

Federico da Montefeltro and His Library

June 8 through September 30, 2007

Exhibition Labels

1. ***Double Portrait of Federico da Montefeltro and His Son Guidobaldo***
Urbino, ca. 1475, attributed to Justus of Ghent or Pedro Berruguete
Urbino, Galleria Nazionale delle Marche (Cat. 1)
This is the official portrait of the Duke of Urbino, painted after 1474, when Federico da Montefeltro received the Order of the Garter from the king of England and the Ermine from the king of Naples. Federico is wearing both decorations and reading Gregory the Great's *Commentary on the Book of Job* (Cat. 3). Job is the supreme example of man enduring trials of faith, *fede* in Italian—a pun on *Federico* as one who is “rich in faith.” Both Justus of Ghent and Pedro Berruguete were active at Urbino in the 1470s.
2. **Gospels, in Latin**
Urbino, ca. 1480, written by Matteo Contugi da Volterra and illuminated by Guglielmo Giraldi and workshop (Alessandro Leoni?), Franco dei Russi, and Pietro Guindaleri
Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Urb. lat. 10, fols. 174v–75r (Cat. 2)
This luxury Gospels was illuminated by artists from Ferrara. The elaborate miniature, enclosed within an architectural framework, depicts St. John writing on the island of Patmos, with his attribute, the eagle. Within the base, the chiseled initial *I* (*In principio*), decorated with gold vines, leads to the first words of John's Gospel. Below the base are two reversed cornucopias, at whose center figure the arms of Federico—the crowned eagle flanked by the initials *FD* (Federico Duke). The volume was worthy of being exhibited during the Second Vatican Council in 1962.
3. **Saint Gregory the Great, *Commentary on the Book of Job*, in Latin**
Florence, ca. 1474–75
Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Urb. lat. 96, fols. 1v–2r
Gregory the Great is represented in half length and turned three quarters to the right. The pope is usually represented with a dove, symbol of the Holy Spirit, inspiring his work. The singular presence of God the Father in the illuminated initial perhaps indicates a deeper interpretation of the patristic text, consonant with the allegorical reading of the biblical vicissitudes of Job. The five roundels (from the upper right corner and proceeding clockwise) narrate the history of Job's life: God the Father entrusts the fate of Job to the Devil; Job talks with the messenger; God the Father appears to Job and his family; the Devil makes the fire of the plague come down on the head of Job; Job, covered in sores, with his wife and friends. This may be the manuscript being read by Federico in the *Double Portrait* (Cat. 1).
4. **Francesco della Rovere (Pope Sixtus IV), *De Sanguine Christi*, and *De potentia Dei, De futuris contingentibus*, in Latin**
Urbino, between 1474 and 1482, illuminated by Franco dei Russi
Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Urb. lat. 151, fols. 5v–6r (Cat. 4)
The opening miniature is the most richly decorated of the manuscript. It shows a portrait of a pope who could be Sixtus IV (r. 1471–84), who at the time was still cardinal Francesco della Rovere, or Paul II (1464–71), to whom the works are dedicated. The pontiff offers a benediction with his right

hand, while holding an open book with his left; for comparison, see his portrait in the studiolo. Sixtus IV was a subtle theologian who wrote three tracts: *On Christ's Blood*, *On God's Power*, and *On Future Contingencies*, which is concerned with the truth of propositions, considering falsity as the “evil of the intellect.”

5. **Francesco Berlinghieri, *Septe Giornate della Geographia*, in Italian**
Florence, ca. 1482, attributed to Attavante (1452–before 1525) and others
Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Urb. lat. 273, fols. 3v–4r (Cat. 5)
Berlinghieri’s monumental *Septe Giornate della Geographia* contains many lavish maps of the world (Europe, Africa, and Asia), of Italy, and of its cities. Berlinghieri (1440–1500) translated Ptolemy’s *Cosmography* into Italian verse and dedicated the work to Federico da Montefeltro, whose name, ducal arms, and emblems appear repeatedly throughout the manuscript. There is also an apologue addressed to the duke (fol. 1v) by the Florentine philosopher Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499), his friend and founder of the Platonic Academy, of which Berlinghieri was also a member. *The restoration of the binding was made possible by a generous grant of the Foundation for Italian Art and Culture.*
6. **Virgil, *Opera*, in Latin**
Florence, between 1450 and 1475, with a miniature added by Guglielmo Giraldi in Urbino in the late 1470s
Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Urb. lat. 350, fols. 45v–46r (Cat. 6)
Giraldi’s elaborate miniature depicts Aeneas saving his father, Anchises, and son, Iulus. In the background are the city of Troy in flames, the Trojan horse, and the procession of Trojans carrying statues of the gods. Aeneas’s wife, Creusa, enters a cave to the left. In the foreground are ships in the harbor. On the architrave is an inscription in capital letters from the *Aeneid* (II, 289). In the studiolo, the portrait of Virgil, next to Homer, is on the upper level of this wall. Virgil’s presence is reinforced by the motto *Virtutibus itur ad astra* (Through virtues you will reach heaven), a crypto-quotation from the *Aeneid* (IX, 641) that one can read on a piece of paper on the north wall (facing the door).
7. **Poggio Bracciolini, *Historia Florentina*, in Latin**
Florence, ca. 1472, written by Gundisalvus Hispanus and illuminated by the Master of the Hamilton Xenophon and others
Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Urb. lat. 491, fols. 3v–4r (Cat. 7)
This elegant volume contains the *Historia Florentina* of Poggio Bracciolini (1380–1459), a work which, upon his death, was revised, completed, and divided into eight books by his son, Jacopo (1442–1478). Jacopo also composed the prologue, which he dedicated to Federico da Montefeltro. At the request of the Florentine Signoria, in the spring of 1472, Federico led a military campaign to suppress the rebellion in Volterra. The city surrendered on June 18th, and the victorious *condottiere* was honored in Florence with a triumphal celebration. This full-page miniature depicts Federico on horseback. The city of Volterra is in the background.
8. **Antiphony, Proper of Saints, in Latin**
Urbino, ca. 1480, illuminated by Bartolomeo della Gatta and others
Urbino, Museo Diocesano Albani, Choir Book D.6, fols. 40v–41r (Cat. 8)
This antiphony is part of a series that also includes two others—the Proper of Time and the Common of Saints. The Proper of Saints includes saints with specific feast days. Here, for example, is the music for the Office of St. Agatha, celebrated on February 5. The historiated initial *D*, attributed to Bartolomeo della Gatta, shows Agatha’s breasts being cut off.
9. **Montefeltro’s lectern**
Northern Europe, probably 1470s
Urbino, Museo Diocesano Albani (Cat. 9)
This spectacular lectern was the central piece of furniture in Federico da Montefeltro’s library. The eagle-shaped top bears the family coat of arms. The lectern was packed in three separate boxes and

shipped to Rome along with the surviving books of the library in 1657. Pope Alexander VII (r. 1655–67) admired the object and thought it was made in Germany. The lectern was eventually returned by Pope Clement XI (r. 1700–1721) to the Cathedral of Urbino in 1717.

The restoration of the lectern was made possible by a generous grant of the Foundation for Italian Art and Culture.

10. **Iacobus of Speyer (?), *Horoscope for the Year 1475, in Latin***

Northern Italy, probably late 1474

New Haven, Yale University, Beinecke Library, Mellon MS 13, fol. 1r (Cat. 10)

This horoscope was written and illuminated—perhaps in Ferrara or Milan, or even Urbino—for the author, whose name was carefully erased from the heading of fol. 1r and the final paragraph on fol. 95v. It was presented to Federico da Montefeltro probably on or very near to New Year's Day 1475. Astrology was very popular during the Renaissance, especially at the Urbino court. Virtually no significant political or personal action would be undertaken without consulting at least one resident astrologer, possibly Iacobus of Speyer. Ultimately the typically ambiguous language of the astrologer says what Federico wanted to hear at the outset of his crucial first year as the Duke of Urbino.

11. **Origen of Alexandria, *Contra Celsum et in fidei Christianae defensionem, in the Latin translation of Christophorus Persona***

Rome, January 1481, printed by Georgius Herolt

Bryn Mawr College Library, Goff O-95 (Cat. 11)

Vespasiano da Bisticci, the Florentine book dealer who was responsible for most of the illuminated manuscripts for the Duke of Urbino, claimed that his client's taste was too refined to allow the purchase of any printed books. Nevertheless, this volume is one of the three extant incunables bearing Federico da Montefeltro's coat of arms. The elegant work of Origen was translated from Greek into Latin by Cristoforo Persona, a monk and prior of the Williamite house attached to the church of Santa Balbina on the Little Aventine in Rome. The volume was published there in 1481, one year before Federico's death.

12. **Federico da Montefeltro, letter to Piero Felici, in Italian**

Urbino, dated 7 February 1478

New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MA 4338 (Cat. 12)

Early 1478 was a time of intense diplomatic negotiations in Italy. Although seriously injured, Federico da Montefeltro, the highest-paid mercenary captain, was being courted by all the major powers to sign a new military contract with them. Federico wrote this chancery letter to his agent in Rome, Piero Felici, who had reported that the two Milanese ambassadors there had conveyed the good disposition of the Duchess of Milan, Bona of Savoy, toward the Duke of Urbino. In the polite and oblique language of diplomacy, he professed loyalty and gratitude to the duchess, while in fact preparing to strike against her greatest ally, Florentine leader Lorenzo de' Medici.