

## POGGIO AND OTHER BOOK HUNTERS

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**ABSTRACT:** Seeking out rare and precious texts, or book hunting, was a favorite pursuit of the Renaissance humanists, but the activity had been practiced with enthusiasm (and often guile) since antiquity. This paper discusses the phenomenon over time, looking at representative book hunters from Aulus Gellius (second century CE) to Poggio Bracciolini (1380-1459), who was probably the most famous book hunter of them all. I will consider the discoveries of Catullus, Cicero's *Letters to Atticus*, and Apuleius as well as several of the most famous finds of Poggio himself, emphasizing in each case the circumstances and method of discovery, the importance of the find, and the fate of the discovered book. The paper will close with a brief epilogue on some modern book hunters.

**KEYWORDS:** book hunting, libraries, Phyllis Gordan, Dante, Boccaccio, Niccoló Niccoli, Cicero, Catullus, Apuleius, Quintilian, Lucretius

Book hunting – by which I mean seeking out rare and precious texts, usually belonging to someone else – is an ancient if not always honorable activity; and it has been enthusiastically practiced since at least the time of the Alexandrian library<sup>1</sup>. Then, as the story goes, the Ptolemies stopped every arriving ship, confiscated its books and replaced them with copies. They borrowed the precious official texts of the tragedians from Athens, paying a huge deposit of fifteen talents. But instead of returning the books themselves, they gave back elegant and beautiful copies, forfeiting their deposit and thereby paying the largest library fine in history. The Romans were equally unscrupulous, bringing home whole libraries as war booty from Greece. But book acquisition in antiquity was not always so reprehensible, and we have a few cases where it was carried out by individuals and on a more modest scale.

One of the best examples is found in a story told by the second-century C.E. Roman polymath, Aulus Gellius. Gellius, it seems, had returned from Greece and was strolling around the port at Brundisium when he saw some books for sale, the book rolls tied together like bunches of sticks.

And I eagerly rushed over to them at once. They were all Greek books, full of amazing tales – unheard of things, unbelievable, and the writers were ancient and of no small authority: Aristaeus of Proconnesus, Isigonus of Nicaea, Ctesias and Onesicritus, Philostephanus and Hegesias. But the book rolls themselves were filthy from long neglect. They were in

<sup>1</sup> Galen, *Commentary on Hippocrates' Epidemics*, XVII (1), pp. 606–07, in *Corpus medicorum Graecorum* (1936) 10.2.1: 79. See also Fraser, 1972: 1.325.

terrible condition and looked dreadful. I went up and asked the price. Attracted by the amazingly and unexpectedly small amount, I bought a large quantity of books for almost nothing, and quickly went through all of them in the next two nights<sup>2</sup>.

Unfortunately, however, Gellius's treasures turned out to be a disappointment, or so he claims. After summarizing their far-fetched and incredible lore in suspiciously enthusiastic detail, he says that he was seized by disgust at such worthless stuff, of no benefit to the «enrichment or profit of life»<sup>3</sup>.

Gellius's story includes several details that we will see again in the narratives and experiences of later manuscript hunters: the serendipitous discovery, the dilapidation of the books, the excitement of the discoverer, and – sometimes, at least – the disappointing nature of the recovered book. The sequel of the story includes another recurring detail: the loss of the discovered text. Of the authors Gellius found on that second-century bookstall and described as «ancient and of no small authority» only fragments survive today. Their works are known only from Gellius's account and brief quotations in other ancient sources.

In spite of these similarities, however, Renaissance book hunting was a different activity from its ancient counterpart. It was not state sponsored confiscation or acquisition of whole libraries by conquest, and it was only rarely a chance purchase by a lucky traveler; rather, it was a deliberate and focused pursuit carried out by learned individuals (whom we call humanists) or small groups of them, who hoped to add to their store of ancient texts. Poggio Bracciolini (1380-1459), of course, is the most famous book hunter, but there were many others. In what follows, I will look at several of these humanists and their finds, as well as at Poggio himself, considering in each case the circumstances and method of discovery, the importance of the find, and the fate of the discovered book. I will close with an epilogue on some modern book hunters.

My first example is the anonymous discovery of Catullus. This is one of the most important finds of all, for this great poet seems to have survived the Middle Ages in a single manuscript<sup>4</sup>. He was undoubtedly read in late antiquity because his work made the transition from roll

<sup>2</sup> «Atque ego avide statim pergo ad libros. Erant autem isti omnes libri Graeci miculorum fabularumque pleni, res inauditae, incredulae, scriptores veteres non parvae auctoritatis: Aristaeus Proconnesius et Isigonus Nicaeensis et Ctesias et Onesicritus et Philostephanus et Hegesias; ipsa autem volumina ex diutino situ squalebant et habitu aspectuque taetro erant. Accessi tamen percontatusque pretium sum et, adductus mira atque insperata vilitate, libros plurimos aere paucio emo eosque omnis duabus proximis noctibus cursim transeo», Gellius 9.4.2-5.

<sup>3</sup> «Tenuit nos non idoneae scripturae taedium, nihil ad ornandum iuvandumque usum vitae pertinentis», Gellius 9.4.12.

<sup>4</sup> See, both with earlier bibliography: Gaisser, 1993: 1-23; and Butrica, 2007.

(probably several rolls) to codex in the fourth century or so, but the last person whom we can definitely name as a reader is Apuleius in the second century. Catullus certainly had readers after that, but no one has any idea how he made his way to the Renaissance. He finally came to light again around 1300, but the newly discovered manuscript, like the book rolls of Gellius's authors, is lost. It probably disappeared soon after its discovery, but fortunately not before it was copied at least once. No one knows who discovered it, or where. Our only evidence is a contemporary epigram by Benvenuto Campesani (d. 1323), which is preserved in two of the lost manuscript's earliest descendants<sup>5</sup>. Benvenuto's epigram commemorates the discovery and identifies the discoverer, but in the form of a riddle that no one yet has managed to solve<sup>6</sup>. Here it is as it appears in the manuscript called G, dated 1375. (The speaker is supposed to be Catullus).

The Verses of Benvenuto Campesani of Vicenza  
on the resurrection of Catullus, the poet of Verona.

An exile, I come to my country from distant lands.  
A fellow-countryman was the cause of my return –  
that is, a man whom France assigned a name from the reeds,  
and one who marks the journey of the passing crowd.  
With all your might celebrate your Catullus,  
whose light had been hidden under a bushel<sup>7</sup>.

The book hunter might have been a notary named Francesco (the phrase «from the reeds», *a calamis*, in the third line can mean «notary», and the reference to a name associated with France could send us to «Francesco»). But only one point is clear: someone from Catullus's home city of Verona discovered the manuscript in «distant lands» and brought it home. But why a riddle in the first place? I speculate (and it is only speculation) that there may have been a good reason to conceal the details of the discovery – which, like many subsequent ones – perhaps was actually theft. If the victim of the putative theft, whether institution or

<sup>5</sup> The epigram appears in R (Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, ms. Ottobonianus Lat. 1829) and G (Paris, Bnf, ms. Lat. 14137). See Gaisser, 1993: 18–19.

<sup>6</sup> For one of the many solutions that have been suggested to the riddle, see Butrica, 2007: 26–28.

<sup>7</sup> Versus domini Benevenuti de Campexanis de Vicencia de resurrectione Catulli poete Veronensis. // Ad patriam venio longis a finibus exul; / causa mei reditus compatriota fuit, / scilicet a calamis tribuit cui Francia nomen / quique notat turbae praetereuntis iter. / quo licet ingenio vestrum celebrate Catullum, / cuius sub modio clausa papirus erat. (Paris, Bnf, ms. Lat. 14137, fol. 1r.)

individual, was sufficiently powerful, it might have been prudent not to identify the perpetrator.

We have three fourteenth-century descendants of the lost manuscript<sup>8</sup>. The next oldest, dated around 1400, was perhaps transcribed by Poggio himself, as Albinia de la Mare and Douglas Thomson once suggested<sup>9</sup>. Subsequent scholars have questioned the attribution, but in any case, this beautiful manuscript is one of the earliest examples of the humanistic script pioneered by Poggio and others<sup>10</sup>.

The person who discovered Catullus will surely remain anonymous, but most Renaissance manuscript hunters are well known. Francesco Petrarca (1304–1374), for example, systematically sought out texts wherever he went and amassed what one scholar has called «the greatest library in Christendom»<sup>11</sup>. In 1345 he discovered the manuscript of Cicero's *Letters to Atticus* in the Chapter Library of Verona and transcribed it himself<sup>12</sup>. It made a huge volume, as he tells a friend in a famous letter. In order to have it always at hand, he propped it against the doorpost of his library, where he tripped over it so often that he badly injured his ankle and developed an infection<sup>13</sup>. (Unfortunately both the offending volume and its original are lost.) Petrarca was not the first modern scholar to study the Verona manuscript, and there were a few other texts of the *Letters to Atticus* north of the Alps, but he was the first to bring the letters to public notice. It was a brilliant discovery, and like Gellius a millennium earlier, he tells of his great eagerness to study his find: «I read most greedily», he says<sup>14</sup>. Like Gellius, however, he was sadly disappointed. For when Petrarca studied the letters, he found that Cicero was not the paragon that he and everyone else had thought he was, but only a frail human being – overambitious, small-minded, and often lacking in moral courage. He even wrote him a letter to tell him so: *Epistulae familiares* 24.3, *Ad Marcum Tullium Ciceronem*, subtitled by one editor, «He criticizes his quarrelsome and inconstant nature»<sup>15</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> O, G, R. For G and R see note 5. O is Oxford, Bodleian Library, ms. Canonici Class. Lat. 30.

<sup>9</sup> Venezia, Biblioteca Marciana, ms. 12.80 (4167). See de la Mare and Thomson, 1973.

<sup>10</sup> A color photograph of the manuscript is shown in the frontispiece of de la Mare, 1973.

<sup>11</sup> «In fine la sua crebbe a biblioteca massima della cristianità» Billanovich, 1994: 35. For a concise account of Petrarca's life and book collecting, see, with further bibliography, de la Mare, 1973: 1–6. Also see Reynolds and Wilson, 1991: 128–32.

<sup>12</sup> See especially Reeve, 2011: 248–51.

<sup>13</sup> Petrarca, *Fam.* 21.10.16–26 (Petrarca, 1933: 4.77–79). For text and English translation see Petrarca, 2017: 2.309–15.

<sup>14</sup> «avidissime perlegi», Petrarca, *Fam.* 24.3 (Petrarca, 1933: 4.225). For text and English translation of the letter, see Petrarca, 2017: 1.435–37.

<sup>15</sup> «Lo riprende della indole sua gareggiosa ed incostante», Petrarca, *Fam.* 24.3 (1892: 5.140).

Petrarca's younger contemporary, Giovanni Boccaccio (1313-1374), was also an avid book hunter and collector. For many years, scholars believed that he removed, or as Richard Tarrant says, «liberated», the unique manuscript of Tacitus *Annales* 11-16 from the Abbey of Monte Cassino (Tarrant, 1983: 407-08), along with the most ancient manuscript of Apuleius' *Golden Ass*. Both manuscripts are still extant, bound in a single volume in the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana in Florence (Laur. Plut. 68.2). But Boccaccio is innocent on both counts. He used both authors, brilliantly, in his own works, and he even transcribed a manuscript of Apuleius himself, carelessly but beautifully<sup>16</sup>. I have argued elsewhere that he can be said to have discovered the *Golden Ass* in the sense that he discovered its literary riches and exploited them in the *Decameron* and other works, but he neither discovered nor removed the ancient manuscript from Monte Cassino; nor did he take the Tacitus (Gaisser, 2008a; Gaisser, 2008b: 93-95). Although he is sometimes still accused of both thefts, he was convincingly exonerated seventy years ago by Cornelia Coulter and fifty years later by Giuseppe Billanovich (Coulter, 1948; Giuseppe Billanovich, 1996).

But Boccaccio did visit Monte Cassino, perhaps in the 1360s, and he described his visit to a younger contemporary, Benvenuto da Imola (d. 1388), who recorded the story in his commentary on Dante<sup>17</sup>. The story provided the basis for the mistaken argument that Boccaccio removed the manuscripts of Tacitus and Apuleius from the monastery, but its real interest lies elsewhere. It describes the condition of the library in the fourteenth century and conveys the eagerness and excitement of Boccaccio the book hunter; and it is perhaps even more important for its context and literary relevance at this place in Benvenuto's commentary<sup>18</sup>.

By Dante's time, Monte Cassino had fallen into physical and moral disarray<sup>19</sup>. Writing around 1320, Dante has the abbey's founder, St. Benedict himself, mourn its present condition and the moral degradation of its monks. In the *Paradiso*, Benedict recalls the ladder crowded with angels that the patriarch Jacob once saw reaching up into highest heaven. He laments:

<sup>16</sup> Firenze, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, ms. Laur. 54.32. The manuscript is described by Casamassima, 1975: 1.152-54 and plate 36; see also de la Mare, 1973: 26-27 and plate 6g. See also Gaisser, 2008b: 108-10.

<sup>17</sup> For Benvenuto see Paoletti, 1966; Uberti, 1980. The date of Boccaccio's visit to Monte Cassino is unknown; for a good account of the possibilities see Coulter, 1948. Modern scholars are inclined to follow Leccisotti, 1968, who dates it to 1362.

<sup>18</sup> Benvenuto da Imola, 1887. The discussion below draws on Gaisser, 2008b: 93-99.

<sup>19</sup> For the condition of the monastery in the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries see Leccisotti, 1974: 71-77.

But no one now would lift his feet from earth  
 to climb that ladder, and my Rule is left  
 to waste the paper it was written on.  
 What once were abbey walls are robbers' dens;  
 What once were cowls are sacks of rotten meal<sup>20</sup>.

Commenting on these verses, Benvenuto remarks that Monte Cassino now «is truly quite deserted and desolate»<sup>21</sup>. He goes on to explain that Dante's Benedict considers his rule a waste of paper «because it takes up space on parchment in vain and unproductively when it is not kept»<sup>22</sup>. Using the idea of wasted paper as his opening, he begins what was to become the famous story of Boccaccio at Monte Cassino: «And for a clearer understanding of this line, I want to report here a thing my venerable teacher Boccaccio of Certaldo told me in jest»<sup>23</sup>.

It seems that Boccaccio had gone to the monastery in hopes of seeing its famous library. When he humbly asked one of the monks to open it for him, he was told roughly that it was already open and directed to a steep staircase – another Jacob's ladder, we might say, recalling the context in Dante. «He climbed up happily», Benvenuto continues:

and found the place of such great treasure without door or key, and as he entered he saw weeds growing through the windows and all the books and tables thick with dust. Marveling, he began to open and turn over one book after another, and he found there many different volumes of ancient and exotic works. From some of them several quaternians had been removed; from others the edges of the pages had been cut away; and thus they were mutilated in many ways. At last, he went away grieving and in tears, regretting that the toil and effort of so many famous intellects had come into the hands of such corrupt and wasteful men. Running into the cloister, he found a monk and asked him why those precious books had been so foully mutilated. He replied that some monks, hoping to make a few *soldi*, would scrape off a quaternian and make cheap psalters to sell to boys, and that they made gospels and breviaries out of the margins to sell to women<sup>24</sup>.

<sup>20</sup> «Ma, per salirla, mo nessun diparte / da terra i piedi, e la regola mia / rimasa è per danno de le carte. / Le mura che solieno esser badia / fatte sono spelonche, e le cocolle / sacca son piene di farina ria», Dante, *Paradiso* 22.73-8 (1995: 484).

<sup>21</sup> «de rei veritate est valde desertus et desolatus», Benvenuto da Imola, 1887: 5.301.

<sup>22</sup> «quia frustra occupat chartas sine fructu cum non servetur», Benvenuto da Imola, 1887: 5.301. The «rule» (*regola*) is the famous rule of St. Benedict that established the Benedictine order.

<sup>23</sup> «Et volo hic ad clariorem intelligentiam huius literae referre illud quod narrabat mihi iocose venerabilis praeceptor meus Boccaccius de Certaldo», Benvenuto da Imola, 1887: 5.301.

<sup>24</sup> «Ille laetus ascendens invenit locum tanti thesauri sine ostio vel clavi, ingressusque vidit herbam natam per fenestras, et libros omnes cum bancis coopertis pulvere alto; et mirabundus coepit aperire et volvere nunc istum librum, nunc illum, invenitque ibi multa et varia volumina antiquorum et peregrinorum librorum; ex quorum aliqui-

Benvenuto ends with a sentence that we are probably to understand as Boccaccio's own conclusion to the story: «Now, O scholar, go break your skull to make books!»<sup>25</sup> The mocking words explain Benvenuto's otherwise mysterious comment at the beginning that Boccaccio told his story «in jest». The anecdote has a bitter irony that would not have been lost on the old Boccaccio as he told it to his friend<sup>26</sup>. Boccaccio, like the ancient authors in the library of Monte Cassino, had spent his life studying and writing books that he hoped would last, and in Monte Cassino he could see what such effort amounted to in the end.

Benvenuto's story of Boccaccio in the library neatly complements the lament of Dante's Benedict, for both passages demonstrate the fragility and vulnerability of the written word. As in the case of Benedict's *Rule*, words can be preserved («on paper», as we would say), but not kept or observed. Like the words of Boccaccio's ancient authors, they can be seen as «not worth the paper they are written on», and so destroyed for the sake of what was supposed to preserve them. But in either case they are effectively lost – «through a waste of paper», in Dante's words – *per danno de le carte*. The story has nothing to do with the removal of manuscripts from Monte Cassino and everything to do with the artistic purposes of Benvenuto da Imola in this section of his *Comentum super Dantem*.

But although Boccaccio did not take the Monte Cassino manuscripts to Florence, someone else did. Most modern scholars agree that the culprit was another serious humanist and book collector named Zanobi da Strada, vice-bishop of Monte Cassino from 1355 to 1357 (Billanovich, 1996). In that period he had full control of the monastery. He could take what he liked, and evidently did.

There is more than one way to get possession of an ancient text. Zanobi clearly abstracted and carried away the manuscripts themselves, and I have speculated that the man who discovered Catullus «in distant lands» might have done the same. But texts could also be transcribed *in situ* or borrowed for copying and later returned, as Petrarca, for example,

bus detracti erant aliqui quaterni, ex aliis recisi margines chartarum, et sic multipliciter deformati: tandem miseratus labores et studia tot inclytissimorum ingeniorum devenisse ad manus perditissimorum hominum, dolens et illacrymans recessit; et occurrens in claustro petivit a monacho obvio quare libri illi pretiosissimi essent ita turpiter detruncati. Qui respondit quod aliqui monachi, volentes lucrari duos vel quinque solidos, radebant unum quaternum et faciebant psalteriolos, quos vendebant pueris; et ita de marginibus faciebant evangelia et brevia, quae vendebant mulieribus», Benvenuto da Imola, 1887: 5.302.

<sup>25</sup> «Nunc, vir studiose, frange tibi caput pro faciendo libros», Benvenuto da Imola, 1887: 5.302.

<sup>26</sup> Boccaccio probably told the story to Benvenuto in 1373–1374, just a year or so before his death. He was lecturing on Dante in Florence in those years, and Benvenuto probably met him then. Cf. Gaisser, 2008b: 96.

did with the manuscript of Cicero's letters. They can even be purchased – openly, as Gellius bought his book rolls in Brundisium, or surreptitiously from venal monks, as sometimes happened in the Renaissance.

Poggio, whom we celebrate in this volume, seems to have employed all these methods, hinting at or describing them openly in letters to his fellow book enthusiasts, especially Niccolò Niccoli (1364–1437)<sup>27</sup>. The correspondence is easily available, of course, in the elegant annotated translation of Phyllis Gordan, whose work and collection have made this symposium possible (1974b). She called her volume *Two Renaissance Book Hunters* – very appropriately, since Poggio's correspondent Niccoli is as important as Poggio himself. Niccoli, a few years older than Poggio, and far richer – at least to start with – never strayed far from his native Florence, but he was at the very center of the book-hunting effort. Poggio kept him informed of his searches and forwarded either copies or originals of most of his finds, which Niccoli copied and shared with other humanists, although he was often very slow to do so. Niccoli also kept in touch with other book hunters, even providing lists of *desiderata* and their possible locations. He amassed a huge number of books himself and bequeathed them as a public library for the use of other scholars. It would be hard to overstate his importance to humanistic activity in Florence and throughout Italy. As Poggio said in his funeral oration for Niccoli: «I can say that essentially all the books recently discovered by both others and myself [...] have been restored to Latin literature by the urging, prompting, encouragement, and veritable badgering of Niccolò»<sup>28</sup>.

Poggio discovered dozens of manuscripts during and after that famous church council in Constance from 1414 to 1418. Space allows me to discuss just two of his discoveries: Quintilian and Lucretius.

First Quintilian<sup>29</sup>. In the summer of 1416, the main business that kept Poggio in Constance was essentially finished, and he set out for the monastery at St. Gall about thirty miles away to look for manuscripts. He was accompanied by two like-minded friends: Cencio Rustici and Bartolomeo Aragazzi<sup>30</sup>. Both Cencio and Poggio wrote accounts of their visit, Cencio to his teacher and Poggio to the well-known humanist

<sup>27</sup> For Poggio see de la Mare, 1973: 62–84; Reynolds and Wilson, 1991: 136–40; Greenblatt, 2011: 14–22. For Niccoli, see especially Ullman and Stadter, 1972; Stadter, 1984; de la Mare, 1973: 44–61; Bianca, 2013.

<sup>28</sup> «... possum dicere, omnes libros fere qui noviter tum ab aliis reperti sunt, tum a meipso [...] Nicolai suasu, impulsu, cohortatione, & pene verborum molestia esse literis latinis restitutos», Bracciolini, 1964: 272.

<sup>29</sup> For the discovery of Quintilian, see Sabbadini, 1914: 383–95; Winterbottom, 1967.

<sup>30</sup> For Cencio, see Bertalot, 1929–1930. For Bartolomeo Aragazzi, see de la Mare, 1973: 62–84.

Guarino Veronese<sup>31</sup>. Interestingly enough, no letter of Poggio's to Niccoli on the discovery survives<sup>32</sup>. As the friends had hoped, they found the monastery full of books, including several treasures, the most important of which was a complete text of the great Roman rhetorician Quintilian, previously known in Italy only in copies from a mutilated tradition that lacked nearly a third of the text. They found Quintilian and the rest, not in the library, but, as Poggio says: «in a sort of foul and gloomy dungeon at the bottom of one of the towers, where not even men convicted of a capital offense would have been stuck away»<sup>33</sup>. The books were kept in conditions very like those Boccaccio described at Monte Cassino sixty years earlier. Here is Cencio (note that he also uses the image of a dungeon):

But when we carefully inspected the tower [...] in which countless books were kept like captives, and the library neglected and infested with dust, worms, soot, and all the things destructive to books, we all burst into tears. [...] In fact, if the library could speak on its own behalf, it would shout aloud, "You men who love the Latin tongue, do not allow me to be utterly destroyed by such neglect; snatch me from this prison, in whose darkness even the great light of books cannot be seen!" There were in that monastery an abbot and monks completely foreign to any knowledge of literature. What barbarity inimical to the Latin tongue! What depraved dregs of humanity!<sup>34</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Poggio's letter is found in Gordan, 1974b: 193-96 (Appendix: Letter III, to Guarino Veronese, 16 December 1416); Bracciolini, 1984: 2.153-56. Cencio's letter may be found in Gordan, 1974b: 187-91 (Appendix: Letter I, to Francesco da Fiano [1416]). For the Latin text of Cencio, see Bertalot, 1929-30: 222-25.

<sup>32</sup> But he certainly wrote to Niccoli. He says in his letter to Guarino (1974: 195) that he had informed both Leonardo Bruni and Niccoli, and Bruni, writing to congratulate him on the discovery of Quintilian, says: «At our friend Nicolaus' house, I read the letter which you wrote about your last trip and your discovery of some books»; Gordan, 1974b: 191 (Appendix: Letter II). It is clear that we do not have all of Poggio's letters to Niccoli; see Gordan, 1974b: 185-86; Bracciolini, 1984: 1.230 (Appendix 5).

<sup>33</sup> Gordan, 1974b: 195 (Appendix: Letter III). Bracciolini, 1984: 2.155: "in teterimo quodam et obscuro carcere, fundo scilicet unius turris, quo ne capitalis quidem rei damnati retruderentur."

<sup>34</sup> Gordan, 1974b: 188-89 (Appendix: Letter I), translation slightly modified. Bertalot, 1929-1930: 223-24: «Sed ubi turrim [...] in qua innumerabiles pene libri utpote captivi detinentur, diligentius vidimus bibliothecamque illam pulvere tineis fuligine ceterisque rebus ad obliterationem librorum pertinentibus obsoletam pollutamque, vehementer collacrimavimus. [...] Hec profecto bibliotheca si pro se ipsa loqueretur, magna voce clamaret: ne sinite, viri lingue latine amantissimi, me per huiusmodi negligentiam funditus deleri; eripite me ab hoc carcere, in cuius tenebris tantum librorum lumen apparere non potest. Erant in monasterio illo abbas monachique ab omni litterarum cognitione alieni. O barbariem latine lingue inimicam, o perditissimam hominum colluvionem».

Poggio pictures the Quintilian manuscript as a human prisoner on the brink of death from mistreatment: «He was sad and dressed in mourning, as people are when doomed to death; his beard was dirty and his hair caked with mud. [...] He seemed to stretch out his hands and beg for the protection of the Roman people»<sup>35</sup>.

It is not clear which of the three actually discovered the manuscript. Cencio does not mention Quintilian, and there seems to be no account from Bartolomeo. But it was Poggio who took the manuscript back to Constance, and he has always had the credit. Phyllis Gordan called Quintilian «probably Poggio's greatest triumph» (Gordan, 1974b: 268n3). The comment may seem surprising to modern readers, especially in view of his discovery of Lucretius, which we will consider presently. But the ancient rhetoricians – writers on both Latin style and the art of persuasion – were of enormous importance to the humanists, for whom the mastery of elegant Latin was both a passion and a means to political and ecclesiastical advancement<sup>36</sup>. The humanists had been eagerly studying Quintilian's work for a long time, frustrated by the great gaps in his text. Now they had it all. We can get an idea of their excitement from our earliest notice of the discovery – a letter from Leonardo Bruni to Poggio dated 13 September 1416. At this point, Poggio seems not to have sent the whole text to Florence, but only a list of chapters – enough to let Bruni see the importance of his discovery. «For Quintilian, who used to be mangled and in pieces, will recover all his parts through you. I have seen the headings of the chapters; he is whole, while we used to have only the middle section and that incomplete. O wondrous treasure! O unexpected joy!»<sup>37</sup>

I noted earlier that one way to get a text was to borrow the manuscript, copy, and return it. That is what seems to have happened in the case of Quintilian. Poggio took it to Constance and transcribed it – in fifty-four days, as he says – and sent his transcription to Florence. His transcription is lost, but one of its many copies preserves the subscription in which he tells of copying the manuscript<sup>38</sup>. We know

<sup>35</sup> Gordan, 1974b: 194-95 (Appendix letter III), translation slightly modified. «Mestus quidem ipse erat ac sordidatus tanquam mortis rei solebant, squalentem barbam gerens, et concretos pulvere crines. [...] Videbatur manus tendere, implorare Quiritum fidem», Bracciolini, 1984: 2.155.

<sup>36</sup> For the pursuit of eloquence as a principal goal of Renaissance humanism, see Baker, 2015.

<sup>37</sup> Gordan, 1974b: 191-92 (Appendix: Letter II); Bruni, 1741: Part 1, 112 (Book 4, Letter 5): «Quintilianus enim prius lacer atque discerptus cuncta membra sua per te recuperabit. Vidi enim capita librorum, totus est, cum vix nobis media pars, et ea ipsa lacera superesset. O lucrum ingens! O insperatum gaudium!»

<sup>38</sup> Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, ms. Urb. Lat. 327. The subscription begins (fol. 235): «Scripsit Poggius Florentinus hunc librum Constantie diebus LIII sede apostolica vacante» Sabbadini, 1914: 384. Poggio's son Jacopo, who later owned the tran-

that he returned Quintilian to St. Gall, for the manuscript he borrowed is still preserved<sup>39</sup>.

Much is known about the discovery of Quintilian and the humanists' immediate response, but almost nothing about the discovery of Lucretius some months later<sup>40</sup>. Again, Poggio's letter to Niccoli does not survive. As far as I have been able to determine, the discovery is first mentioned in July 1417 – almost in passing – in a letter to Poggio from the Venetian humanist Francesco Barbaro in which Lucretius appears without comment in a long list of discoveries that Barbaro attributes jointly to Poggio and Bartolomeo Aragazzi<sup>41</sup>. Barbaro's offhand reference to Lucretius is in sharp contrast to the general excitement over Quintilian some months earlier; Lucretius, unlike Quintilian, was essentially unknown in Italy, and the magnitude of the discovery would take a few years to register<sup>42</sup>. Poggio made his discovery in the winter of 1416–1417, after his trip to St. Gall and well before Barbaro's letter in July. He did not take the manuscript back to Constance, but left it to be copied *in situ*, as we see from a letter he wrote to Barbaro at the end of 1417 or early in 1418. He says that the Lucretius has been transcribed but not yet brought to him, and the place is far enough away that few travelers come from there. If no one comes soon with the manuscript, he will go after it himself<sup>43</sup>. Unfortunately, he does not name the distant monastery: modern scholars suggest either Murbach or Fulda<sup>44</sup>.

Poggio clearly did get his manuscript and send it on to Niccoli. But we hear nothing more from him about Lucretius until April 1425, eight years after his discovery, when he writes to ask Niccoli for the manuscript. He asks for it again and again for several years, sounding successively more irritated<sup>45</sup>. In 1429, for example, he tells Niccoli that he has

scription, commented on its influence (Winterbottom, 1967: 340): «a quo tanquam ex equo troiano omnes Quintiliani qui apud nos sunt manarunt». For Iacopo's letter, see especially Rubinstein, 1958.

<sup>39</sup> Zürich, Zentralbibliothek, ms. C74a. See Winterbottom, 1967: 340–41. A photograph of the manuscript is shown on the website of the Zürich Zentralbibliothek: <<http://www.e-codices.unifr.ch/de/list/one/zbz/C0074a>> (09/2019).

<sup>40</sup> For an imaginative reconstruction see Greenblatt, 2011: 23–50.

<sup>41</sup> Gordan, 1974b: 196–203 (Appendix: Letter IV); Barbaro, 1743: 1–8.

<sup>42</sup> For traces of Lucretius in Italy before the fifteenth century see Reynolds, 1983: 221.

<sup>43</sup> Gordan, 1974b: 210–13 (Appendix: Letter VIII). «Lucretius mihi nondum reditus est, cum sit scriptus: locus est satis longinquus, neque unde aliqui veniant: itaque exspectabo quoad aliqui accedant qui illum deferant: sin autem nulli venient, non praepnam publica privatis», Clark, 1899: 125.

<sup>44</sup> On Murbach as a possibility, see Butterfield, 2016: 50n9; on Fulda, see Greenblatt, 2011: 44–45.

<sup>45</sup> He wrote on 14 April 1425; 12 May 1425; 14 June 1425; 14 September 1426; 13 December 1429; 27 May 1430 (dates from Bracciolini, 1984). Bracciolini, 1984: 1.142, 144, 149, 172, 89, 103; Gordan, 1974b: 88, 89, 92, 110, 154, 160.

now had Lucretius for twelve years, and that he has not yet had a chance to read the poem himself<sup>46</sup>. In 1430 he reminds Niccoli that it has now been fourteen years: «are you going to keep it another ten?»<sup>47</sup>. Poggio finally did get his manuscript back, sometime in the 1430s – no doubt after Niccoli had transcribed it<sup>48</sup>. Poggio's own copy is lost<sup>49</sup>.

Poggio mentions Lucretius in seven of his letters to Niccoli. In six of those letters he pleads for the return of his manuscript, but in the seventh he is interested in something else. Writing in 1427, he discusses a list of books that Niccoli hopes to acquire from Germany. Among them is Lucretius – clearly another Lucretius, not the one that has been sitting in Florence for ten years. He says:

Bartolomeo [...] is making an effort for us to have Lucretius. If he accomplishes it, then we will attempt the rest. For we must not talk about the other books now, lest in seeking many things we provide an opportunity for refusing this one. We must proceed little by little, for they are barbarians and full of suspicion<sup>50</sup>.

In his recent book on the textual history of Lucretius, David Butterfield speculates that Bartolomeo's mission was to go to the German monastery where Poggio had acquired his copy of Lucretius and bring back the original. He suggests that Bartolomeo succeeded and that readings in that manuscript not present in Poggio's found their way into Italian texts of the poet. The manuscript itself, of course, is lost (Butterfield, 2013: 5-45, esp. 41-5).

There is much more to be said about Poggio's Lucretius and his other finds, including the unique manuscript of Petronius' *Cena Trimalchionis* from the *Satyricon* (de la Mare, 1965). But I promised an

<sup>46</sup> «Tenuisti iam Lucretium duodecim annis [...] Cura ut habeam Lucretium, si fieri potest; non enim adhuc potui universum librum legere, cum semper fuerit peregrinus», Bracciolini, 1984: 1.89.

<sup>47</sup> «Lucretium tenuisti iam per annos XIV [...] Cupio legere Lucretium, at ego privor illius presentia; nunquid etiam illum aliud decennium tenere velis?», Bracciolini, 1984: 1.103.

<sup>48</sup> Firenze, Biblioteca Laurenziana, ms. 35.30; for a color photograph, see Greenblatt, 2011.

<sup>49</sup> Poggio had discovered a medieval copy (now lost) of «the most important extant Lucretius manuscript, the Oblongus», Leiden, Universiteitsbibliotheek, ms. Voss. Lat. F. 30) Butterfield, 2016: 50.

<sup>50</sup> Gordan, 1974b: 113-14, translation slightly modified. «Bartholomeus de Monte Politiano dat operam, ut habeamus Lucretium; id si assequetur, tunc alia aggrediemur. Non enim est nunc de aliis libris tractandum, ne multa petendo daremus occasionem istius denegandi. Paulatim incedendum est, barbari enim sunt et suspitiosi», Bracciolini, 1984: 1.73.

epilogue on some modern book hunters. The Poggio of the tale, of course, is Phyllis Goodhart Gordan, and the role of Niccoli belongs both to her fellow alumnae and to the Friends of the Bryn Mawr College Library, with whom she shared some of her book hunting adventures in occasional publications<sup>51</sup>. She started at the age of twelve, visiting the library of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge in 1925 with her father, Howard Lehman Goodhart. There she greatly admired the earliest edition of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and a Bible with an illustration of Jonah climbing on a ladder out of the mouth of the whale. Other expeditions followed, including a visit to the Ambrosian Library in Milan in 1933, where she and her father were shown what was left of the fourth-century manuscript of Plautus: the Ambrosian palimpsest. She says that the librarian brought out the pages «on a pie knife» (Gordan, 1939: 2). After her first year in graduate school she embarked on a book hunting expedition with another companion, her Bryn Mawr classmate, Helen Ripley. They were seeking material for Kirsopp Lake's catalogue of Greek manuscripts<sup>52</sup>. The high point of their trip was a week spent studying the famous manuscript collection of Sir Thomas Phillips under the not very watchful eye of his 80-year-old grandson, T. Fitzroy Fenwick. Although everyone had told them that they would never be admitted, they somehow managed it. Mr. Fenwick discouraged visitors by charging them a pound a day to see the collection, but as Phyllis relates: «He refused to charge us anything, because he had never before had two American college girls come to study his Greek manuscripts» (Gordan, 1939: 5). Phyllis Gordan's trip with Helen Ripley was perhaps her greatest expedition, but she never forgot her love of old books and went on to become a great and generous collector herself. We could say of her what Niccolò Niccoli said of himself in his will (I am correcting for gender, of course): «from girlhood she collected her books [...] from everywhere with great industry, effort, and zeal – avoiding no effort and sparing no expense»<sup>53</sup>.

Both Poggio Bracciolini and Bryn Mawr College have been her beneficiaries.

<sup>51</sup> See Gordan, *Written by the Hand of Poggio* (1934), *Manuscript Hunters* (1939), *Of What Use Are Old Books?* (1973), and *To Hold the Renaissance in Our Hands* (1974).

<sup>52</sup> Lake, 1934–1939. Lake's daughter, Agnes Kirsopp Lake (later Michels) had been one of Phyllis Gordan's teachers at Bryn Mawr.

<sup>53</sup> «libros suos [...] undique magna industria diligentia studio ab adolescentia nulum laborem subterfugiendo nullis impensis parcendo coegit», quoted from Ullman and Stadter, 1972: 89.

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