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The Odyssey of the Ravenna Manuscript: Urbino Time

The aim of this paper is to define the chronology of the Ravenna manuscript (R 429), which is the oldest and qualitatively best witness of Aristophanes' plays. The manuscript was held at the Court of the Dukes of Urbino between the end of the 15th and 16th centuries. As it is well known, the Ravenna manuscript was in Florence in 1516, but how and when the Ms. came into the Library of Urbino are questions as obscure as how and when it was carried away. Over the centuries, scholars have tried to investigate such issues, but they still disagree to this day. After summarizing the bibliography concerning such chronology, I focus on the ancient indices of the Library of Urbino. Special attention will be given to the so-called "Old Index" and the "Index of Veterani". By studying these indices and their marginal annotations and also the prefaces of two printed editions of Aristophanes (the 1515 and 1516 Giunta editions), it is possible to suggest that the Ravenna manuscript arrived in Urbino at Federico da Montefeltro's time (that is to say before 1482) and that it left the library in 1515–1516.

Keywords: Aristophanes, Ravenna manuscript, Library of Urbino, Giunta's editions.

As it is well known since the study of Von Velsen, the Ravenna manuscript was part of the volumes of Greek poetry at the Library of the Dukes of Urbino.¹ By the will of Pope Alexander VII, in 1657 the manuscripts of this library were transferred to the Vatican Library, forming the

¹ VON VELSEN (1871: 4).

section of *Urbinales Graeci*.² But not all the manuscripts reached Rome. Considering only the Greek poetic manuscripts, it can be observed that three of them are not today in the Vatican Library. Among these three, there is the codex known as R 429 since it is preserved in Ravenna.³ It is the oldest and qualitatively best witness of Aristophanes' text since it is dated on a palaeographic basis to the mid-10th century circa and it is the only one that bears all the eleven plays of Aristophanes.⁴

The quaestio of the Ravenna manuscript concerns its troubled history, still unknown in many parts. The milestones in the tradition of this codex can be summarized as follows.⁵ The manuscripts survived the Fourth Crusade in 1204; it was brought by Giovanni Aurispa in 1423 in Italy;⁶ it was taken to Florence by Niccolò Niccoli; it became the property of Angelo Vadio da Rimini;⁷ then it arrived in Urbino. Later, R 429 reached Tuscany. As pointed out by Von Velsen and Zacher, the codex was in Florence in 1516.⁸ Here it was read and annotated by Eufrosino Bonini and thanks to his work in collaboration with the Giunta's press it was possible for the latter to print in 1516 the appendix – including the *Thesmophoriazusae* and the *Lysistrata*, never printed before – of the edition published in 1515, containing nine plays just as the Aldine already printed on the 15th July 1498.⁹ Finally, there was no more news of

² About this transfer see MORANTI–MORANTI (1981).

³ These are the data resulting from a comparison between the *Index Vetus* (on which see infra p. 469) and the current *Urbinali Graeci*. The other two poetic codices missing at the Vatican Library are numbers 114 and 116 of the *Index Vetus*. Both these codices include Homer and are today stored in the Biblioteca Ambrosiana in Milan.

⁴ Among the conspicuous bibliography of R 429, see most recently ORSINI (2011: 321).

⁵ A short brief can be found in PRATO (2001: XXXI–XXXV).

⁶ He was traveling in Greece and he brought 238 other codices. For the list see *Epistulae* 38, 53 and 61 del XXIV book in TRAVERSARI (1759) For the role of Aurispa see MIONI (1964: 364).

⁷ See STEFEC (2012: 146, n. 193).

⁸ VON VELSEN (1871); ZACHER (1888).

⁹ On Giunta's edition see infra p. 471–472. Aldine is printed by the Cretan scholar Marco Musuro in Venice. On Giunta and Manuzio see NORTON (1958).

the Ravenna manuscript until 1712, when Pietro Canneti bought it and brought it to Ravenna to the library of the Camaldolese monastery in Classe, where it is still stored today.¹⁰

As Clark pointed out ‘how and when the Ms. came into the Library of Urbino are questions as obscure as how and when it was carried away’.¹¹ Over the years scholarly perspectives have tried to investigate this aspect but critics still disagree to this day.

Before adding new elements to the analysis of this topic, I intend to carry out a summary of the bibliography concerning such chronology.

Clark believes that the codex arrived in Urbino surely after 1498, most probably in 1503.¹² According to the English scholar, this date can be proved by reflecting on the following arguments. The Ravenna manuscript is not mentioned in the list given by Vespasiano da Bisticci in his *Life of Federico da Montefeltro*, which according to Clark was written around 1463.¹³ Francesco Maria I (Duke of Urbino between 1508 and 1538) had neither the financial resources nor the interest for making additions to the library. So, the codex must have been purchased from either Federico or Guidubaldo, that is to say not after 1508. Another terminus can be found in 1498, the date of the Aldine edition. If the manuscript had already been part of the library before 1498, Aldus himself could not have failed to be aware of this codex. So according to Clark, the Ravenna manuscript was acquired by Guidubaldo between 1498 and 1508, probably around 1503, i.e. after his restoration to his dukedom.¹⁴ The Ravenna manuscript had a brief stay in Urbino since it

¹⁰ On Pietro Canneti see PETRUCCI (1975: 125–129).

¹¹ CLARK (1871: 158).

¹² CLARK (1871: 159).

¹³ Vespasiano da Bisticci was the most known Florentine bookseller of the XVth century A.D. He had played a leading role in the establishment of Federico’s Library and he was the first to outline a description of the Library of Federico. His text was edited by GRECO (1970: 355–416). On Vespasiano’s work see also *infra* p. 4468–4469.

¹⁴ In 1502–1503 the duchy of Urbino and the Ducal Library suffered because of the war

was used in Florence by Giunta's brothers in 1516 to print the appendix including *Thesmophoriazusae* and *Lysistrata*. After this use, Clark asserts that the manuscript in all probability never returned to Urbino.

According to Martin, the Ravenna manuscript reached the Library of Urbino before 1482.¹⁵ This can be proved by considering firstly that the most significant acquisitions occurred during Federico's reign. Secondly, the terminus post quem of 1498 is not a valid argument, since Aldus may have known Duke Guidubaldo and may not have known that there was a manuscript bearing all the eleven plays of Aristophanes in Urbino. Thirdly, Vespasiano's catalogue has not to be read with strict historical accuracy and so the fact that Aristophanes is absent from his list is not probative.¹⁶ By these considerations, Martin asserts that the Ravenna Manuscript was purchased by Federico, so before 1482.¹⁷ As for when the codex left Urbino, Martin believes it happened in 1503, since between the years 1502–1503 Guidubaldo was assaulted by Cesare Borgia and was forced to leave the city. Cesare Borgia had the library moved to Forlì, where Guidubaldo found it again in 1504. As pointed out by Le Grelle, there were indeed losses among the manuscripts, but these affected the Latin and not the Greek section.¹⁸ Moreover, as argued by Zacher, if the manuscript had left the Urbino library in 1502–1503, one could not explain Bernardo Giunta's words in the edition of 1516. There he spoke of the 'antiquissimus exemplar ex Urbinatē bibliotheca' which

with Cesare Borgia. On this event see CLOUGH (1966: 103), VOLPE (2005: 105–148) and MORANTI (2023: 53–78).

¹⁵ MARTIN (1882: IX).

¹⁶ On the accuracy of Vespasiano's catalog see *infra*, p. 469.

¹⁷ The same opinion is also expressed by VAN LEEUWEN (1904: VI): 'Quem ex bibliotheca *Urbinatē*, ut vidimus, habebat Euphrosynus, quomodo cunque acceptum. Quam bibliothecam Urbini condidit dux Federicus; ante annum 1482 igitur, quo anno Federicus mortuus est, illuc pervenisse videtur. In Euphrosyni autem Iuntaeque manus postquam pervenit, non rediit in bibliothecam *Urbinatē*'.

¹⁸ LE GRELLE (1921: XXI). On these losses see also PERUZZI (2014: 353).

is described as damaged in the initial folios.¹⁹ Such a description is well suited to the first pages of codex R, as it is preserved today, which is difficult to read in its first pages.²⁰ Therefore, it is impossible to assume that Giunta owned the codex with initial guard sheets bearing information about an Urbino provenance. According to Zacher, most probably Giunta's brother received the Ravenna manuscripts shortly before 1516.²¹

The most recent work concerning the study of the chronology of R429 is the *Lysistrata* edited by Perusino. As for when the Ravenna Manuscript reached the Urbino Library, Perusino believes that the manuscript has been purchased by Guidubaldo, citing as evidence on the one hand the latter's knowledge of Greek and on the other hand the fact that Aldo Manuzio's editio princeps of 1498 does not present the *Lysistrata* and the *Thesmophoriazusae*.²² Along the lines of Clark and Zacher, Perusino suggests that the Ravenna manuscript had left the Urbino library around 1515. By considering the two Giunta's editions, she proposes the period between September 1515 and January 1516, assuming these dates as terminus post quem and terminus ante quem respectively.

To understand this problematic issue, I will consider three aspects. Firstly, according to Stefec's study concerning the figure of Angelo Vadio da Rimini, we deduce that he owned the Ravenna manuscript.²³ An analysis of all the codices in the *Urbinales Graeci* has shown that almost half of the ancient core, acquired during Federico's lifetime, was annotated by Angelo Vadio and must therefore have come from his private

¹⁹ GIUNTA (1516: a II; 54): '[...] ex codice adeo vetusto excerpsimus ut altera interdum dictionis pars ibi desideretur'.

²⁰ VON VELSEN (1871: 6).

²¹ ZACHER (1888: 529, n. 1).

²² PERUSINO-BETA (2020: LXXXIX).

²³ STEFEC (2012: 146, n. 193). Angelo Vadio was born in Rimini. Since his youth, he must have developed an excellent knowledge of Greek and shown a keen interest in Greek manuscripts, as is proved firstly by his letters and secondly by the acquisitions made during his travels around Greece and the Orient, on which see ivi.

library.²⁴ Some of Vadio's manuscripts became part of the library during Federico's duchy as it is evidenced by the decorations.²⁵ These show allegorical and symbolic allusions derived from figurative elements, which are combined with coats of arms celebrating the virtues of the lord of Urbino. Because of such decorations, we can conclude that these manuscripts were acquired before Federico's death, in 1482. The initial folios of the Ravenna manuscript do not bear any trace of this coat of arms, but since the codex had belonged to Angelo Vadio and since almost all the manuscripts of this humanist's personal library were included in the Urbino library before 1482, we may assume the same *terminus ante quem* for the Aristophanes' codex as well.

Secondly the Ravenna manuscript appears in the *Index Vetus*, the first index of the Urbino library that has come down to us, compiled in his first part in 1487 and in his second one between 1496 and 1498.²⁶ At number 123 we read *Aristophanis comoedi insignis comoediae XI. Codex pulcherrimus in croceo*.²⁷ Another list of the works kept in the Urbino library can be found in a passage of Vespasiano da Bisticci, included in the *Life of Federico da Montefeltro*, composed shortly after Federico's death – that is to say, soon after 1482.²⁸ This passage of Vespasiano da Bisticci, written before the *Index Vetus*, thus testifies to the existence of an earlier index of the Urbino library, which must have been compiled while Federico was still alive, but which has not come down to us.²⁹ To understand the re-

²⁴ This is not surprising, since the acquisition of private collections was one of the methods to make additions to the Urbino library (just as in the case of Palla Strozzi's collection). On the ways of increasing codices in the Ducal Library see PERUZZI (2010: 265–304), PERUZZI (2004: 27 sqq.) and MORANTI (1986: 19–49).

²⁵ See *Urb. Gr.* 44; 146; 148; 159.

²⁶ This *Index* is contained in ff. 1r–126r of the current *Urb. lat.* 1761. It is edited in its entirety by STORNAJOLO (1895: LIX–CLXXV). The Greek section of the *Index Vetus* is edited also by STEFEC (2012: 155–162). On this index see MICHELINI TOCCI (1962: 250 sqq.).

²⁷ See *Urb. Lat.* 1761, f. 99v.

²⁸ For this text see GRECO (1970: 386–399).

²⁹ GRECO (1970: 398–399): 'avendo (*scil.* Federico) gl'inventari di tutte le librerie d'Ita-

relationships between these 3 lists – the lost index, the Vespasiano's catalogue and the *Index Vetus* – we can focus on the contrast between the first and second parts of the *Index Vetus* itself. The first part presents more accurate descriptions compared to the second one. But this difference can be simply explained. The first part of the *Index Vetus* is a copy of the first index, lost to us, which is quoted implicitly but not in its entirety in Vespasiano's work. In this way, the *Index Vetus* turns out to be a copy of the first lost index.³⁰ Since the Ravenna manuscript is written in the first part of the *Index Vetus* we can probably assume that it was also listed in the inventory lost to us and so that it was acquired before 1482, i.e. while Federico was still alive. An argument against this hypothesis may be the absence of Aristophanes' works in Vespasiano's list. But it is necessary to consider some aspects of Vespasiano's description to understand firstly its peculiarities and secondly its objective value. Because of the genre of the work, the author's purpose is mainly celebratory. Moreover, his passage presents some critical points. Considering only the Greek list, out of 35 names expressly mentioned by Vespasiano, 14 turn out to be problematic. By this consideration and according to Stornajolo's study,³¹ it seems to me that the description of the Ducal Library in the work of Vespasiano is not a faithful reproduction of the Library.³² So, since the codex is listed in the *Index Vetus* – which directly retraces the first index lost to us – we can conclude that the Ravenna manuscript reached the Urbino library during Federico's duchy.

lia, cominciando a quella del papa, di Firenze di Santo Marco, di Pavia, infino a avere mandato in Inghilterra per lo inventario della libreria dello studio Ausoniense, riscontrando di poi con quello del duca, tutti pecano in una cosa'.

³⁰ See STORNAJOLO (1895: LVI).

³¹ STORNAJOLO (1895: XXIII).

³² After all, drawing up an accurate inventory of the Urbino library was not the Florentine bookseller's purpose. He just wanted to celebrate his most important client. After celebrating Federico as a victorious ruler, Vespasiano glorified him as a patron of arts. For this purpose, Vespasiano described briefly the Library.

Finally, the Ravenna manuscript is listed in *Veterani's Inventory*.³³ This index is compiled by Federico Veterani, a copyist and then librarian at the Library of Urbino. It is dated between 1508 and 1521³⁴ and it retraces the *Index Vetus* but it records 56 fewer codices.³⁵ Moreover, it presents minimal bibliographical descriptions, since neither the materials of the codices nor the bindings are described, and the codex indication is often not precise. In the *Veterani's Inventory* the codices of Aristophanes' plays are listed after those including the works of Sophocles and Euripides. *Veterani's Inventory* is arranged as follows:

690 Sophoclis Tragediae; bis

691 Euripidis Tragediae

692 Aristophanis Comedie; bis.

According to the *Index Vetus*, the Urbino library owned three codices with plays by Aristophanes.³⁶ Among these three, one is a miscellaneous codex as it includes Sophocles and Aristophanes' works together (nr. 120), the other two contain only Aristophanes' works (nr. 123 and 124). Only two of these three codices seem to be listed in *Veterani's inventory* (item 692),³⁷ but if we look carefully there is also the third codex. It is necessary to analyse how Veterani lists miscellaneous codices. For those manuscripts Veterani usually indicates the first author and then he mentions either the other authors included, or he simply writes *cum*

³³ For the edition of this inventory see GUASTI (1862).

³⁴ PERUZZI (2014: 355).

³⁵ 38 *libri graeci ex armario* and 18 codices out of the 130 placed on the shelves are missing. The 15 codices are 15; 20; 29; 30; 36; 45; 47; 50; 51; 74; 79; 80; 81; 91; 103; 105; 114; 116.

³⁶ These are the numbers 120, 123 and 124 corresponding to the current *Urb. Grr.* 141, 143 and R 429 of Ravenna Library.

³⁷ Item 692 corresponds to two codices as evidenced by the presence of 'bis'.

reliquis.³⁸ But in other cases, he just mentions the first author.³⁹ By writing 'Sophoclis Tragoedie bis' (item 690) Veterani means the numbers 120 and 121 of the *Index Vetus*, the only 2 miscellaneous codices of the *Index Vetus* including Sophocles. Since one of the two codices listed under item 690 of the *Veterani's Inventory* corresponds to number 120 of the *Index Vetus* (Sophocles and Aristophanes) and since there were 3 codices of Aristophanes, item 692 in the list must necessarily correspond to the numbers 123 and 124 of the *Index Vetus*. So, we can conclude that the Ravenna Manuscript is listed in the *Veterani's Inventory*.⁴⁰ Due to this conclusion, we deduce that the codex was still part of the Urbino Library in 1508, the terminus post quem of the *Veterani's Inventory*.

By these considerations, we may conclude that the Ravenna manuscript arrived in Urbino at Federico da Montefeltro's time, i.e. before 1482, and that it left the library surely after 1508. But as for when the codex left the Ducal library, there is another certain terminus ante quem. It is the 28th of January 1516, when the Giunta's appendix is printed. As already demonstrated by Von Velsen and Zacher, this edition is directly based on the Ravenna manuscript.⁴¹ Moreover, this relationship is also evidenced by the marginal annotation at the number 123 of the *Index Vetus*. Here it is written *Habuit Petrus Florentinus Cartularius stampandum*.⁴² This marginal annotation clearly attests firstly to the presence of

³⁸ See the following miscellaneous manuscripts of Veterani 62; 624; 637 bis; 648; 655, 656; 663; 664; 665; 666. For the *Index Vetus* see STORNAJOLO (1895), for the index of Veterani see GUASTI (1862).

³⁹ 640 Veterani; 670 Veterani; 677 Veterani on which see GUASTI (1862: 150–151).

⁴⁰ According to MARTIN (1882: viii): 'Il semble qu'il y ait là un ensemble de faits entraînant, non la preuve certaine, mais au moins une présomption assez forte que le manuscrit de Ravenne est un des deux qui sont portés dans l'inventaire de Veterano'. But along the line of GUASTI (1862: 127) Martin dated this catalogue to the 15th century and so he used this argument to conclude that the Ravenna manuscript had reached Urbino before 1482.

⁴¹ See VON VELSEN (1871: 1–53) and ZACHER (1888: 529–543).

⁴² See *Urb. lat.* 1761 f. 99v.

the Ravenna manuscript in the Urbino Library; secondly, it testifies that the manuscript at a certain point arrives in Florence to print the Aristophanes' texts. In the preface of the Giunta's edition of 1515 addressed to the bishop Francesco Accolti, Bernardo Giunta expresses his disappointment at being unable to publish two other plays in addition to the nine already printed by Aldo Manuzio.

Putabam vir doctissime duas quoque notioribus his addere posse nondum ab aliis impressas, quae cito forsitan abs te nostra ope his novem comitatae legi poterunt, ni forsitan Euphrosyni Bonini praeceptoris tui et aliorum tuorum pariterque nostrum amicorum promissa irrita quod credere nequeo in leves abibunt auras.⁴³

From this sentence, we deduce that Giunta believed he was close to printing two new Aristophanes' plays. Since *Thesmophoriazusae* can only be found in the Ravenna manuscript and in the Monacensis Augustanus 494, a direct copy of R from the 15th century, it is therefore clear that Giunta is aware of the existence of R 429, although at that time he did not yet own it.⁴⁴ Shortly afterward the *expectata dies* comes and Giunta can print the last two plays. It is the 28th of January 1516 and the Ravenna manuscript is in Florence.⁴⁵ Overall, therefore I suggest that the Ravenna manuscript has been borrowed between September 1515 and the 28th of January 1516.

⁴³ GIUNTA (1515: 1).

⁴⁴ We can assume that if Giunta had received the Ravenna manuscript in 1515, close to the publication of the edition, he would probably have waited to print the volume to include the *Lysistrata* and *Thesmophoriazusae*.

⁴⁵ See GIUNTA (1516: a II): 'Venit mi Francisce expectata dies illa in qua ex urbinatæ bibliotheca antiquissimum Aristophanis exemplar nacti sumus ibique inter alias *Λυσιστράτην* και *Θεσμοφορίαζουσας*, idest *Lysistratem* et *Cereri* sacrificantes feminas non alias visas comedias invenimus hasque et tuo nomine cudere tibi que dicare amicorum optime visum est'.

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