

Cicero, Marcus Tullius. *De oratore*. Subiaco : Conradus Sweynheym and Arnoldus Pannartz, 30 September 1465.

109 f. 2°

Collation: a-g10, h9, i-110

Old shelf marks: 173/5/21

The first folio contains a handwritten annotation from the nineteenth century: *Jesus Maria Joseph. Tres libri de Oratore Opus Marci Tullii Ciceronis*.

Until recently, this book was considered to be the first printed book in Italy and outside of Germany. It is the oldest printed book preserved in the University of Barcelona Library.

Probably seeking to enhance their prestige before presenting themselves in Rome, the German printers Conrad Sweynheim and Arnold Pannartz stayed for a period at the Benedictine monastery of Subiaco in Lazio, demonstrating the new invention of the printing press. At that time, Lazio was home to a large colony of German monks and the two printers published numerous works at the monastery. They printed a work by Lactantius on 29 October 1465, but no information exists on the printing date of *De oratore*. Documentary sources, however, do note the purchase by Carlo Fumagalli in the nineteenth century of a copy of *De oratore* with a handwritten note on the last page. The note states that the scholar Antonio Tridentone corrected the text on 30 September 1465, which supports the view that *De oratore* had already been in print a month before the edition of the Lactantius. That would make it the first book to emerge from the Subiaco printing press and, therefore, in all of Italy. The Fumagalli copy with the correction note was acquired by the Gewerbemuseum of Leipzig and later destroyed by a bombing raid during the Second World War.

Early incunabula are characterized by their similarity to manuscripts. Indeed, the manuscript provided the model for early books, making their resemblance logical. In this respect, the UB incunable represents the typographical equivalent to the humanist manuscript 358, which also appears in the Virtual Museum. This is also the reason why no indication of the title appears at the beginning of the work (the handwritten annotation that does appear is much later). Nor does any information on the imprint appear. Instead, the beginning of the book was left blank so that decorated initials could be added later, following the manuscript tradition. In the same way, wide margins around the text give the whole work a great beauty and remind us of the manuscript model from it comes.

The lettering used is not Gothic, which was found in the first printed books in Germany. Instead, the intention was to create a new typeface that imitated the script that appears in classical manuscripts. The new Carolingian script was called *littera antiqua*—known as *romana* nowadays—and it was closely related to the reproduction of classical and humanist texts.

The binding of the incunable is made of parchment with modern millboard and the ex-libris on the first page indicates that it comes from the convent of Sant Josep of Barcelona, an order of Barefoot Carmelites, possibly from the collection of Canon Besora.

(NV)