

Foreword

THIS BOOK must stand as a monument to the skills and scholarship of A. C. de la Mare (1932–2001). One of the greatest palaeographers of her age, ‘Tilly’ – as she was universally known to her family and friends – developed a special affinity for and expertise in the humanist scripts of fifteenth-century Italy and it was to these that she devoted much of her scholarly career. It is fitting that what is her last contribution to the field, published eight years after her death, should be a study of Bartolomeo Sanvito, once a totally unknown figure but now recognized as one of the most elegant and prolific of Renaissance scribes.

Whether Sanvito can also be considered a humanist is a matter for debate. He came from a family that although armigerous and so of gentry stock had fallen on hard times following the deaths of his uncle and father. His education must have been limited. Nevertheless he was intelligent, enterprising, hard working – in spite of Alessandro Cortesi’s disparaging remarks¹ – with a keen aesthetic sense, and receptive to the humanistic ethos of his native town. Scott Dickerson’s discovery of a legal document of 1454 written in his italic hand shows that at the age of about nineteen he had already developed the script for which he is famous (the marginal note in the Harleian Virgil, Cat. no. 2, may be even earlier).

From early in his career Sanvito was concerned with making the texts that he copied as correct and authoritative as possible. De la Mare gave several examples.² The King’s Library Virgil (Cat. no. 74) and the Perugia *Tusculanae disputationes* (Cat. no. 106) were collated against ‘ancient’ manuscripts, in the former case possibly the fifth-century Codex Mediceus. He made his own copies of Horace, Eusebius and other texts for use as exemplars, and regularly improved them by comparison with different manuscripts. The Austin Horace (Cat. no. 19), including the marginal and interlinear gloss, was copied from a tenth-century manuscript that had belonged to Petrarch. In this case the choice of exemplar was probably due to Marcantonio Morosini, for whom the copy was made. This is one example of the influence on his scholarly development of his contemporaries in the Paduan *Studio*, primarily Bernardo Bembo, but also perhaps Morosini and Francesco Buzzacarini. Starting with a complete ignorance of Greek, he had learned enough of the language by about 1463 to supply the relevant passages in Latin manuscripts. He was a pioneer in a Paduan innovation in book production, the use for fine bindings of gilt goatskin in place of silk or velvet, and carried the fashion with him to Rome.

His reputation as a humanistic scholar depends chiefly on his collaboration with the architect and antiquary, Fra Giovanni Giocondo, on the latter’s collections of

ancient inscriptions. This record of the physical remains of antiquity was a project closely connected with the interests of the Paduan humanists. Sanvito had been involved from the early 1470s, as his working copy of the first recension shows (Cat. no. 51), and he was a natural choice as the scribe of the dedication manuscript to Lorenzo de' Medici (Cat. no. 92). The second recension added 1009 inscriptions to the 1872 of the first. By the time it was ready, in about 1498, Fra Giocondo was in France and the choice of dedicatee was left to Sanvito. He chose his former colleague and patron, Ludovico Agnelli, by then Archbishop of Cosenza. The third recension added inscriptions from North-East Italy – chiefly Brescia, Verona, Padua and Venice – and for these Sanvito must have been largely responsible after his permanent return to his home town. They included some that had been recently discovered there during the rebuilding of the church of Sta Giustina. But his reputation has suffered from the inclusion of an inscription allegedly found on vases excavated on his own land at Prà, near Padua, since condemned as a forgery.

Sixty years ago Bartolomeo Sanvito was unknown. Since then, as the bibliographies show, he has attracted more scholarly attention than any other fifteenth-century scribe. He was identified by James Wardrop, Librarian of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, a fluent Italian speaker with many friends in the learned world of the peninsula, whose principal interest was in the script of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Italy. He has left a description of his discovery, published posthumously.³

In 1947, with Professor Augusto Campana of the Vatican Library, he was looking through a collection of facsimiles. Their attention was arrested by a group in cursive script of the first order, all unsigned. They included the Vatican Homer with the arms of Cardinal Francesco Gonzaga (Cat. no. 72), while among those in British libraries known to Wardrop were the Duke of Wellington's Suetonius with the arms of Ludovico Agnelli (Cat. no. 70) and the Royal Eusebius copied for Bernardo Bembo (Cat. no. 87). 'It was clear', Wardrop wrote, 'that our independent observation was converging on a numerous and important group of manuscripts ... all executed ... for patrons of the most exalted rank, and associated invariably with illuminators of the highest skill.'

Later, Wardrop was examining the manuscripts in Eton College Library and came across the Cicero, *De officiis* (Cat. no. 102), written by the same hand, signed with the initials 'B.S.' and dated Rome, 1497. His discovery of an article in *Rivista d'arte*, 1930, by Silvio de Kunert about the two Monselice manuscripts presented to the Collegiate Church of Santa Giustina by Bartolomeo Sanvito (Cat. no. 121), solved the riddle. The same article led him to an earlier one quoting extensively from Sanvito's 'Memoriale', a source of unparalleled interest for the insight it gives into the life of a late medieval scribe.

I first met Albinia de la Mare in 1966. Major J. R. Abbey, a book collector on a grand scale, had already commissioned catalogues of his English bindings (1940), of some of his French and Italian bindings (1953), and of his collection of colour-plate books (4 volumes, 1952–7). I suggested to him that he should invite J. J. G. Alexander, of the Bodleian Library, to compile a catalogue of his Italian manuscripts. The Association internationale de Bibliophilie was a very new society, founded three years earlier by Julien Cain with headquarters in Paris. In 1966 it held its one-day annual general

meeting in Oxford, and I took the opportunity to introduce collector and potential cataloguer to each other. The proposal was referred to Dr Richard Hunt, Keeper of Western Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library, who insisted that de la Mare, an Assistant in his Department, should be the joint author with Alexander. *The Italian Manuscripts in the library of Major J.R. Abbey* was published in 1969, and since Abbey owned a Petrarch copied by Sanvito (Cat. no. 101), it included an account of the two artists who decorated most of his manuscripts, now identified as Gaspare da Padova and Sanvito himself.

After the Abbey catalogue had appeared I looked for ways of publishing the results of de la Mare's conspicuous skill in recognizing the writing of individual scribes and scholars. The Association internationale de Bibliophilie agreed to sponsor a series on Renaissance script, and 'The Handwriting of Italian Humanists' was founded to administer the project, with Dr Hunt, Sir Roger Mynors and myself as Trustees.⁴ The original intention was to publish an annual fascicule devoted to a single scribe, but de la Mare produced a substantial volume describing the writing of eight humanists – five well known: Petrarch, Boccaccio, Coluccio Salutati, Niccolò Niccoli and Poggio Bracciolini, and three less famous: Bartolomeo Aragazzi, Sozomeno of Pistoia, and Giorgio Antonio Vespucci. This was published in 1973 with the help of grants from the Association internationale de Bibliophilie, the Renaissance Society of America, and several individuals, including a generous gift from the late Otto Schäfer. Unfortunately through a hangover from the original plan the book was mistakenly titled 'Volume I Fascicule I'.

After this distinguished start the project languished. De la Mare was preoccupied with other scholarly interests and her appointment in 1989 as Professor of Palaeography at King's College, London, absorbed all her time. Her interest in Sanvito, dating from the 1960s, did not however weaken and in the early 1990s, she accepted my suggestion that Volume II should be devoted to him. Ellen Cooper Erdreich, who had completed her Ph.D. at John Hopkins University on an illuminated Petrarch in Baltimore (Cat. no. 88), and Scott Dickerson, who had already begun his exploration of the Archivio di Stato in Padua, were enrolled as collaborators. In 1995, accompanied by Erdreich and with Laura Nuvoloni as driver and organiser, she carried out an intensive study of his manuscripts in seven Italian towns. Further visits were made to libraries elsewhere in Italy, in England, Switzerland and the U.S.A. Wardrop had known forty of Sanvito's manuscripts. By the time of her cruelly early death de la Mare knew 116. Except for a few written in the 1490s and the two Monselice manuscripts (Cat. no. 121) none is dated, but by a close analysis of the script and other features she succeeded in establishing their chronological order and in dating each manuscript within a narrow margin.⁵

Her contribution to the exhibition 'La Miniatura a Padova' in 1999 gave a full account of Sanvito's scribal career. It is reprinted here in English translation. She left copious notes on Sanvito and numerous slides, but nothing in a form ready for publication. The Trustees have been fortunate in securing the services of Laura Nuvoloni as co-author to put her notes into publishable form and to add to them as required from her own expert knowledge. The Editors wish to express their thanks to Dr Martin Kaufmann and the Bodleian Library for allowing de la Mare's notes to be deposited in

FOREWORD

the British Library for Dott Nuvoloni's use, to Dr C. J. Wright and Dr Scot McKendrick, successive Keepers of Western Manuscripts in the British Library, for giving Dott Nuvoloni leave from her duties in the Department in order to carry out this work and for much other help, to the President and Council of the Association internationale de Bibliophilie for a generous grant that has made this publication possible, to the librarians and private owners who have allowed their manuscripts to be reproduced, to Dr C. J. Wright for reading the text and proofs, and suggesting many improvements, to Signor Arturo Pregliasco for assistance with illustrations in Italian libraries and to Mr Bernard M. Rosenthal for help with illustrations in the U.S.A. and for a generous gift towards the cost of publication, and to Mrs Helen Tyson for her valuable work in inserting corrections and calling attention to inconsistencies, and to the many scholars who have answered enquiries and provided information.

'Tilly' de la Mare was not only a distinguished scholar; she was a greatly loved personality, always most generous with her knowledge in helping other enquirers. This book is published by her friends in her memory.

ANTHONY HOBSON