Valerius Maximus, *Facta et Dicta Memorabilia*

Florence?, ca. 1400
Poole 23

124 leaves; 24×32cm. (15×21.5cm.); vellum
Late Gothic/proto-humanistic script; nine historiated initials,
numerous decorated initials
Bound in modern blind-tooled dark green morocco over boards

Valerius Maximus, an obscure first century Roman writer, left only one completed work for posterity, the *Facta et Dicta Memorabilia*. The Lilly Library is fortunate in having two complete copies (see item no.15) of this text which was written for orators and contains nine books of historical anecdotes relating to the Roman emperors. Valerius Maximus remained popular throughout the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, but his work is not accorded much authority today even though it has been translated into a number of languages, including English.

The nine books cover a wide variety of topics ranging from military discipline to the vice of luxury. Book I (5r-17v) discusses religion, omens, dreams, and miracles. In Book II (18r-31r) marital relationships and other state institutions are the major subjects; while Book III (31v-45v) deals with virtues, such as fortitude and patience. General moral characteristics including moderation, abstinence, and friendship are discussed in Book IV (46r-59v). Book V (60r-74r) deals primarily with humanity and, especially, familial relationships. Book VI (74v-87r) begins by considering chastity, but digresses to include a variety of topics; for example, the fidelity of servants to their masters. Likewise, in Book VII (87v-98r) the first chapter on happiness is followed by several unrelated subjects. Book VIII (98v-111v) primarily concerns judicial matters and related topics; while vices are the major theme of the last book, Book IX (112r-124v).

The Lilly manuscript is of fine quality, written in consistently legible and regular late Gothic script with generous margins and copious decoration. Each page contains two columns of text, averaging 35 lines per column. The decoration begins at the table of contents (3v-4r), where illuminated initials two text lines high are set on square gold grounds with foliate flourishes, and are randomly dispersed throughout the text. Initials flourished in red and
blue appear at the beginning of each chapter title. The opening page of the text (5r) contains the most concentrated decoration in the book. Here, three margins of the two column page are covered with a complex foliate border which is broken at the bottom by a large coat of arms belonging to the Popoleschi-Rossi family, a prominent Florentine house.

One historiated initial (nine text lines high), is found at the head of each book and is followed by a vertical string of display lettering. The characteristic floral design borders one or two sides of these initials. Throughout the book subsections of text are marked by non-historiated foliate initials, two text lines high, rubrics, and initials flourished in red and blue or gold and purple. The consistency of both the decoration and script of Poole 23 suggests that one hand was responsible for the text, while a single artist decorated the book.

The decoration of Poole 23 is typical of late fourteenth-century Paduan illumination, and is especially close in style to a late fourteenth-century Paduan copy of Petrarch's *Epistolae Seniles* in a private collection (Manion, 71, plate 13). The mauve, green, red, and blue palette, with a delicate white tracery superimposed on the floral forms is very similar in both manuscripts, as is the blue and gold filling in the interstices of the leaf forms. In both Paduan examples, this decoration is rich and fleshy, yet governed by an ordered design. Other parallels can be drawn in the sophisticated handling of shading; in the gold studs outlined in black and randomly distributed throughout the border; and in the structure of the initials which in both the Lilly Valerius Maximus and the Petrarch manuscript are set on a similarly constructed square burnished gold ground. The script and rubrication are also similar in both manuscripts.

Other Paduan manuscripts exhibit many of these same characteristics; for instance, another Valerius Maximus in the Bodleian Library attributed to Cristoforo Cortese, an artist active in Padua around 1400 (Bodleian Lib., Canon, Class. Lat. 259; cf. Huter, 10). In addition, comparison can be made with Poole 9 (item no.8) a Paduan Breviary in which the decoration is similar to that of Poole 23. Such stylistic similarities suggest a Paduan origin and a later fourteenth-century date for the Lilly manuscript.

The tradition of the Valerius Maximus historiation is less easily traced since few of the many extant Valerius texts have been fully
catalogued and published. However, those published examples of the illuminated texts do parallel the illustrations in the Lilly copy. The inclusion of an author portrait in Book I (5r) seems standard and relates to the author's prologue dedicating his book to Augustus Tiberius Caesar. In Poole 23 the author dons a scholar's hood, appropriate for the University milieu at Padua, and is surrounded by three students or followers. Valerius as author appears alone without the hood of an academic in the Bodleian *Dicta et Facta*. In another copy in Paris (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, ms. fonds français 287, fol. 1; cf. Photo, Lilly Library) Valerius appears with two scribes and no hood.

The other historiated initials also relate to the opening passages of each book. Book II is illustrated with a male figure and two birds, no doubt referring to the custom of consulting soothsayers before marriage discussed in Chapter 1; while Book III shows a single male figure, possibly a representation of the young boy, Emilius Lepidus, who saved a fellow Roman citizen from death, thus displaying his precocious virtue. In the initial to Book IV, men with tools pull down a house, referring to that passage of text relating such an incident from the life of P. Valerius. (Because his house was situated in a high part of the city, P. Valerius ordered it to be destroyed so no one could accuse him of living ostentatiously.) This same anecdote is illustrated in Book IV of the *Facta et Dicta* in Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, ms. fonds français 288, fol. 198 (Photo, Lilly Library).

In Book V the discussion of humanity and clemency is exemplified by a story of 2,740 captives being released, as illustrated in the accompanying initial. Book VI of the Valerius text includes an account of the story of Lucretia who is dramatically depicted in the Lilly volume not merely stabbing herself with a dagger, but pathetically impaled on a great two-handed sword. In Book VII, Metellus appears with a ball and scepter symbolic of the honor of consulship and dignity of Imperator awarded by fortune, an incident mentioned in the first chapter of the book. The initial opening of Book VIII also relates to the text with its image of a man being absolved from judgement before a group of onlookers.

The illustration of a group of bathers in a basket-like structure opening Book IX refers to the hanging baths of C. Sergius Orata briefly described in the first chapter. This particular motif appears to have derived from an established tradition of Valerius historia-
tion, since a number of Valerius manuscripts use the illustration of bathers for Book IX. Other examples of this iconography are found in: Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, ms. fonds français 287, fol. 181; Jena, Universitätsbibliothek Ms. El. f. 88, fol. 76; and Leipzig, Universitätsbibliothek, Valerius Maximus (Photos, Lilly Library). All nine Lilly historiated initials can be interestingly compared with a mid-fifteenth century Facta et Dicta Memorabilia in Rome which is fully illuminated (Rome, Vatican Lib. Lat. 7320; cf. Vatican, 1950, plate 38). Since many Valerius manuscripts were available, it is understandable that an illustrator would copy rather than invent totally new illustrations.

Certainly, the fine decoration, interesting historiation, and complete state of preservation of the Lilly Valerius Maximus make it a valuable part of the Library’s collection.

PROVENANCE
Marchese Campana sale to Techener, 1860; Tumin of Lyons, 1890; Sotheby, 1896; Quaritch, 1898; Sotheby, 1906; Quaritch, 1952; acquired by George A. Poole, Jr. from C.A. Stonehill, 1955; Indiana University, 1958

S.M.H.