

ARISTOTLE, translated from the Greek into Latin by ROBERT GROSSETESTE, *Ethica Nicomachea* [Latin translation of *Ἠθικὰ Νικομάχεια*]

In Latin, decorated manuscript on paper

Northern Italy, Emilia-Romagna?, c. 1425-1450

iv (paper) + 72 + iv (paper) folios on paper (with watermarks similar to Briquet no. 15808, *Tête de licorne*: Emilia-Romagna, 1422-1428, Mantua, 1422; Briquet no. 2668, Basilic: Ferrara, 1449; and Briquet no. 2680, Basilic: Emilia-Romagna, 1448), modern foliation in pencil, upper outer rectos, 1-61, with unfoliated leaf between ff. 31 and 32, complete (collation i-vi<sup>12</sup>), horizontal catchwords, lower center margins of versos, ruled faintly in crayon with full-length vertical bounding lines (justification 195-196 x 113-115 mm.), written in a graceful gothico-antiqua hand on thirty-three long lines, rubrics in red, capitals highlighted in red and sometimes decorated with human faces (f. 17), some capitals set off to the left of the text, running headers on the rectos indicating the book numbers in red or blue or both, with contrasting red and pale brown pen decoration, one-line red paraphs, two-line initials in red or blue with contrasting pen decoration in pale brown or red (some incorrect), nine six- to eight-line initials in red or blue with contrasting pen decoration in pale brown or red (ff. 6v, 10v, 17, 23v, 30v, 34, 41v, 48, 54), ten-line parted initial in red and blue with contrasting pale brown pen decoration (f. 1), corrections in at least one contemporary hand, annotations in a contemporary hand, slight waterstaining and smudging in the margins of some pages, slight tears along the lower margin of ff. 58-61, otherwise in excellent condition. Bound in modern brown half-goatskin on wooden boards, spine with four raised bands. Dimensions 283 x 209 mm.

A complete and well-preserved witness to Robert Grosseteste's translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, this lovely manuscript presents a text that exerted a profound influence on medieval philosophy. This is a previously unrecorded copy of the original, and less common, version (known in only thirty-three other manuscripts) of a translation by one of the great intellectuals of the thirteenth century. Written in a very elegant gothico-antiqua script and bound with manuscript fragments quoting the work of several classical authors, this was perhaps a treasured volume in the library of an Italian humanist.

## PROVENANCE

1. Evidence of script, watermarks, and decoration all suggest that this manuscript was produced in Northern Italy, perhaps the region of Emilia-Romagna, during the second quarter of the fifteenth century, c. 1425-1450. The pen decorations of the larger initials bear a particular resemblance to those found in London, British Library, Arundel MS 473, a humanist manuscript produced in Padua in 1425.
2. The fourth flyleaves at both the front and back of the volume are fragments from another paper manuscript, datable to the fifteenth century and bearing lists of Latin phrases (quotations, perhaps, or an index?) in multiple columns. We have not been able to identify most of these, but those we have identified share an origin in classical antiquity (including, for example, lines from the works of Terence and Plautus).
3. Traces of later writing are barely visible on several of the blank pages at the back of the volume. They were effaced and are almost entirely illegible, but at least one of these pages appears to have been written in Italian.

## TEXT

ff. 1-61, *Aristotilis Ethicorum liber primus feliciter incipit*, incipit, "OMnis doctrina et omnis ars similiter autem et electio et actus bonum quoddam appetere uidentur ... Consideratis igitur his forte utique magis conspiciemus et qualis policia optima et qualiter unaqueque ordinata et quibus legibus et consuetudinibus utens. Dicamus igitur incipientes. Deo Gratias Amen;" [ff. 61v-72v, blank but ruled].

A complete copy of Robert Grosseteste's Latin translation of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, thought to have been completed around 1246-1247 and known in the Middle Ages as the *Liber ethicorum*. This text was subject to multiple revisions and there are paired modern critical editions of Grosseteste's original translation and of a subsequent revision attributed to William of Moerbeke (see Gauthier, 1972-1974, vols. 3 and 4). Together, these two very closely related Latin versions achieved notable popularity in the Middle Ages; Dod indicates the survival of thirty-three manuscript copies of the original translation and 246 copies of Moerbeke's revision (1982, p. 77; for a complete list of these manuscripts, see Gauthier, 1972-1974, vol. 1, pp. CLII-CLXVIII) and nine editions of this text were printed before 1500 (see Gauthier, 1972-1974, vol. 1, pp. CLXIX-CLXX). In spite of the text's wide circulation and immense popularity, few copies appear now on the market; the Schoenberg Database lists only eight copies of Latin translations that may have been Grosseteste's for sale in the last century.

Not only does our manuscript present the complete text of this important translation of the *Ethics*, but it appears to preserve a copy of Grosseteste's original translation, a copy that has gone unremarked in scholarship until now. This original version, rather than the far more prevalent revision attributed to Moerbeke, most closely matches both the wording and the placement of chapter divisions in the present manuscript. This manuscript certainly warrants further study alongside Gauthier's edition (as well as the other thirty-three copies) of Grosseteste's original translation; such study may yield valuable insights into the transmission of this version of the *Ethics* in the centuries after Grosseteste produced it.

Taken together, Grosseteste's translation and Moerbeke's revisions supplied the version of the *Nicomachean Ethics* that would be standard for the rest of the Middle Ages. Originally composed in Greek by Aristotle (384-322 BC), the *Nicomachean Ethics* is the Greek philosopher's best-known work on ethics. Over its ten books, the treatise addresses in practical terms how individuals should best live. Aristotle moves from a discussion of happiness to defining and discussing the moral virtues which make happiness possible. This material proved ripe for synthesis with Christian theology during the Middle Ages, inspiring such thinkers as Thomas Aquinas, and it was quite central to medieval philosophy.

As the originator of the translation that was standard during the Middle Ages, Grosseteste was arguably the thinker who most influenced medieval reception of this Aristotelian text. There had been an earlier, partial Latin translation of three of the ten books of the *Ethics* that often circulated with Aristotle's works on logic, and there is evidence that this earlier translation was part of the curriculum at the University of Paris in the early thirteenth century. That said, Grosseteste produced his translation at a time when Aristotle was becoming increasingly important to the academic world of the medieval west, as attested by the existence of far more manuscripts surviving from this period, as well as an increase in the production of Aristotelian

commentaries. Grosseteste's *Liber ethicorum* often circulated alone, as it does here, though from the late thirteenth century onward it can also be found in manuscripts alongside Aristotle's other 'ethical' treatises, namely his *Politics*, *Rhetoric*, *Oeconomica*, and *Magna moralia*.

First Chancellor of Oxford University and bishop of Lincoln (from 1235 to 1253), Robert of Grosseteste (1175-1253) was an incredibly significant figure in the fields of politics, science, philosophy, and theology, as well as an important translator of works of Aristotle and others. It is generally supposed that he began learning Greek late in life, perhaps during his episcopate, during which he was in a position to work with several Greek-speaking assistants and to obtain Greek manuscripts. His *Liber ethicorum* is his most important Aristotelian translation – though by no means his only one – and he also wrote glosses on a number of Aristotelian texts, including the *Ethics*. A very literal translator from his Greek source texts, Grosseteste went to some lengths to clarify passages in which his Latin was unavoidably ambiguous, adding explanatory notes for his readers.

## LITERATURE

Dod, Bernard G. "Aristoteles Latinus," in *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy from the Rediscovery of Aristotle to the Disintegration of Scholasticism, 1100-1600*, ed. Norman Kretzmann, Anthony Kenny, and Jan Pinborg, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1982, pp. 45-79.

Gauthier, Renatus Antonius, ed. *Ethica Nicomachea: Translatio Roberti Grosseteste Lincolniensis sive 'Liber Ethicorum'*, Aristoteles Latinus, 26: 1-3, 5 vols., Leiden, Brill, 1972-1974.

Thomson, S. Harrison. *The Writings of Robert Grosseteste, Bishop of Lincoln, 1235-1253*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1940.

## ONLINE RESOURCES

Lewis, Neil. "Robert Grosseteste," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2013

<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/grosseteste/>

Urquhart, Francis. "Robert Grosseteste," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 7, New York, 1910

<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07037a.htm>

TM 888