Sophist; the *Collations* of John Cassianus, the Book of Paradise, *Vitæ sanctorum palrum ex Ægypto*; the Lives of Barlaam and Jesaphat; a Psalter in three tongues—a wonderful thing—in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, verse for verse, a most excellent book; all the books on geometry, on arithmetic, and on astronomy that are found in any language.

There are numerous Greek books, by various authors, which when he was not able to get them otherwise, he sent for them, desiring that nothing should be wanting in any tongue which it was possible to acquire. There were to be seen Hebrew books, all that could be found in that language, beginning with the Bible, and all those who have commented upon it, Rabbi Moses, and other commentators. Not only are these Hebrew books the Holy Scriptures, but also on medicine, on philosophy and in all branches, all that could be acquired in that tongue.

His Lordship having completed this worthy task at the great expense of more than 30.000 ducats, among the other excellent and praiseworthy arrangements which he made was this, that he undertook to give to each writer a title, and this he desired should be covered with crimson embellished with silver. He began, as has been noted above, with the Bible, as the foremost of all, and had it covered, as was said, with gold brocade. Then beginning with all the doctors of the Church, he had each one covered with crimson and embellished with silver; and so with the Greek doctors as well as with the Latins. As well philosophy, history, and books on medicine and all the modern doctors; in such a manner that there are innumerable volumes of this kind, a thing gorgeous to behold. In this library all the books are beautiful in the highest degree, all written with the pen, not one printed, that it might not be disgraced thereby; all elegantly illuminated, and there is not one that is not written on kid-skin.

There is a singular thing about this library, which is not true of any other; and this is that of all the writers, sacred as well as profane, original works as well as translations, not a single page is wanting from their works, in so far as they are in themselves complete; which cannot be said of any other library, all of which have portions of the work of a writer, but not all; and it is a great distinction to possess such perfection. Some time before I went to Ferrara, being at Urbino at his Lordship's court, and having catalogues of all the libraries of Italy, commencing with that of the Pope, of Saint Mark at Florence, of Pavia—and I had even sent to England to obtain a catalogue of the library of the University of Oxford—I compared these with that of the Duke, and I saw that all were faulty in one particular; that they had numerous copies of the same work, but they had not all the works of one writer complete as this had; nor were there writers of every branch as in this.

Ellwood P. Cubberly, *Readings in the History of Education* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1920):194–197.