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GREAT CHANGES in the appearance of books took place in the early Renaissance. By 1500 the cumbersome folio in gothic script bound in wooden boards and intended to be read on a desk or lectern had begun to give way to octavos in roman or italic letter bound in gilt leather, small and light enough to be carried in the pocket. These changes, aesthetic as much as technical, were the consequence of initiatives by scholars and scribes, and had little or nothing to do with the invention of printing. Indeed the first printers hoped to profit from an existing market by making their products look as much like manuscripts as they could.¹

During the last years of the fourteenth and the first of the fifteenth century two Florentines dedicated to the revival of classical literature and learning, Niccolò Niccoli and Poggio Bracciolini, introduced a new handwriting, the humanistic upright and cursive scripts from which modern typefaces derive.² Fifty years later a group of antiquaries centred in Padua started to experiment with what may be called the ‘humanistic binding’ of gold-tooled leather, at first over wooden boards, later over pasteboards, the ancestor of the modern ‘hard back’.

Paduans were proud that their city, besides being the seat of a famous university, had been the birthplace of Livy. What were optimistically believed to be the historian’s bones were unearthed in 1413 and his supposed tombstone re-erected in the great hall of the Palazzo della Ragione. The first medal of the Renaissance was cast in Padua in 1390 in imitation of a Roman sestertius to commemorate Francesco Novello da Carrara’s recapture of the city from the Visconti.³ Scholarly residents included Pietro Donato, bishop from 1428 to 1447, who discovered, and had copied, a Carolingian or Ottonian manuscript of the Notitia dignitatum in Speier Cathedral while attending the Council of Basle,⁴ and Palla Strozzi, a patron of learning and collector of Greek manuscripts who chose to live in Padua after being expelled from Florence by the Medici.⁵

More important for his influence on the younger generation of Paduan antiquaries was Ciriaco of Ancona (1391–c. 1452), ‘the founder of archaeological science in the

⁴ Pächt–Alexander, ii, no. 599, with bibliography.
⁵ Kristeller, Mantegna, 16–17.
Renaissance’. Ciriaco was a self-taught merchant whose passionate interest in antiquity, first aroused on his foreign travels, had been confirmed by the figures and inscriptions on Trajan’s arch in his native town. At the age of thirty he learned Latin from the Aeneid and thereafter travelled indefatigably in Italy and the eastern Mediterranean to examine and record monuments. His aim, he said, was ‘to wake the dead’, by his ‘potent and divine art to revive the glorious things which were alive to the living in antiquity but had become buried and defunct through the lapse of ages…’ During more than forty years of travelling he explored Dalmatia, Greece and the Archipelago, Anatolia, Syria and Egypt, and became a recognised expert on Byzantine and Ottoman affairs.

He had been in Padua and knew Pietro Donato. There is an addition in his hand in Donato’s copy of the Notitia dignitatum, and he dedicated an antiquarian miscellany to the bishop. Most of his interests were later shared by the Paduan antiquaries. He was the first Renaissance man to compile syllogoi of inscriptions; he collected gems, coins, statues and codices. Did he bring back Mamluk gilt bindings from the Levant? We do not know, but he certainly bought manuscripts of the Greek Gospels and of Plutarch’s Moralia and had a Strabo transcribed in Constantinople. He wrote an individual, though inelegant, hand and was fond of brightening the page with much use of coloured inks.

The most celebrated of the Paduan antiquaries was Andrea Mantegna. He had been

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**Notes**


7 Oxford, Bodleian, MS Canon. Misc. 378 (Pächt–Alexander, ii, no. 599; cf. Wardrop, 15 n. 3), and Berlin, MS Hamilton 254, fols. 81–90v (H. Boeke, _Die lateinischen Handschriften der Sammlung Hamilton zu Berlin, Wiesbaden 1966, 127–8_).

8 Bodnar, 15; R. Weiss, ‘Ciriaco d’Ancona in Oriente’, _Medieval and humanist Greek, 289._

9 Kristeller, Mantegna; G. Fiocco, Mantegna, Milan, n.d.
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born in Vicenza in 1431, but was sent to Padua as a child and adopted when his parents died young by his teacher, Francesco Squarcione. Squarcione, who had travelled to Greece, collected antique busts and casts and taught his pupils to imitate the work of classical antiquity. Mantegna proved a willing learner. His first major commission was to paint scenes from the lives of SS. James and Christopher in the Eremitani Chapel in Padua. He took advantage of the opportunity to recreate a Roman imperial setting. The figures are placed in front of classical arches and columns and have the statuesque quality of ancient sculpture. An inscribed stele carved with medallion heads bears witness to the Paduan fascination with this type of monument (fig. 1). A round bas-relief forshadows plaquette ornament on bindings (fig. 2). Mantegna’s early interest in antique works of art is much in evidence; it was a subject on which he was to become an acknowledged authority.

Mantegna moved to Mantua in 1459 on entering the service of the ruler, Ludovico Gonzaga, and remained there until his death in 1506. He did not however lose touch with his Paduan friends, at least one of whom was to benefit from the Gonzaga connection, and retained a house in the city he had grown up in until 1492.

Giovanni Marcanova (c. 1410–67), a rich professor and bibliophile, was an older member of the circle. After obtaining his doctorate at Padua in 1440 he taught for thirteen years at the University before moving to Bologna, where from 1453 until his death he practised as a physician and held the chair of natural philosophy. He was a man of many interests, a collector of coins and medals, owner of a library of over 500 manuscripts, author of a lost treatise on Roman triumphs and warfare, and compiler – or at least responsible for the compilation – of four collections of inscriptions and antiquities. In his will he bequeathed his bound books to the monastery of S. Giovanni in Verdara in Padua, with instructions that the monks were to choose what they wanted for their library and to sell the others at the inventory prices to ‘Paduan doctors and scholars’.

In September 1464 Marcanova joined Mantegna, Samuele da Tradate, a Mantuan official, and Felice Feliciano in an expedition round the southern shores of Lake Garda ostensibly to search for Roman antiquities. The last-named wrote a lively account of the journey appropriately titled Juliatio. Samuele da Tradate was proclaimed ‘emperor’, Mantegna and Marcanova ‘consuls’. In a boat wreathed in laurel – while the ‘emperor’, wearing a crown of myrtle, periwinkle and ivy, played the lute – they cruised exuberantly about the lake, landing to inspect ancient monuments and finally disembarking at Sirmione to give thanks in the church of S. Pietro to the ‘Supreme Thunderer’.

Felice Feliciano was a remarkable figure even in an age when versatility was commonplace: ‘a born eccentric, a Renaissance vagabond…a printer and draughtsman, familiar of artists, dabbler in alchemy, a cleric in minor orders possibly with heretical Joachimite leanings…a voluminous letter-writer’, a vernacular poet and novelist. He

10 Léon Dorez, ‘La bibliothèque de Giovanni Marcanova’, in Mélanges G. B. de Rossi, Supplément aux Mélanges d’archéologie et d’histoire, xii, 1892, 113–26; Sighinolfi, 187–222; P. Sambin, ‘La formazione quattrocentesca della biblioteca di S. Giovanni di Verdura in Padova’, Atti dell’Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti, cxxiv, 1936, 266–7. Sighinolfi argued that Marcanova was a native of Padua, the term Veneto applied to him referring to the state, not the city.
11 Printed in Kristeller, Mantegna, 472–3; English translation in Mardersteig, Alphabenum, 20–2.
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was born in Verona in 1433 and apparently trained as a professional scribe. At an early age
classical antiquity became an all-absorbing interest. 'When I had grown out of youth and
could lead a freer life,' he later explained, 'I turned my gaze upon the venerable ancient
relics of our forefathers.' A contemporary described him as having 'spent most of his days
in searching out the noble relics of Rome, Ravenna and all Italy' and wrote of 'his passion
to investigate and imitate ancient script, whether he found it in old manuscripts or on
antique stones'.

In Ciriaco of Ancona, whom he may never have known, Feliciano recognised the ideal
guide and master. He took a lively interest in his life and travels, assembled, added to and
transmitted his epigraphic collections – he seems to have owned some of the older man's
autograph material – and copied Francesco Scalamonti's Vita Kiriaci for Samuele da
Tradate in a volume that also contains the Jubilatio. His friendship with Mantegna, who
had worked in Verona on an altar-piece for S. Zeno, and to whom he dedicated one of
his own sylogai of inscriptions, provided the link with the Paduan antiquaries. From 1469
he signed himself 'Felicianus Antiquarius', implying that he was both 'learned in the
antique world and fascinated by antique objects and images'.

Until he was over thirty Feliciano appears to have stayed in Verona. His first dated
manuscript was copied in 1458.14 In the 1460s he applied to Mantegna for an introduction
to Cardinal Francesco Gonzaga, apparently without result; but it was perhaps through the
Paduan artist's good offices that in 1464 he was engaged as a scribe by Giovanni
Marcanova. For over a year he lived in Bologna, probably lodging in his employer's
house, and occupied in copying a wide range of texts. The association seems to have ended
in the late autumn of 1465. Feliciano, who had been in Florence at the end of June, was
in Verona the following year to make a will disposing of his few books, a collection of
antique coins and a portfolio of drawings.

From about 1470 to 1473 he was again in Bologna. Part of the next two years may have
been spent in the service of Filasio Roverella, papal legate in Perugia, though in the late
summer of 1474 he was at Poiano, near Verona, staying in the villa of his friends Gregorio
and Francesca Lavagnola, and composing a novel, Justa Victoria. The year 1475 witnessed
two new enterprises: a visit to Germany, though he may have travelled no further than
Trent, where the Bishop, Johann Hinderbach, was his latest patron; and the printing of
five books in Ferrara in partnership with Severino da Ferrara. In 1476 he established his
own press at Poiano, but completed only a single book, Petrarch's Libro degli uomini famosi.
By January 1478 he was in Rome. The last that is heard of him is in letters of August 1479
written from woods outside the city, where he had fled to escape the plague. He is
presumed to have died during the following autumn or winter.

Feliciano wrote an idiosyncratic script based on Ciriaco's, with some strange letter
forms. He illustrated his manuscripts with brilliantly coloured drawings in a naïve style
which is far removed from those of his friends Mantegna, Giovanni Bellini and Marco
Zoppo, and with intricate knotwork ornament which recalls Islamic art but was probably
inspired by romanesque models. He was also a bookbinder, like many medieval and

13 Mitchell, Librito, 7.
14 He also contributed to a manuscript of Giammario Filelfo's of the same year: Mardersteig, 'Tre epigrammi', 382. I agree
with Mardersteig and Mitchell in considering the date 'mcccxxxvi' in Verona, Bibl. Civica, cod. 3845, to be a mistake; see
Appendix 2.
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Renaissance scribes. (It was related, for instance, of St Osmund, Bishop of Salisbury and leader of its scriptorium and possibly a nephew of the Conqueror, that he was not too proud to copy and bind books himself.) The Lombard humanist Francesco Filelfo’s son, Giammario, addressed some verses to Feliciano which the recipient transcribed into a splendidly decorated manuscript to be lent only to his closest and dearest friends. They contain the following tribute:

The pen’s yellow lines yield up to you the faded writing of the ancients. No one traces the effigies of earlier times and the coins of antiquity more intelligently than you. If you take in hand manuscripts to be bound, your ability excels that of Daedalus himself. The lines celebrate Feliciano’s varied talents, his ingenuity in deciphering ancient manuscripts, his success in discovering antique portraits and coins, and his accomplishment as a bookbinder. When he bound a book, Filelfo declares, not even Daedalus could match his skill.

Feliciano’s bindings will be considered later. One other member of the group was of equal importance in the evolution of the humanistic binding. Bartolomeo Sanvito, rescued from oblivion less than forty years ago, has been recognised as a major figure of the Paduan antiquarian circle and as one of the most gifted and prolific calligraphers of the Renaissance. He was born in 1435 into a family of minor nobility established in Padua since the thirteenth century. Like his near-contemporary Feliciano, he followed the career of a scribe, but with greater success, as his beautiful script and no doubt more amenable temperament ensured that he never lacked employment. As a young man in Padua he copied five texts by classical authors for the Venetian patrician, Marcantonio Morosini. Other work of this period includes a Petrarch, now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, illustrated by Franco dei Russi and a second, anonymous, artist of great merit, and a copy, intended for Cardinal Ludovico Scarampi, of Bernardo Bembo’s congratulatory oration on behalf of Padua University to Cristoforo Moro on his election as Doge of Venice in 1462, also illuminated by dei Russi. Bembo was two years older than Sanvito; Sanvito copied other manuscripts for the future Vice-Doge and the latter chose the scribe as godfather to a natural son, born about 1458 and christened Bartolomeo.

Sanvito seems to have paid a first visit to Rome in 1464, one of many inhabitants of the Veneto attracted there by the election of the Venetian Pietro Barbo to the papacy as Paul II. Two years later he was back in Padua, signing a legal document as joint-witness with Francesco Squarcione. In about 1469 he returned to Rome as a member of Cardinal Francesco Gonzaga’s household, a post he may well have secured through Mantegna’s...
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recommendation. The cardinal died in 1483, but Sanvito remained in the papal capital, subsequently being appointed apostolic chamberlain and Comptroller of the Household to Sixtus IV’s nephew, Cardinal Raffaello Riario. During this period he transcribed manuscripts for several rich, powerful and discriminating patrons besides his two employers: Sixtus IV, Matthias Corvinus, King of Hungary, Giuliano de’ Medici, Ippolita Sforza, wife of Alfonso, Duke of Calabria, Cardinal Giovanni of Aragon and Ludovico Agnelli of Mantua, Archbishop of Cosenza. By the time he returned to the north, in the early years of the new century, as canon first of SS. Nazario e Celso in Brescia and later of the Collegiate Church of Monselice in the Euganean Hills, he is revealed by entries in his lost Memoriale, or memorandum book, as ‘a cultivated amateur … a man of property who has filled his cabinet with fine things – jewels; cameos; gold and silversmith’s work; coins and medals; stuffs and pottery’.10 He was still alive in June 1511 but died not long afterwards.20

Sanvito had many talents besides those of a scribe. He was a draftsman and illuminator, a scholar, antiquarian and epigraphist. The beauty of his clear and exquisite italic script has never been surpassed. His multi-coloured inscriptional capitals were so much admired that he was invited to add them to manuscripts copied by other scribes. Most of his manuscripts were illuminated by one or other of two hands. The first was that of a classicizing artist of the Paduan School whose most ambitious work was a Homer, now in the Vatican Library; it was copied for Cardinal Francesco Gonzaga – the Greek text by Joannes Rhosos, the Latin translation by Sanvito. He appears to have moved from Padua to Rome at much the same time as the scribe, and according to the most recent opinion is to be identified with a Gaspare da Padova who belonged to the cardinal’s household. He may have been identical with the Gaspare Romano of whom Pietro Summonte wrote that he ‘andava al garbo antico’.21 The second artist was probably Sanvito himself. In his seventies he presented two service-books copied by himself and illuminated in the same style as many of his other manuscripts to the Church of Monselice. The costs incurred were recorded in the Memoriale, but no payment was noted to an artist and in the colophon Sanvito declared that the books had been written and decorated by his own hand and at his own expense. The phrase could mean that he had paid for the illumination, but the more natural interpretation is that he was both scribe and artist.22

Twenty-one manuscripts copied by Sanvito and illuminated by ‘Gaspare da Padova’ are known.23 The humanistic scribe was clearly the senior partner in this collaboration, frequently making an entirely novel choice of subject to be depicted. His own numismatic collection and a notebook containing obverse and reverse of imperial coins were probably drawn on for the emperor portraits in two copies of Suetonius.24 Prints which he owned of Trajan’s Column perhaps inspired the representation of both sides of the monument to

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10. Wardrop, 27.
24. De Kunert, 9, 10 (the notebook is described as ‘el quinerno dove sono designate le teste et riversi de le medaglie de li imperatori’). For the manuscripts, see Alexander, Illuminations, 64-7; pl. 13-14; Wardrop, 53; Avril, 166.
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frame the opening of the British Library Eusebius transcribed for Bernardo Bembo.25 At the foot of the page a putto has disguised himself in a Silenus mask to frighten two other infants, a motif almost certainly taken from a Roman sarcophagus and later repeated in a lost drawing by Mantegna.26 Byzantine illumination provided the model for the borders in the Greek portion of Cardinal Gonzaga’s Homer.27 These decorative elements, introduced in all likelihood as a result of Sanvito’s own antiquarian researches, were combined with the altars, stelae and triumphal arches of the Paduan tradition to create a pervasive impression of idealised antiquity.

Sanvito was closely associated with another student of antiquity, the architect, classical scholar and epigraphist, Fra Giovanni Giocondo of Verona (1435–1515). Fra Giocondo’s methods, at least in intention, were much closer to those of modern scholarship than the romantic enthusiasm of Ciriaco and Feliciano. He arranged his epigraphic collections in systematic topographical order and distinguished between inscriptions he had seen himself and those taken over from other sources.28 Most of the surviving manuscripts of the three recensions of his sylloge are in Sanvito’s hand. The latter’s contribution, however, was not simply that of a copyist. The author’s working manuscripts were kept in his charge; he completed and published the second recension during Fra Giocondo’s absence abroad, and collaborated actively in collecting material for the third.29

No investigation has yet been made of Sanvito’s exemplars. Probably, in the fashion of the time, he copied his manuscripts from printed editions. The choice of text was of course to some extent dependent on his patrons; nevertheless the high proportion of classical authors must reflect a personal taste. He produced five copies of Cicero’s De officiis, three of Eusebius’s Chronicle, two each of Caesar, Horace and Petrarch, but only three Books of Hours, and, apart from the Gospels and Epistles presented to Monselice, no more than one other service-book, a lectionary which later belonged to Cardinal Pietro Bembo.30

Much remains to be discovered about Sanvito, but as our knowledge grows he emerges increasingly as an impressive figure, a scholar and a gifted and original scribe, artist and artistic director, who devoted his talents to communicating his vision of a revived antiquity to a small but influential group of collectors and connoisseurs.

One of the features of the new style introduced by the Paduan humanists was a form of capital letter imitated from Roman inscriptive lettering and drawn or painted as if in relief (fig. 3). The inventor of these faceted capitals is uncertain. Their design in a manuscript of 1458–9 has been attributed to Mantegna.31 Feliciano however, who left a complete alphabet of them dating from c. 1459–60, has been claimed as ‘the first to make a thorough study of [the] shapes [of Roman capital letters] by going back to the principles of geometrical construction’.

In the same manuscript Feliciano gave recipes for dyeing paper purple or black.32 The

25 De Kunert, 6; Kren–Evans–Backhouse, 104, fig. 13b.
27 Information from a lecture by Professor Robert S. Nelson at the Warburg Institute on 30 Nov. 1983.
28 Mitchel, Libri, 9–10.
29 See below, pp. 81–2.
30 These statistics (taken from Alexander–de la Mare, 108–9, and de la Mare, ‘Florentine scribes’, 285–8) are incomplete as they do not include many manuscripts discovered by Buysschaert and de la Mare which have not yet been published. Compare the six Books of Hours, two Psalters and possibly one Breviary copied by Antonio Sinibaldi, one of the best professional scribes among Sanvito’s contemporaries, in a known output of comparable size: de la Mare, ‘New research’, 460, 484–7.
31 Meiss, 52–3.
32 Mardersteig, Alphabetum, 13, 39 (for the dating).
33 Ibid., 131–2. The work used is paranasso, which I take to mean purple. Mardersteig translated it ‘peacock-blue’. 

7
Paduan circle was fond of tinted parchment as a background for miniatures or inscriptions in gold and silver. It is found in two manuscripts of about 1460: a Basino, *Astronomicon*, with the arms of John Tiptoft, Earl of Worcester, who was in Padua c. 1459–61; and a Horace copied by Bartolomeo Sanvito for Marcanzio Morosini. The idea no doubt came from the *codices purpurei* of late antiquity, such as the fifth-century Gospels in Verona Cathedral, but leaves were also tinted yellow, and an Islamic manuscript on coloured paper may have been a subsidiary source of inspiration. A pastedown or endleaf of coloured parchment is sometimes found inside early gilt bindings.

Paduan scribes or those influenced by them were fond of placing a title in inscriptive...
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capitals on a classical monument as a frontispiece to the text. Here again the early examples date from around 1460 – Tiptoft’s Basino, an Onosander written for Pasillo Malipiero, Doge of Venice from 1457 to 1462, and three manuscripts in Sanvito’s hand: the Victoria and Albert Petrarca, Bembo’s congratulatory oration to Cristoforo Moro and a Jerome, Lives of Malchus and Paul, in Venice. In the Petrarca the monument takes the form of a niche holding half-length figures of Petrarca and Laura, or of a tablet, in each case surmounted by a curved pediment and standing on a plinth bearing an inscription (fig. 4). On another page the title of the Triomphi is represented as an inscription on the face of a Roman altar.

Feliciano preferred a semi-cylindrical sarcophagus as a frame for the title in his manuscripts (fig. 5). This was not the usual kind of antique sarcophagus, which had a flat or pointed top, but a special type peculiar to Ravenna in the final period of the western empire. (Sabadino degli Arienti named Ravenna as one of the places whose antiquities the Veronese scribe had explored.) Feliciano was so delighted with these monuments that

For these manuscripts, see n. 14 above; Pächt–Alexander, ii, no. 490, pl. xlvii; Alexander, ‘Petrarch’, figs. 1, 2 and 9 and pl. 1; and, on the subject in general, M. Corbett, ‘The architectural title-page’, Motif, xii, 1964, 49–62. The manuscript in Venice is Bibl. Marciana, lat. ii, 39 (Valentinnelli, V, 393).

Alexander, ‘Petrarch’, fig. 3.

E.g., in the Codex Marcianova (Modena, Bibl. Estense, cod. a.L.5.15); Oxford, Bodleian, MS Bywater 37 (Pächt–Alexander, ii, no. 637, pl. lxxii); and Treviso, Bibl. Capitolare, cod. 2, A/1.
