

TWO BOOKS FROM THE ENVIRONMENT
OF LEONARDO DA VINCI IN THE ELMER
BELT LIBRARY OF VINCIANA:
GAFURIO AND PLUTARCH

BY

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Books from the Elmer Belt Library of Vinciana are usually presented with emphasis upon their relationship to our protagonist and central figure Leonardo da Vinci. It was the research for Leonardo da Vinci's sources of learning which brought both volumes, the Plutarch of 1491, and Franchino Gafurio's theoretical works on music, 1508 and 1518, to our shelves. It is a fortunate coincidence that our description of Gafurio's printed editions follows Franz Unterkircher's article in the first issue of *Libri* which describes the treasure of the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, the Grolier Manuscript of Gafurio's *de Harmonia*.

We have singled out for special description our copies of Gafurio and Plutarch not only for their quality and beauty as early Italian illustrated books but because they are linked together by documents of ownership. Franchino Gafurio, chief ecclesiastic musician at the Sforza Court in Milan, acquired our specific copy of *Plutarchi vitae* on January 13th, 1494. Gafurio noted, next to the colophon, the date and price—5 pounds and 10 soldi. He signed his name on the title page, folio 1 b, and during the period of his ownership made many marginal notes especially while reading the lives of Pompey and Hannibal¹.

Leonardo read the *Lives* of Plutarch. Can we assume that he used Gafurio's copy when he noted in *Ms. B.*, fol. 41 a: "Doloni are a kind of weapon mentioned by Plutarch in the life of Gracchus . . ." or when *Ms. B.*, fol. 50 b, he noted the names of military engineers from the life of Demetrius?

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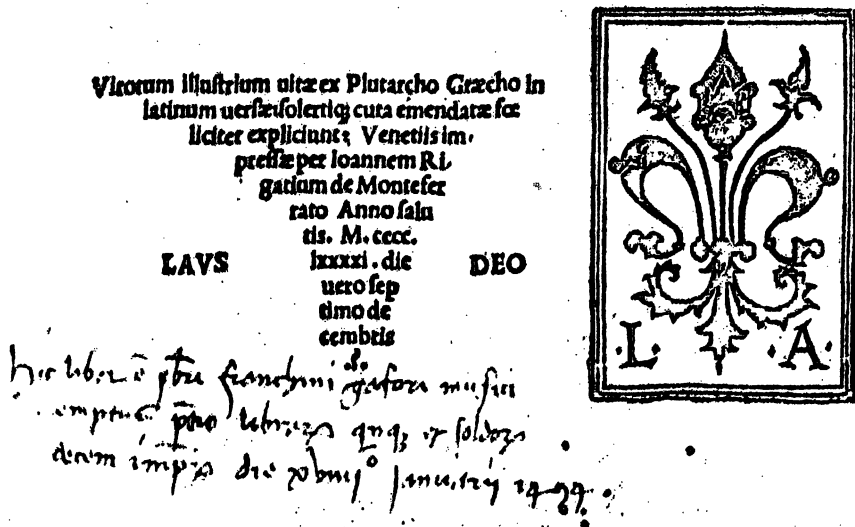


FIG. 1. Gafurio's ownership entry in Plutarch 1491, colophon S8a.

Much research has been made regarding Leonardo's book knowledge in order to determine his scientific starting point. The physicist and mathematician Pierre Duhem clarified Leonardo's relation to precursors such as Albert of Saxony, Buridan, Nicolas Cues, and others, from the viewpoint of the scientist². The librarian and bibliophile however will lean upon a little reference book which in itself is a bibliophilistic curiosity.

It is Count Girolamo d'Adda's *Note di un bibliofilo*, Milan, 1873, privately printed in 75 copies, each copy given to another bibliophile with a holograph presentation and the calling card of Count d'Adda tipped in. After many years of searching for this book we finally acquired copy 19, presented to Baron James Nathaniel de Rothschild, February 1, 1873.

D'Adda's study is a critical analysis and bibliographical interpretation of Leonardo's so-called "booklist", *Codex Atlanticus*, folio 210 a. When Leonardo jotted 37 book titles and authors' names on a large sheet of paper he certainly did not anticipate that his disregard for bibliographical procedures would create both headaches and pleasure for future generations of scholars and collectors. From Leonardo's scanty notes *d'abbaco*, *plinio*, *bibia*, *de re militare*, etc., d'Adda identified the editions Leonardo might have used. D'Adda probably did this with the same delight which we feel when some of these venerable volumes appear in our reach.

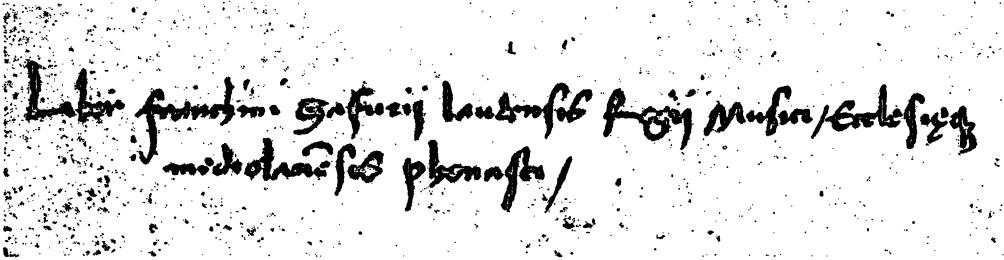


FIG. 2. Gafurio's ownership entry in Plutarch 1491, titlepage, fol. a1b.

Leonardo who called himself an unlearned man read, of course, more books than the 37 which were on his book list and which were subsequently described by Count d'Adda. At the Mostra of Leonardo da Vinci in Milan in 1939, 114 manuscripts and books were exhibited as Biblioteca di Leonardo. They were assembled from the great Italian Libraries for the short period of the exhibition. In this corner of the world which was not known in Leonardo's day we have started to bring together as a permanent collection the editions which can be documented as Leonardo's sources of learning—the books he read in the editions he used. At this date we have 35 incunabula and 21 books printed between 1501 and 1519 the year of Leonardo's death. For the purpose of collecting these books we have made an almost utopic "desiderata list" extracting from various sources the names of authors quoted by Leonardo with notes stating where and in what context he quoted them. Our recently acquired Plutarch was on this list.

Plutarchi vitae. Venice, Johannes Rigatius de Monteferrato (For L. Giunta), December 7, 1491.

Pagination: CXLV; CXLVIII leaves—292 leaves.

Collation in signatures: a-r^s; s¹⁰; A-S^s.

Typography: 63 lines to the page.

Size: 31.3 cm.

Binding: Quarter binding in vellum and marbled paper.

Contents: Fly leaf, modern; a1a half title: *Plutarchi vitae*; a1b tabula and Ms. note by Gafurio; a2a title and beginning of text with woodcut decoration; a2a-s 10 a text; s 10 b registrum; A1a beginning of text of second part with woodcut decorations; A1a-S8a text; S8a colophon and holograph note by Gafurio; S8b blank; fly leaf modern.

Note: On inside cover and on modern fly leaf bibliographical notes,



FIG. 3. Plutarchi vitae, Venice 1491 fol. a2a Titlepage.



FIG. 4. Plutarchi vitae Venice 1491 2nd titlepage A1a, detail.

and the bookplate of C. W. Dyson-Perrins. This copy was acquired from A. Rosenthal, Oxford, in April 1950. Hain 13129; Essling II, 594. Illustrations: a2a and A1a woodcut borders and illustrations.

Decorative initials at the beginning of each biography; S8a printer's mark with the Giunta lily. The two woodcut title pages a2a and A1a are composed of ornamental borders surrounding a title vignette and the beginning of the text. These borders and vignettes are early examples of graceful and delicate decorations used for more than this one book, migrating from one printer to the other. The elegant border which Gio-

vanni Ragazzo used for both the Italian Bible translated by Nicola Mallermi in 1490, and for our Plutarch in 1491, seems with its pagan gods and symbols more fitting for the Gracco-Roman Plutarch than for the biblical texts. From a pediment with naked riders on horseback and satyrs playing on string instruments pilasters arise decorated with vases and antique cameos. On the ornate frieze two eagles watch the surmounting arch. Outside the architectonic framework tritons lift trophies on slender poles and graceful festoons drop from above. In the center of the pediment an escutcheon is left empty for the arms of the owner of the book. Where in the Mallermi Bible vignettes with scenes of the creation fill the space within the border a battle of centaurs drawn in exquisite lines appear in the Plutarch edition. Friedrich Lippmann³, who places great importance on these illustrations, feels especially reminded of Antonio Pollaiuolo. The second title page shows the same framework with a smaller vignette representing Cimon behind a barred window—possibly to illustrate a scene from his trial—his accuser Pericles passes the prison on horseback, both horse and rider in splendid armor, walking over the sword and shield of the prisoner.

In order to reach a more complete survey of the books accessible to Leonardo one should revive his environment. His vivid interest both in the technicalities of the art of printing⁴ and in the printed product makes it probable that he saw the prominent publications which originated in his environment. Leonardo's notes on books are rather casual, but a few of his memoranda suffice to tell us what importance he gave to books in the possession of persons he knew: "Messer Fatio to show you (the book) of proportions" "Get the Friar of the Brera to show you the *de Ponderibus*" "See the Vitellone in the Library at Pavia which deals with mathematics"⁵.

Among the intelligentsia of the Sforza court the figure of the musician Franchino Gafurio stands in sharp relief so near Leonardo that it does not seem presumptuous to believe that Leonardo knew him well and that, perhaps, the two men together bent over the pages of the Plutarch acquired by Gafurio in 1494. Gafurio was appointed *magister biscantandi in ecclesia majori Mediolani* on April 27, 1484⁶. He came two years after Leonardo had arrived in Lodovico Sforza's court with a silver lute in his hand. Leonardo was accompanied by another musician, the young and beautiful Atalante Migliorrotti, a singer and builder of musical instruments. While the Sforza court resounded with light music, everyone singing and playing, Leonardo would not have ignored the magnificent choir of the

Duomo founded by Werbecke⁷ and then directed by Gafurio. He surely discussed Gafurio's musical innovations, possibly even before they came into print in Milan in 1492. Previously the *Theorica musicae* had been published in Naples in 1480. Of the 1492 edition a facsimile was printed in Milan, 1934. This book is also present in the Elmer Belt Library. Gafurio's *Practica musicae* appeared in Latin, Milan, 1496. Gafurio compiled his more popular Italian *Angelicum* from parts of his earlier works, to quote from his first chapter — "because many unlearned people make their profession in music . . . they acquire only with great difficulty the knowledge of the rules of harmony because they do not understand our works and those of other worthy Latin writers which are written in an ornate and obscure style. Therefore, we have thought of meeting their desires and also those of many religious ladies who want to praise God with all the celestial hosts . . ."⁸ *De Harmonia* 1518 is also a first edition, in Latin, the history of which is described in Franz Unterkircher's article *Libri* 1950: 1: 51-57.

Angelicum ac divinum opus musice / Franchini Gafurii laudensis Re / gii musici: ecclesieq; Me / diolanensis phonasci: / materna lingua / scriptum. / Colophon: Milan. Gotardo da Ponte, September 16, 1508.
with

. . . de harmonia musicorum in / strumentorum opus. / Colophon: Milan, Gotardo da Ponte, November 27, 1518.

Angelicum:

Pagination: 48 unnumbered leaves.

Collation: A⁴; B⁶-F⁶; G⁴-H⁴; I⁶.

de Harmonia:

Pagination: [4] 100 [2] leaves.

Collation: a⁴; A-M⁸, N⁶.

Both *Angelicum* and *de Harmonia:*

Size: 27 cm.

Binding: Quarter binding brown calf and marbled paper, by Simier R. du Roi, according to stamp on fly leaf.

Contents: *Angelicum*: A1a title; A1b blank; A2a-A2b dedicatory sonnets and poems, headed by woodcut, table of contents, introductory letter; B1a-I3b text interspersed with woodcuts; I4a-I5b register, laudatory verses, colophon with printer's mark, I6a blank; A6b end of verses and end woodcut.

de Harmonia: a1a-a4b title, dedicatory verses to Grolier, tables of contents



FIG. 5. Franchino Gafurio, *Angelicum* Titlepage A 2a; also *de Harmonia* a1a.

and Grolier coat-of-arms; A1a-N4b text interspersed with woodcuts, register; N5a-N6b laudatory notes on Gafurio, sonnets and Endecasyllabon with dedication to Grolier, colophon and end woodcut.

Note: Brunet: II, p. 345.

Illustrations: Both works, the *Angelicum* and *de Harmonia*, begin with the half page woodcut illustration of Gafurio surrounded by 12 of his students whom he is teaching. The same woodcut also headed the *Practica musicae* of 1496. In the Grolier manuscript the same composition appeared though more elaborate and refined in execution. The effort of the printer and wood engraver Guillaume de Signerre of Rouen is described by Franz Unterkircher in *Libri* 1950:1, p. 54-57, in his comparison of the Grolier manuscript with the printed editions of Gafurio 1496 and 1518. The character of the illustrations is Milanese: according to Lipmann the wood blocks may have been cut by Venitian craftsmen who brought new artistic growth to the arts of the book in Milan.

Ioannis Iacobi Lomati Mediolanensis disicon :

Acthenios quicunque cupis cognoscere cantus :
Franchini hoc opus est : sat tibi lector habes .

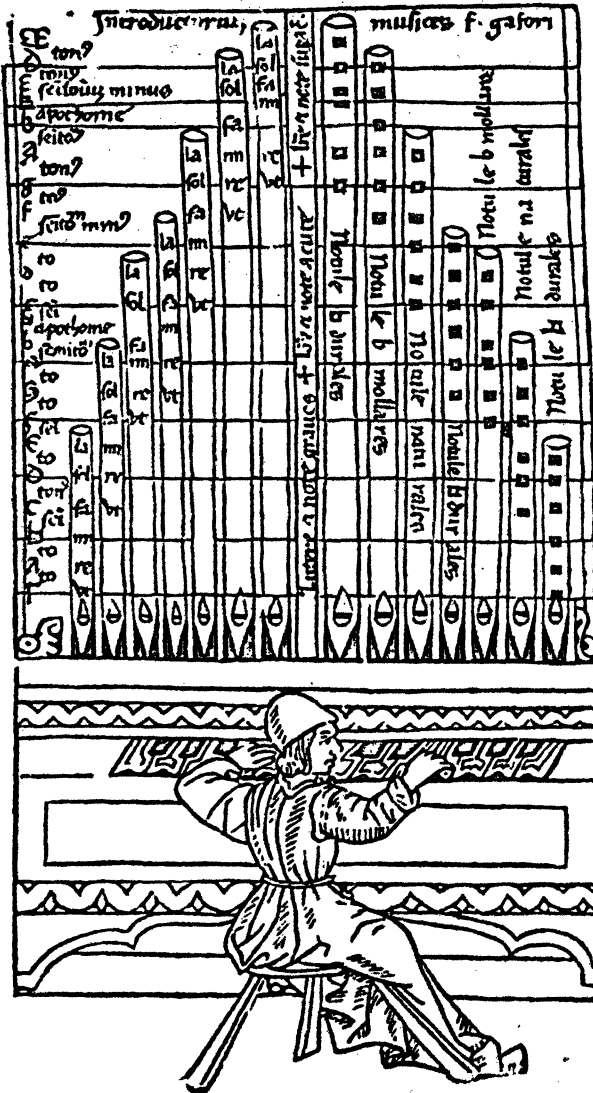


FIG. 6. Franchino Gafurio, *Angelicum*, 16b. The woodcut with different text appears also *De Harmonia* N6b.



Alcuni altri compositori de cantilene frequentano altri signi per cognitiōe de q̄ste quātra ascriuēdo el circulo & semicirculo al modo maggiore & la zifra deli nūeri ternario & biario: al modo minore: & ācora al tēpo: quorū affluctu dinē (imo corruptelā) reprobauimus octauo capite scđi libri practicz nostrz.

FIG. 7. Franchino Gafurio, *Angelicum* F2a. Musical diagram.

The *Angelicum* and *de Harmonia* have each at the end of the book a full page woodcut of Gafurio playing his organ. The initial space in the *Angelicum* is open but throughout *de Harmonia* a variety of decorative initials are used. Together the works contain about 100 musical diagrams, some of them intricate requiring the greatest technical skill of an accomplished wood engraver. On folios *A4b* and *B1a* of the *Angelicum* the text is framed by wide decorative borders. *B1a* illustrates the power of music with medallions of Amphion, Orpheus and Arion and putti holding an empty escutcheon. Gafurio's work represents a remarkable step toward the development of musical harmony and the printing of chords in a period in which musicians did not know how to write several notes on a staff.

In *de Harmonia* recur the full page illustrations of musical proportions with 8 musicians playing on wind instruments and on M6b the "harmonies of the spheres" with allegoric representations of Apollo, the Muses and planets⁹.

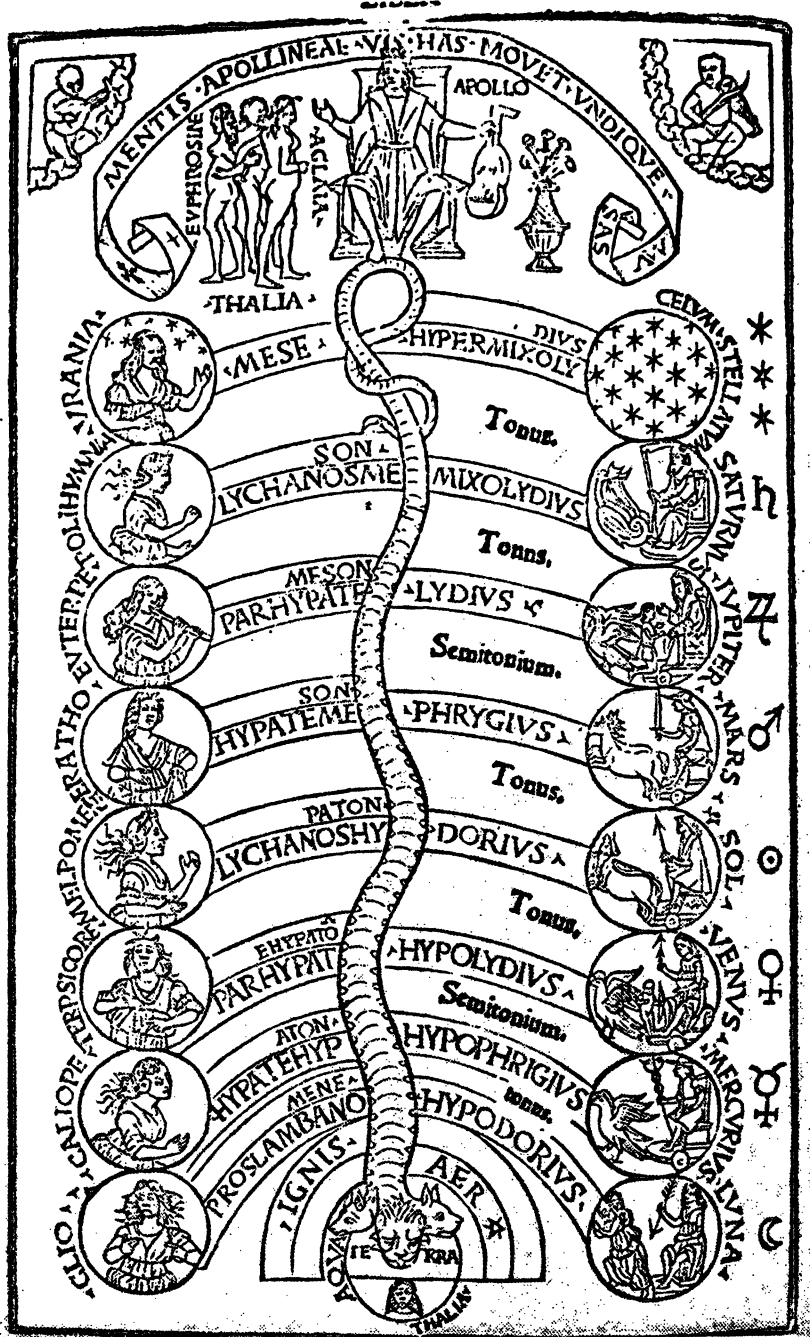


FIG. 9. Franchino Gafurio, *De Harmonia*, 1518, fol. M6b.
The Harmony of Spheres.



FIG. 10. Leonardo da Vinci. Portrait of a musician, ca. 1485. Ambrosiana. Milan.

On a4b is Grolier's coat-of-arms with two putti holding it as a tailpiece to a poem to Grolier. On N5b "Magister Gulielmus le signerre" addresses the reader apologetically for the imperfections of his illustrations.

It has been presumed that Leonardo drew the sketches for the woodcuts in Gafurio's theoretical works, however this attribution did not hold firm in the eyes of critics except, perhaps, for the group which pictures Gafurio teaching with his students about him. Count d'Adda believes that this composition is based upon a sketch Leonardo da Vinci made for Guillaume de Signerre¹⁰. In fact, even in the crude woodcut Gafurio's figure resembles the portrait of a musician (Gafurio?) in the Ambrosiana which for a long time was attributed to Leonardo's pupil *de Predis* but which is now presumed to be by Leonardo's own hand. With the identity of both the painter and the model now established, we have the most direct proof of Leonardo's relation to the musician Gafurio.

NOTES

- 1) Gafurio's ownership entries: A2b: "Liber Franchini Gafurii laudensis Regii Musici Ecclesiaeque mediolanensis phonasti". S8a: "Hic liber est pbri. Franchini gafuri musici emptus pretio librarum quinque et soldorum decem in die xviiiio Januarii, 1494".
- 2) Duhem, Pierre. *Études sur Léonard de Vinci, Ceux qu'il a lus et ceux qui l'ont lu*. Paris, A. Herman, 1906-1913. 3 v.
- 3) Lippmann, Friedrich. *The art of wood-engraving in Italy in the 15th century*. London, Bernard Quaritch, 1888.
- 4) Leonardo da Vinci. *Cod. Atl.* 358 r b. Leonardo designed a printing press in which he introduced a mechanical device to move the platen.
- 5) Leonardo da Vinci. *Cod. Atl.* 225 r b.
- 6) Malaguzzi-Valeri, Francesco. *La corte di Lodovico il Moro, le arti industriali, la letteratura, la musica*. Milan, Hoepli, 1923. pp. 206 ff.
- 7) Richter, Jean Paul. *The literary works of Leonardo da Vinci*. London, New York, Oxford University Press, 1939. I, p. 73 ff.
- 8) Malaguzzi-Valeri, *op. cit.*, also Gafurio, *Angelicum* 1508, fol. B1a.
- 9) Compare the woodcut version with the illustration of the Grolier in Libri 1950: 1, p. 55.
- 10) D'Adda, Gerolamo. *Léonard de Vinci, la gravure milanese et Passavant*. Paris, Gazette des Beaux Arts, XXV, 1868.