

Andrea Corsali and the Southern Cross



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In 1515 Andrea Corsali, an Italian under the patronage of the Medici family, accompanied a Portuguese voyage down the African coast and around the Cape of Good Hope, en route to Cochin, India. On his return Corsali's letter to his patron describing the voyage was published as a book which survives in only a handful of copies:

CORSALI, Andrea. *Lettera di Andrea Corsali allo Illustrissimo Signore Duca Iuliano de Medici, Venuta Dellindia del Mese di Octobre Nel M.D.XVI.* [Colophon:] Stampato in Firenze per Io. Stephano di Carlo da Pavia. Adi. xi. di Dicembre Nel. M.D.XVI.

This book included the earliest illustration of the stars of the *Crux*, the group of stars today known as the *Southern Cross*.

This paper will explore the cultural context of that publication, along with the significance of this expedition, paying attention to the identification and illustration of the stars of the *Southern Cross*; in particular, I shall investigate why the book was important to the Medici family; the secrecy often attaching to geographical information acquired during the Age of Discovery; Andrea Corsali's biography; and printing in Florence at this period; and other works issued by the printer Giovanni Stefano from Pavia.

Corsali's discoveries, particularly the ground-breaking astronomical report and illustration of the *Southern Cross* off the Cape of Good Hope, remained a navigational aid to voyages into the Southern Ocean and on to The East and the New World for centuries to follow, and ultimately even played a part in the European discovery of Australia.

CONTEXTUAL INTRODUCTION

Humanism: the cultural revolution that culminated in European discovery of the New World and the subsequent jostle for power

The ground-breaking cultural phenomenon that was the Renaissance began in the fourteenth century as Humanism swept throughout Europe. The core of this change centered on education, knowledge and study which, it was believed, could elevate, protect and improve the individual and in so doing enable him to be more Godlike.

The scholar and poet Petrarch (1304-1374), is considered the founder of Humanism; it was his discovery of Cicero's letters, *Epistulae ad Atticum*, in Verona in 1345 that has often been credited as the beginning of this cultural revolution. Such letters revealed frank and intimate details of Cicero's thoughts and daily activities that were found so illuminating that their recognition as a fundamental inspiration to humanist scholars immediately followed. Sadly, the original Cicero manuscript and the copy made by Petrarch have both been lost. A copy made for the Florentine Secretary of State, Coluccio Salutati, is held in the Laurentian Library, Florence.¹

The cradle of the printing press

Italy became the second country in the West to embrace printing when printers from Germany arrived in Rome. The first two men, Arnold Pannartz and Konrad Sweynheym, both clerics, brought with them knowledge of Johannes Gutenberg's printing press in Mainz. It was there that the Gutenberg Bible, produced in 1454, became the first European work to be printed with movable type, today considered the most famous and valuable of all rare books.

¹ Cicero, *Selected Letters*, Ed. Frank Frost Abbott, Boston, Ginn and Co., 1909.

The cleric Sweynheym is known to have worked with Gutenberg from 1461-1464; one of the very first books which he produced with Pannartz in the Benedictine monastery of Subiaco (Rome) was Cicero's *De Oratore*. In the same year they also printed Lactantius's *De divinis institutionibus*; both books were in Latin, the language of the Christian world.

Settled in Venice from 1490, the founder of the Aldine Press, Aldus Manutius (c.1450-1515), was a humanist scholar who studied Latin under Gaspare da Verona and Greek with Guarino da Verona. The Aldine Press was celebrated as providing the best corrected texts; his work on Greek manuscripts marked him as an innovative publisher, and in 1495 Manutius produced the first volume of his Aristotle edition – long awaited throughout Europe.

Manutius is also celebrated as the inventor of small, portable books known by the Greek term, *enchiridia*, and these revolutionized personal reading. The edition of Virgil printed in 1501 is a landmark in the history of printing as the earliest of these octavo books. A year later, Sophocles' tragedy followed as the first Greek classical text to be printed in Aldus' smallest and finest Greek type. As Nicolas Barker points out: 'by any standard it is a masterpiece, not only of engraving skill executed with marvellous homogeneity on a minute scale, but also of exquisitely planned letter fit'.²

The Greek context is highly relevant for the present investigation. Although the heavenly constellation of the *Southern Cross* was known to classical astronomers as early as 1000 BC, it was Manutius who first brought it to European notice; in 1499, he published the poem of the Greek third-century poet Aratus, *Arati Solensis Phaenomena cum commentariis*, printed in Greek. This epic poem had drawn on the knowledge of earlier poets and astronomers, including

² Nicolas Barker, *Aldus Manutius and the Development of Greek Script and Type in the Fifteenth Century*, New York, Fordham University Press, 1992.

Hesiod and Eudoxus. Aratus discusses the heavens and the constellations. His description of the *Crux* is the earliest account of this specific cluster of stars that would later be first fully described and illustrated from direct observation by Andreas Corsali in 1516.

Printers and humanists

Printing and Humanism rapidly went hand in hand. Humanists often rejected the teaching of the late-medieval universities and preferred to be self-taught with the overriding idea of returning to the study of original sources, connecting to Greek and Roman texts and the original authors. This movement started with a revival of original languages, Latin and Greek, and by the end of the fourteenth century a polished version of Latin had been re-established as the *lingua franca* of the European élites. The developing interaction of printers with humanists in Italy created an expansion and appreciation of humanist scholarship. Printers employed them as editors because of their knowledge of Latin and Greek, and this collaborative and creative flourishing led to a larger reading audience and expanded potential texts for publication, which came to include mathematics, geometry, architecture, accounting and the sciences.

The invention of movable type did not sweep away the entire manuscript production; in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries manuscripts created by humanist scribes continued to exist side by side with printed books, as both were highly desirable commodities as the burgeoning, richer middle classes built humanist collections. One of the most successful scribes working in Padua, Bartolomeo Sanvito (1433-1511), was a master of Roman and Italic script using square initial capitals. It is known that the bookseller Vespanio da Bisticci (1421-1498) employed twenty five scribes in his scriptorium to create books for Cosimo de Medici for the Laurentian Library of Florence which houses, among other treasures, the private library of the Medici family.

The transmission of classical knowledge came via humanist scholars locating original classical manuscripts and copying them. By reclaiming these original ancient texts, they rejected current learning in the universities and shared their disdain of the widespread ignorance of the past that relied on repetitive, often inaccurate information transmitted throughout the Middle Ages. Poggio Bracciolini, a famous collector and copyist, travelled to monastic libraries in Germany, Switzerland and France to unearth classical manuscripts. One of his most celebrated discoveries was the only surviving work by Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura* from the 1st century BCE. Bracciolini's friend Niccolò Niccoli (1364-1427) corrected the text, introduced chapters and made tables of contents; he was the inventor of the cursive script, today known as italic. Niccoli became known as 'the censor of the Latin tongue'.³ He was also one of the most influential figures in the court of Cosimo de Medici. The Laurentian Library holds many of his manuscripts including those of Lucretius.

FLORENCE AND THE MEDICI FAMILY

By the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries Florence had become the centre of the Renaissance. It was a free city state run by several families led by the Medicis and had grown into the artistic and cultural centre of Italy. The period of the High Renaissance witnessed the widespread reading of Latin and Greek classics by the merchant classes; in the light of these new interests in classical science and astronomy, it is very likely that the Greek poem *Phaenomena*, written about 270 BCE by the writer Aratus and published for the first time by Aldus Manutius in 1499, became known to this new class of learned Italians including the Medicis.

³ Leonardo Bruni, *History of the Florentine People*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2001.

The financial nature of the European economy at the time was the reason that Northern Italian navigators such as Andrea Corsali and earlier, Christopher Columbus, were able to participate in the Iberian voyages. Portugal and Spain had the ships and the seamen, the motives and the opportunity for oceanic exploration. Nevertheless, they lacked capital, experience and financial organisation to commercially benefit from their discoveries. It was Northern Italy, and above all, Florence, the western world's biggest banking centre, the Medici bank its biggest financial institution, that supplied the finance that the Iberian powers lacked. It was only with this concentration of help and capital that the wealth of the Indies and the New World could be exploited.

The Medici family had always been involved in widespread business activities that included banking, property, luxury and staple goods. Although expelled from Florence by the Republican faction in 1494, they returned in 1512 after a time of exile.

It is not surprising that Corsali's work would be published in Florence. Corsali was under the patronage of its ruler, Giuliano de Medici, Duke of Nemours, and the younger brother of Giovanni who became Pope Leo X. Giuliano, a patron of the arts, is thought to have been a patron of Leonardo da Vinci.

The Medici family's investment at this time in patronage of the arts and their widespread commercial enterprises ensured their unrivalled position as rulers of Florence for decades to come. Cosimo de Medici built and endowed the first Florentine library, the largest in Europe at this time; their wealth was evident in buildings and acquisitions, whilst their aristocratic desire for honour, display and cultural prestige was very much on show from the time of their triumphant return to Florence in 1512.

Lisa Jardine has said that in Florence, with this powerful banking influence, ‘nowhere is the interrelatedness of cultural innovation and shrewd business exploitation of a new market opportunity more strikingly illustrated than in the emerging book trade’.⁴

The Medici family were also active in linking the Florentine language with antiquity, and ensured that their language, the Tuscan dialect, would be part of discussions in the formation of a universal Italian language.

PRINTING IN FLORENCE

Printing had begun in Florence in 1471 and as one modern scholar says ‘[in Florence] Italian genius was at the height of its scientific achievement’.⁵ It is for this reason that Florence has been called ‘the new Athens on the Arno’.⁶

Florentine printing of the early sixteenth century was often modest as both *De sculptura* by Pomponio Gaurico printed in 1504 and Corsali’s *Lettera* illustrate. It is said ‘that it was not until Duke Cosimo I in 1546 invited Lorenzo Torrentino from Bologna to become the first ducal printer, that the Medici harnessed the power of the printed word’.⁷

The printer of Corsali’s *Lettera* was Giovanni Stefano di Carlo da Pavia; we know that he was working in Florence between 1505 and 1521. According to current reports incorporated in the online database of Italian sixteenth century printing⁸, he printed more than fifty-five books. It

⁴ Lisa Jardine, *Worldly Goods*, London, Macmillan, 1996, p.128.

⁵ Victor Scholderer, *Printers and Readers in Italy in the fifteenth century*, Annual Italian Lecture of the British Academy, 1949.

⁶ Hans Baron, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance*, Princeton University Press, 1966.

⁷ *From the Library: Florentine Publishing in the Renaissance* [Exhibition catalogue], Washington, National Gallery of Art, 2015.

⁸ EDIT16 Censimento nazionale delle edizioni italiane del XVI secolo (<http://edit16.iccu.sbn.it>) Record identifier: CNCE 2077.

is interesting for our purposes to note that at least five of these titles are specifically related to the Medici family (e.g., Poliziano's *La giostra di Givliano de Medici* of October 15, 1513).

Corsali's *Lettera* itself is a fine example of an elegant printing style intended for a private, selective audience, probably printed in just a handful of copies— in this instance a report to Guiliano de Medici, Corsali's patron. Giuliano di Piero de Medici (1479-1516) ruled Florence from 1512-1516 and he had commissioned Corsali's mission to India. He died 17 March 1516 so could not in fact have read the letter addressed to him. He was succeeded by his nephew Lorenzo di Pietro, son of Giuliano's brother Piero; promptly responding to this change in power, Corsali addressed a second letter dated 18 September 1517 to Lorenzo, describing another voyage with the Portuguese from Cochin to Ethiopia and the Persian Gulf area: Corsali, Andrea. *Lettera di Andrea corsali allo ill. Principe et signore Laurentio de Medici duca d'Urbino. Ex India, Florence, after Sept. 18, 1517.*

THE AGE OF DISCOVERY

The term *Age of Discovery* is widely used to define the establishment in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries of new trade routes by sea to the Far East and the New World. This commercially expansive period coincided with and was aided by the growth in publishing in humanist subjects. Italian, Portuguese and Spanish maritime voyagers were seeking new knowledge of hitherto unknown countries that would give merchants and rulers prized and secret territorial advantage.

The transmission of information about these new discoveries became a major topic of interest for both printers and merchants. The maritime push to a New World not only led to better understanding of newly discovered lands, their cultures and civilizations, but it also

offered massive commercial benefits to the countries best able to finance and exploit new opportunities. This was the time that maritime voyaging had developed into an exciting race offering as its prize gigantic economic benefits. The world was entering a new age; as Europeans were developing an interest in exploring sea routes to the New World both for economic survival and religious expansion, the existing routes to the East were being lost. The Ottoman Empire had taken command of the eastern Mediterranean and its key trade routes; although Italian states, with Venice at the forefront, were reluctant to impede the healthy flow of goods across the Ottoman Empire to and from the markets in the West, attention had turned to potential opportunities afforded in the hitherto unknown lands of the New World.

When Vasco da Gama returned from India in 1499, King Manuel I chose Pedro Cabral to sail a fleet of ships to establish trade with India. Pedro Cabral's fleet was one of the largest fleets that had ever sailed the Atlantic. It set sail for India in 1500 on what turned out to be the longest voyage in history up to that time, and one of the greatest and most influential voyages of discovery ever made. After passing Cape Verde Islands, Pedro Cabral's fleet took a south westerly course, which led to them inadvertently becoming the first ships to sail across the South Atlantic.

This voyage was the beginning of trade between Europe and the East by the Atlantic route. This caused the eventual decline of the prosperity of those nations that had conducted trade with Asia via the existing routes.⁹

Added to difficulties with land-based trade routes to the East, another strong social force was in play. With the spread of printing throughout Europe, there was a growth in literacy in a society that had not previously encountered such intellectual stimulation. A new self-confidence emerged and with it a burgeoning growth in the sale of consumer products; the wealthy and the rising merchant class were becoming more interested in collecting the rare and unusual. This

⁹ James Roxburgh MacClymont, William Brooks Greenlee, and Pero Vaz de Caminha, *Pedro Cabral*, London, Viartis, 2009.

interest especially included goods sourced from exotic lands and the acquisition of rugs, silks, art, precious stones, gold and books was now seen to improve social prestige.

Such a large social change led rulers and merchants to become increasingly interested in financing new and speculative maritime exploration ventures. Besides exotic goods, the lure of finding sources of gold was also the major incentive for these potential patrons, as the European value of gold was widely fixed making it the only commodity treated as an international currency.

THE LIFE OF ANDREA CORSALI

Andrea Corsali was born in June 1487 in Monteboro di Empoli, about twenty kilometres south west of Florence. His family had long resided in this area although his father, Giovanni, held positions in the town and in Florence. The family business was that of saddle and bridle makers. Andrea's name appears for the first time on the baptismal register of Santa Maria del Fiore, the Cathedral of Florence.

Little is known of Corsali's life. He left for India at the age of twenty-eight; it can be assumed that he was an educated young man from the content and style of his letters that display acute powers of observation and a knowledge of both Latin and the works of Ptolemy. His ease with astronomical instruments and uses of the astrolabe suggest a high level of mathematical skills.

In his 1516 *Lettera* Corsali mentions a contemporary from his township, Giovanni da Empoli (1483-1518). Empoli was appointed Governor of Sumatra by the Portuguese and was an agent for the Florentine merchants Gualtiere and Frescobaldo in Lisbon; Empoli had undertaken two voyages to India on their behalf with the permission of the Portuguese.

How Corsali actually secured passage on a Portuguese ship is not known; it may have been with the help of the navigator da Empoli who enjoyed a relationship with King Manuel I. Empoli wrote of ‘our Andrea Corsali, certainly a man worthy of faith, since he is literate, and has a great deal of knowledge ... of astrology and cosmography and who has consumed a great deal of time in researching these seas and lands and this island...’.¹⁰

With scant evidence for the later period of Corsali’s life, a letter written to the Vatican in 1524 by Abba Thomas, the head of a religious house is particularly interesting: ‘At present one can find Andrea Corsali, a Florentine, who is printing books in Chaldean in this land and he has a large printery here as well as one in Barrara’.¹¹ From this single piece of evidence, we know in 1524 that he is in Ethiopia.

Although little remembered in Florence today, Corsali’s name and his coat of arms were engraved in the Basilica di Santa Croce in 1898, together with that of other Tuscan navigators. He also has a street named in his honour - via Andrea Corsali, 50127 Firenze.

In the New World Corsali is celebrated for the astronomical and navigational ability he possessed that made possible his identification of the *Crux* off the Cape of Good Hope, the five stars, today known as the *Southern Cross*. These stars today have been adopted by southern countries as a national and distinctive symbol and are illustrated on the flags of Australia, New Zealand, Brazil, Papua New Guinea, and Samoa.

¹⁰ Quoted by Giulia Grazi in *Andrea Corsali, un avventuroso esploratore e astronomo empolese* (online resource <http://www.summagallicana.it/lessico/c/Corsali%20Andrea.htm>)

¹¹ Biblioteca Nazionale di Firenze Magl. X11184.c 58r.

CORSALI AND THE SOUTHERN CROSS

Corsali's description of his voyage and of the celestial phenomenon that was the *Southern Cross* was published in Florence. Knowledge was power: as privileged information it would have had an extremely limited circulation, almost certainly only within the Medici immediate circle. Given its present rarity, and the existence of two manuscript copies, it was probably highly restricted, much as a cabinet memorandum might be in government today. For similar reasons of secrecy, Portuguese voyages into the Southern Ocean to colonise an unknown world were not made public, and much of the official record was lost in the Lisbon earthquake. Corsali's narrative is one of the few that we have – thanks only to the chance of the expedition's having had a Medici protégé aboard.

The *Crux* or the *Cross*, when it was situated in the Northern sky, was known since around 1000 BCE by the Sumerians and Babylonians, but it is in Aratus's epic poem *Phaenomena* that it is first recorded in Europe. At the latitude of Athens, *Crux* was clearly visible in the night sky in classical times but slowly the precession of the equinoxes gradually lowered the stars below the European horizon. By 400 CE, the stars in the constellation we now call *Crux* never rose above the horizon throughout most of Europe, and the stars were forgotten.

Manutius's 1499 publication of Aratus's work revived this long forgotten classical knowledge. It was not until the Age of Discovery that this heavenly constellation was observed again, by this time in the Southern skies. It was briefly mentioned by a couple of early maritime explorers, travellers down the coast of Africa. The earliest notice appears to have been that of Alvise Cadamosto during his voyage of 1482, printed in 1507, but not illustrated. Then follows that of Pedro Cabral in 1500 in a letter sent to King Manuel which was not printed until 1843.

Vespucci noted it in his account of his third voyage, 1501-2. In 1505, Ludovico di Varthema was told of its use by Malay mariners in Javanese waters. But it is Andrea Corsali on his voyage to India in 1515 who first recognised it and described its shape in detail as a cross. Corsali also provided detailed descriptions of places, their peoples, commodities and curiosities; remarks on the use of the astrolabe and other instruments reveal acute powers of observation. His writings are among the very earliest informed observations of the still mysterious East to be printed in Europe. This astronomical rediscovery of *Crux* in the southern skies by European navigators illustrates the ideal synergy between humanist scholars, classical knowledge and commercial endeavours during the High Renaissance.

In terms of cultural significance, the Crux, like all constellations, played an important role in the belief system of many cultures. In the ancient mountaintop village of Machu Picchu, a stone engraving exists which depicts the constellation. In addition, in Quechua (the language of the Incas) Crux is known as “Chakana”, which literally means “stair”, and holds deep symbolic value in Incan mysticism (the cross represented the three tiers of the world: the underworld, world of the living, and the heavens). To the Aborigines and the Maori, Crux is representative of animist spirits who play a central role in their ancestral beliefs. To the ancient Egyptians, Crux was the place where the Sun Goddess Horus was crucified, and marked the passage of the winter season.¹²

It was this newly discovered constellation that would guide navigators into the Southern Ocean and onto discoveries in the New World for hundreds of years, in the same way as *Polaris* was used in the Northern Hemisphere.

¹² Matt Williams, *Southern Cross Constellation*, in online resource <https://www.universetoday.com/85158/southern-cross-constellation/>.

THE PUBLICATION BY ANDREA CORSALI



CORSALI, Andrea. Lettera di Andrea Corsali allo Illustrissimo Signore Duca Giuliano de Medici, Venuta Dellindia del Mese di Ottobre Nel M.D.XVI. [Colophon:] Stampato in Firenze per Io. Stephano di Carlo da Pavia. Adi. xi. di Dicembre Nel. M.D.XVI.

Corsali's book is a slim, small quarto of six leaves, printed in a Latin text with a full-page woodcut illustration of the *Southern Cross* and a woodcut printer's device below the colophon (see illustrations). There are four known copies of this work in existence:

- State Library of New South Wales. This copy was formerly owned by the English author, distinguished art collector and politician William Beckford (1760-1844), passing with much of Beckford's library to his son-in-law the Duke of Hamilton for his library at Hamilton Palace; sold in the Hamilton Palace sale of 1882 to Crawford; thereafter uncertain ownership until acquired by Lord Clark; passing to his son the British politician

Alan Clark; acquired by an Australian private collector through the Sydney rare bookdealers, Hordern House; acquired by State Library in 2019.¹³

- British Library. The Library's copy was formerly owned by Thomas Grenville (1755-1846), politician, book collector and Trustee of the British Museum, to which he bequeathed his magnificent library of 16,000 titles.¹⁴
- Princeton University Library.¹⁵ This copy has a fascinating story. It is known to have been owned by the Parisian bookseller Tross in the 1870s at which time it was bound with a copy of the Vespucci *Lettera... delle isole nuouamente trouate in quattro suoi viaggi*, Florence, n.d. but c.1505; it was acquired by the Parisian collector Dr. J Court and while in his ownership the two works were separated and bound by the Parisian binder Lortic; at Court's sale in the 1880s the Corsali, now separate, appears to have been bought by Bernard Quaritch; it then made its way to the New York collectors Kalbfleisch and subsequently Robert Hoe, at whose sale it was purchased by Cyrus H. McCormick of Chicago, who subsequently presented it in 1912 to his alma mater Princeton University.¹⁶
- Biblioteca Palatina, Parma.¹⁷ This copy has contemporary Italian annotations on the illustration ('*polo antartico*') and on the colophon ('*Lisbona, cavo verde, cavo di buona Speranza, mozambiquo, Ghoa, batticala cananov, Calicut, cuccin, melibari*'). This second inscription clearly references a route to India by circumnavigating Africa, and since the places mentioned can be found in the text of the *Lettera*. it is open to speculation whether these notes are simply commentary or possibly even the annotations of a prospective traveller.

¹³ SAFE/910/11 at State Library of New South Wales (www.sl.nsw.gov.au)

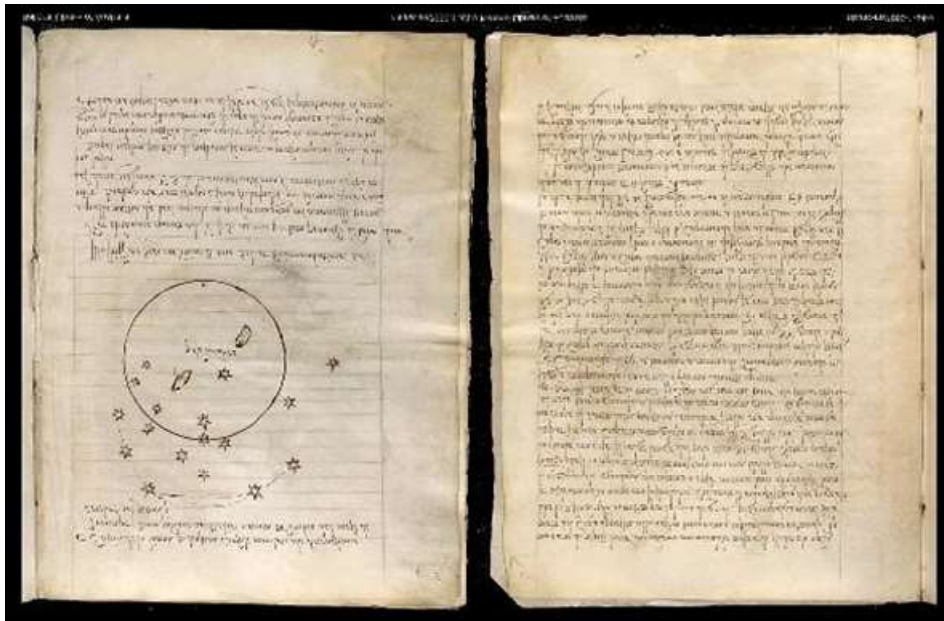
¹⁴ General Reference Collection G.6946 at British Library (www.bl.uk)

¹⁵ EX 1079.934.266 at Princeton University Library (www.princeton.edu)

¹⁶ George Tyler Northup, *Amerigo Vespucci Letter to Piero Soderini*, Princeton University Press, 1916; *Biblia* [Princeton University Library occasional publication], vol. I, no. 2, January 1931.

¹⁷ CNCE 63487 at Biblioteca Palatina, Parma (www.bibliotecapalatina.beniculturali.it/)

Manuscript versions of the Lettera



Unusually the *Lettera*... also exists in two contemporary manuscript versions. Their very existence seems to confirm our supposition that the printed book enjoyed a deliberately limited circulation.

The Pierpont Morgan Library version¹⁸ is on flimsy paper and is written in an ornate Florentine secretarial hand; it is in a modern binding of papered boards. Originally from the library of Marchese Girolamo d'Adda (1817-1895), it was acquired by the Pierpont Morgan Library in 1909 from the art dealer, Fairfax Murray.

The State Library of New South Wales copy¹⁹ is more interesting to our analysis because it has a Venetian connection. It is titled *Copia de la lettera p. Andrea Corsali mandata alo Serenissimo Prencipe Duca juliano de Medici venuta dellindia del mese di Octobre nel M.DXVI*. It comprises fifteen pages on eight leaves of vellum, and is stitched in contemporary paper

¹⁸ 108202 at the Pierpont Morgan Library (www.themorgan.org)

¹⁹ SAFE 1/239 at State Library of New South Wales (www.sl.nsw.gov.au)

wrappers. The pages are paginated 1-15 in another hand which matches the writing of the inscription on the front cover ‘A Misier Andrea Gritti’.

‘Gritti was at this time Proveditor Generale di Campo, responsible for the financing of material and men used in Venice’s wars. It is more than likely that he maintained confidential agents in Florence as he had done when he was in Istanbul. Gritti would have been most interested in the size and strength of the Portuguese blockade of the Red Sea trade in cloth and spices from India to Aden, Mecca and Cairo as this put the Venetian business in these commodities at a serious risk’.²⁰

Textual variations between the printed text and this manuscript copy have been noted.²¹ They emphasise its Venetian origins: the scribe makes several mistakes with place names and uses various spellings, e.g. *Goci* is written as *Coci*. There are also dialectic variations from the Florentino to the Veneziano dialects, e.g. *anchora* becomes *ancora*; *mezzo* becomes *mezo*; *navigatione* becomes *navigazione*.

These textual variations not only identify place of composition; they also confirm that the manuscript categorically is based on the printed text.

There may well be a further copy of the *Lettera*. The Morgan Library catalogue notes that ‘There are copies of this letter in the Mitchell Library (State Library of New South Wales), the British Library, and the Seminario Vescovile di Padova’. Since the British Library example is in fact an example of the printed text identified above, we cannot tell whether the Padua example to which they refer is thought to be a printed or manuscript example. However the holdings of the Seminario Vescovile as reported to the *Catalogo collettivo delle biblioteche di Padova* do not

²⁰ Sergio Sergio, *Andrea Corsali Fiorentino*, Canberra [self-published], 2013, pp.37 & 49.

²¹ Sergio Sergi, op. cit., p.38.

include any reference to Corsali's Letter(s) beyond their inclusion in later anthologies such as Ramusio's collection of voyages.

The woodcut illustration

The first dated Italian engraving is inscribed 1461 and the earliest known date for Florentine wood cut book illustration is 1490. The period of greatest flourish in book illustration was the sixteenth century. It is difficult because of the lack of early documentation to know where illustrations were made, but we can accurately date the full-page woodcut of the *Southern Cross* and know that it was made in Florence. Although the woodcut lacks attribution to an artist, the importance of the subject in this instance reaches far beyond. It was not intended as a beautiful work of art to dazzle a viewer but was a precise scientific astronomical diagram to be viewed with wonder and awe.

Kristeller has identified ten publications by Giovanni Stefano da Pavia which include woodcut illustrations.²²

THE DISSEMINATION OF CORSALI'S WORK

The information written by Corsali had far reaching significance. It appeared frequently over the next century in various forms and anthologies but almost all refer back to the early voyage anthologist Giovanni Battista Ramusio (1485-1527).

Ramusio, the great Venetian humanist was born in Treviso, near Florence and spent his life analysing and codifying all the reports of exploration and travel in the Age of Discovery. In an official Venetian role Ramusio, fluent in seven languages, was able to translate into Italian

²² Paul Kristeller, *Early Florentine Woodcuts : with an annotated list of Florentine illustrated books*, London, Kegan Paul, 1897.

works in many European languages. Corsali's letters appeared in volume one of Ramusio's *Delle Navigazioni et Viaggi* published in Venice from 1550 in Italian.

In his introduction Ramusio apologises to his readers for any errors that may be present in the text as 'nella qual due lettere se si saran degli errori, n'e causa il tristo esemplar che noi habbiamo havuto' ('in these two letters there may well be errors as a result of the sad condition of the example that we have received'). This might possibly suggest that he was working from the manuscript written on paper held in the Pierpont Morgan Library rather than the copy in the State Library of New South Wales which is on vellum and in exemplary condition. Of course, another copy may have existed in the sixteenth century that has since been lost.

Richard Eden translated Corsali's letter in his work printed in London in 1555, *The Decades of the newe worlde* ('we saw a marvellous configuration of stars in that part of the sky, the opposite to our north').²³

This was the first English translation of Corsali's work; included in Eden's work are also numerous accounts of voyages and exploration, some of them on general topics such as 'Contencion for the trade of spices'. Of special interest is the section 'Of the Pole Antartike', which discusses Vespucci's observations of the southern stars and then contains the first appearance in English of Andrea Corsali's identification of the Southern Cross with the woodcut illustration appearing twice.

After Corsali, the name *cross* appears frequently. In 1592 it appears as such on Emery Molyneux's globe, the first terrestrial globes to be made in England and the first to show new

²³ *The Decades of the newe worlde or west India...written in the Latine tongue by Peter Martyr... and translated into Englysshe by Rycharde Eden*, London, Roberte Toy for William Powell, 1555.

information of the New World. In 1605-1606, the Portuguese navigator Pedro Fernandes Quiros on his expedition across the Pacific Ocean in search of the southern continent instructs his captains to ascertain their position at night by the *crucero*. It remained the best available information until the astronomical observations of the southern stars made by Pieter Keyser and Frederick de Houtman were published on a globe by Petrus Plancius in 1597/98. Until the late eighteenth century and the mystery of longitude had been solved navigation would rely entirely on star gazing. The exploration of the Pacific and the European discovery of Australia made by Captain James Cook brought an unknown third of the world to European notice. Corsali's work had prepared the way; Cook completed this task on his three monumental expeditions into the Pacific in 1768-1780.

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