

THE ARATEA VATICANA

LOOKING AT THE SKY IN A
SPLENDOROUS TRIP TO THE STARS

Rome, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Barb. lat. 76



LOOKING AT THE SKY IN A SPL

The sky and its stars have always fascinated and inspired manhood; people wanted to understand what they were seeing on the firmament. They strived to interpret movement, position and influence of the orbs and looked for a deeper understanding of the universe. This is the reason why astronomy counts among the most ancient sciences and already existed in Mesopotamia and Greece.

written around 370 BC, reflects all these contents in a magnificent way and was for many centuries one of the most popular texts in the area of astronomic knowledge and didactics.

The text *Phaenomena*, composed in hexameters, describes the sky and its stars, the planets and metrological signs, linking them to legends of stars. Its popularity can be deduced from its widespread reception and

Aratea Vaticana, where the famous text is accompanied by especially rich imagery.

The Aratea Vaticana, kept under the signature Barb. Lat. 76 in the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, is an astronomic compendium from the second half of the 15th century.

The manuscript was commissioned for or by king Ferdinand's I. son Giovanni of Aragon at the royal court in Naples. The manuscript is exceptionally colourful and magnificently decorated, and comprises 42 miniatures on 100 folios. In the 16th century the volume came to form part of the collection of Cardinal Maffeo Barberini. Later, in 1910 under Pope Leo XIII., it was incorporated together with the complete Barberini collection into the inventory of the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, where it still forms a core part.

The magnificent original manuscript was created on finest parchment; the text is displayed in a single column and written with dark ink and in humanistic cursive font and decorated by many illuminated and gilded initials.

The text includes the version in prose of the Aratea translation by Germanicus, the *Naturalis historia* by Pliny the Elder and *De Astronomia* by Hyginus. The manuscript starts with a frontispiece, followed by a splendid illuminated page showing a celestial map. After this introduction, the volume contains a sequence of miniatures, which are rich in details and accurately executed; they are framed and in this way separated from the text. The miniatures show the orbs in a colourful and expressive manner. The marvellous images in the manuscript clearly reflect the influence of arabic and greek-roman iconography.

This codex is without any doubt a treasure of Italian Renaissance and an exceptional masterpiece of book art.



Fol. 17r, (detail). *Bootes is a bright constellation north of the equinoctia, near the Ursa Major. Its body is formed by 14 bright stars. One of the stars forming the sword is probably Arcturus, the central star of the constellation. Arcturus is the brightest star in the Northern celestial hemisphere and the third one on the whole sky.*

The front page shows a detail from fol. 3r, the famous planisphere. Above these lines, a small detail from fol. 21r, the constellation Gemini.

Myths, the veneration of the stars, the development of calendar systems and in general the determination of time have been connected to this science, which also held a mystic aspect.

Additionally, the astronomic knowledge was very closely related to medical and astrological contents as well as to primitive literature. The didactic poem by Aratus of Soli,

commentation: already Cicero translated the text into Latin, and so did after him Germanicus and Avienus, which potentiated its enduring influence well into the Middle Ages. The text achieved its broadest extension with several manuscripts that were created during the Italian Renaissance in the 15th century. Among these splendid manuscripts shines the

ENDOROUS TRIP TO THE STARS



Belligerū Tytan et cū contigit Archum
Ducētemq; ferūt sinuato spicula nervo
Iam clausum rōne mare ē iam nauita pōtv
In festam noctē fugitat Lōgasq; tenebras.
Signum erit exoriēs nob tū nocte suprema
Scorpios ille micat sup freta cerula cauda.
Insequitur grauis archus et i lucē maḡ exit
Tunc alte cynosura repit tē tot' in undas
Mergitur orion humeīs et uertice Cephys

PHANTASTIC CONSTELL

12
tulum aquam ingerere. Huius aut
habet stellas in puppe .iii. In catastro
ma .iiii. In malo summo .ii. In linguis
themonibus v. sub carina v. Sunt
omnes XXI.



Diuerso posita et boree vicina legenti
A uster pistrinx agit duo sidera plegit vnu
N anqz Ariens supra pistrin piscelqz ferunt
B elua s; ponti n multum pterit annem
Porro sub ariete et piscibus su
per fluvium: cetus in caeli re
gione collocatus e. Dicitur autem a

The open volume shows fol. 57v (Cetus) and fol 58r (Eridanus).

Fol. 57v, constellation Cetus (the whale). Cetus is a very vast, but not too remarkable constellation on the autumn sky between Pisces and Eridanus. Here it appears in the shape of a winged dragon. The body is formed by six stars, the tail by eight.

Fol. 58r, constellation Eridanus. Eridanus is one of the vastest constellations on the night sky. Formed out of a chain of stars, it extends itself from below Orion up well into the southern sky. The head is composed of seven stars, six or seven form the right arm, one star each the hips, one the right knee and one each the feet.

ATIONS IN SHINING GOLD

58
Neptuno missus ad cepheum ppter
inuidiam Hecydis a qua contra
Calliopiam et Andromedam exar-
descebat propter nimiam pulchri-
tudinem. Huic cetui Andromeda
proposita erat: quem Perseus inter-
fecit: et ab ioue Astris illatus est:
ut memoria actus maneret. habet
stellas in caude extremo claras. ii.
a cauda usq; ad gibbum. vi. sub
ventre. vi. Sunt omnes. xiiii.



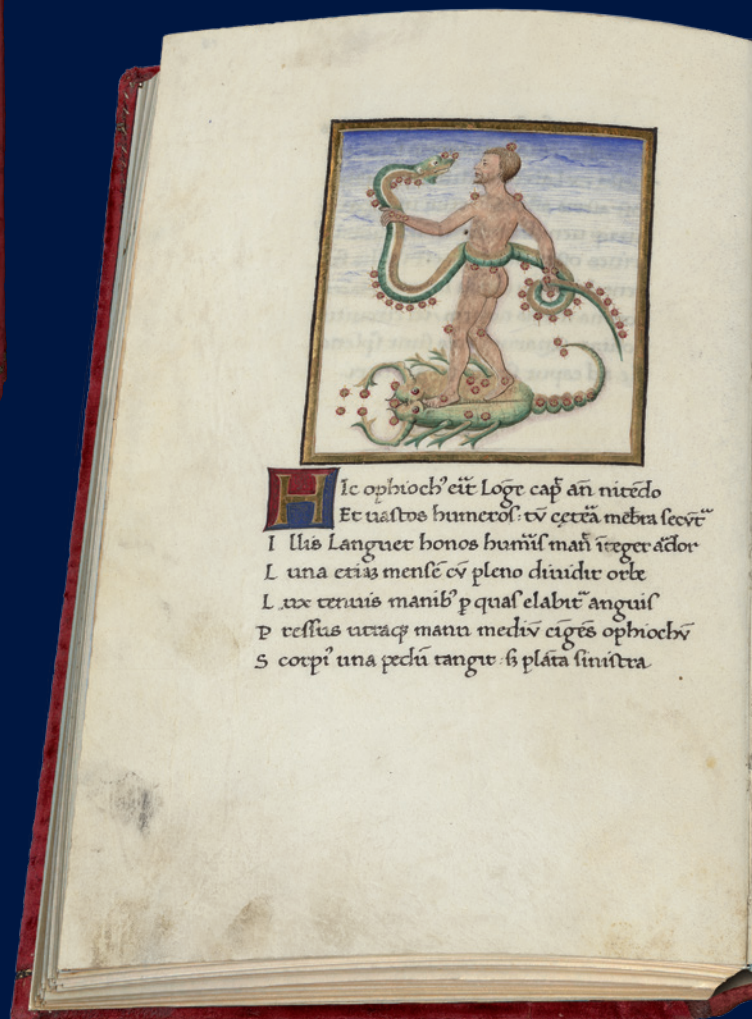


Top left: The front cover of the original manuscript, a richly embroidered velvet cover. The bordure embraces a representation of the Virgin Mary with the Child Jesus and the kneeling Joseph.

Top right: The back cover of the original manuscript. The same bordure as on the front cover embraces the episcopal coat of arms, together with the arms of the Barberini family, three bees.

GOLDEN STARS, SHINING COLOURS

True to the original facsimile edition of the manuscript Barb. Lat. 76 in the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana in Rome. A splendid decorative page, the famous planisphere and 39 golden miniatures as well as numerous initials illustrate the phantastic Aratea on 100 sheets of 23.2 x 15.1 cm each. The original cover, a richly

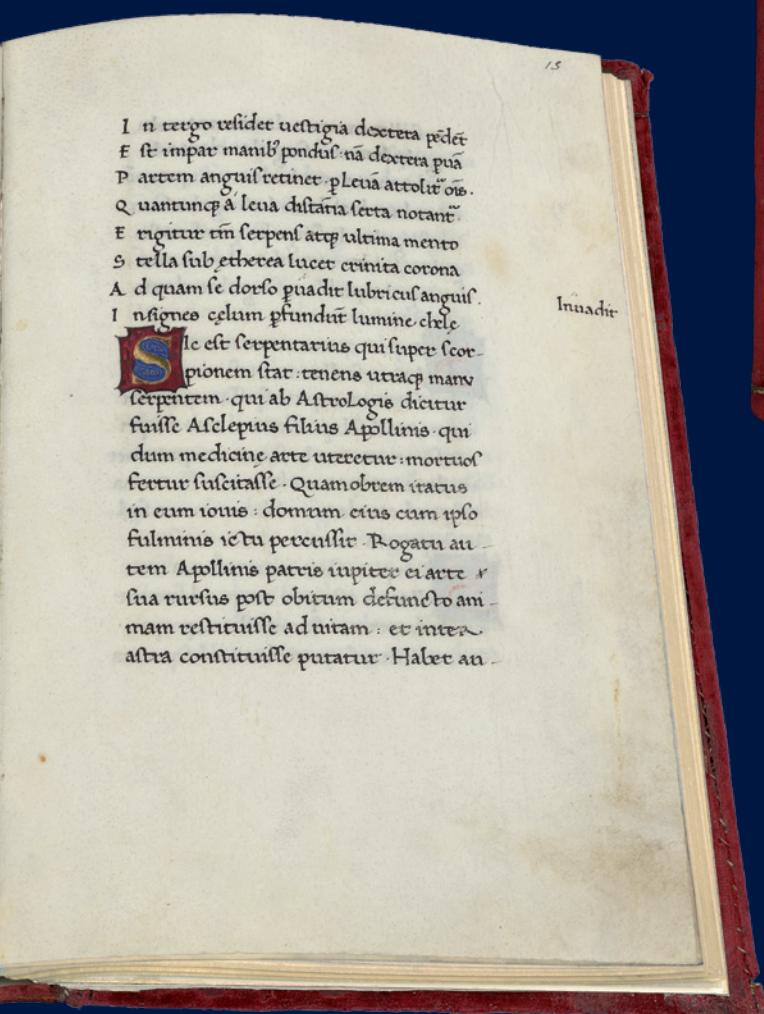


Hic ophioch' e'it loqr cap' an' nitēdo
 Et vastos humeros: tū ceterā mebra sevrē
 I llis languet honos humil' manū rēger' ādor
 L una etiāz mensē cū pleno chinidit' orbe
 L ax tenuis manib' p' qual' elabit' anguis
 P restus utraq' manu mediv' cūgēs ophioch'v
 S corpi' una peclū tangit' h' plāta sinistra

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embroidered velvet cover with the coat of arms of the Barberini, has been exactly reproduced. A magnificent box protects the precious facsimile volume. The scientific commentary describes all aspects of the manuscript, traces its incredible history and explains all miniatures and initials in detail.



Left: The open book shows folios 14v and 15r.

Serpentarius (32 stars) is a very vast, but not too remarkable constellation on the summer sky. As its stars are not very distinctive, it cannot be easily identified between Hercules and Scorpio. Serpentarius is of annular shape, and the stars of the snake extend from there to the West and to the East.

Scorpio (19 stars) is one the most remarkable constellations on the southern night sky on the northern hemisphere. A sinuous chain of bright stars forms the clearly recognizable body of a scorpion, with its pincers and the erected sting. It lies near the centre of the Milky Way and therefore includes lots of star clusters and nebulae.

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into the fascinating world of Italian Renaissance and traces the sinuous journey of the manuscript up to our days.



The three original Fine Art Facsimile leaves in the documentation: fol. 41v (left; Aquarius and Capricorn), fol. 3r (centre; the famous planisphere) and fol. 73v (right; the solar chariot).



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