

RETHINKING THE MANUSCRIPT TRADITION OF *ARBOR VITE CRUCIFIXE IESU*: UNVEILING NEW INSIGHTS

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This contribution presents a brand-new comprehensive examination, with paleographic and codicological insights, of the thirty-eight manuscripts that transmit Ubertino da Casale's «Arbor vite crucifixe Iesu» in non-fragmentary forms, thus identifying its Latin manuscript tradition. Disseminated along at least three main geographical axes, the Italian, Brabantian-Rhenish, and Franco-Iberian areas, it now relies on revised chronological and topical coordinates. Previously reliant on outdated reference materials (when not entirely absent), these coordinates, have been redefined. Furthermore, the material features, functions and transmission circumstances of many of these manuscripts have been reconstructed.

Although long anticipated, a comprehensive and systematic study of the entire manuscript tradition of the *Arbor vite crucifixe Iesu* (henceforth *AVC*) has never been realized¹. The research efforts conducted so far resemble rather episodic campaigns of examining individual witnesses or limited portions of the manuscript tradition. These efforts have been primarily instrumental in contributing arguments relevant to Ubertino's biography and literary output². Focused around a handful of significant dates and associated with the names of Frédégand Callaey (1911-1921)³, Bertrand Guyot (1976)⁴,

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1. This contribution is part of the research activities outlined in PRIN 2020 program (Progetti di Ricerca di Rillevante Interesse Nazionale), focused on *The Latin Middle Ages. A comprehensive bibliographic repertory of writers, texts and manuscripts*. According with those project lines, this paper provides an overview of the first results achieved in the study and edition of Ubertino da Casale's most important work, *Arbor vite crucifixe Iesu* (as further elaborated in footnote 12). It was presented and discussed during the international workshop *The Franciscan Vita Christi Tradition*, organized by ELTE - Eötvös Loránd University, Faculty of Humanities, and held in Budapest on the 3rd and 4th of July 2023. For the full version of the research work, refer to SAIANI 2023.

2. It suffices to recall the outcomes achieved at the dedicated conference, accessible within the volume *Ubertino da Casale*, wherein a comprehensive overview is provided by BARTOLI 2014, pp. 3-26. This is followed by various biographical reconstructions, including that of MONTEFUSCO 2014, pp. 27-81, and SORIANI INNOCENTI 2014, pp. 325-402. Noteworthy are also the analyses of the established influences between his works and his cultural and doctrinal milieu: PARMEGGIANI 2014, pp. 149-187; VIAN 2014, pp. 217-298; LAMBERTINI 2014, pp. 229-323, along with their reception: PIRON 2014, pp. 403-442.

3. CALLAEY 1911; and IDEM 1921, pp. 533-546.

4. GUYOT 1976, pp. 293-307.

Carlos Mateo Martínez Ruiz (1996)⁵, and Stephen Mossman (2009)⁶: these works are sufficiently known within recent historiography to not require further summarization⁷.

Instead, the difficulties that have arisen from these historiographic inquiries concerning the interpretation – or better said: the very understanding – of the manuscript tradition of *AVC* as an authentic «testo precursore nella prassi di ordinata meditazione della vita di Cristo» («precursor text in the practice of ordered meditation on the life of Christ»)⁸, clarify the reasons why a genuine critical edition of this text is still desired. This way, the *incunabulum* of 1485, still considered the most reliable recourse for those wishing to read Ubertino's work in its entirety, can be properly preserved and definitely overcome⁹.

As Daniele Solvi has emphasized on several occasions, the task of a scholarly reconstruction of the text can no longer be deferred. This process should commence with a preliminary assessment of the stemmatic relationships among the witnesses and, even before that, with an in-depth analysis of each individual witness¹⁰. Thus, as Enrico Menestò puts it, it should begin with the «primato della filologia» («primacy of philology»)¹¹.

Overshadowed by the protracted editorial debate on the existence of multiple authorial redactions, the corpus of *AVC* witnesses has never truly been the subject of an investigation that started and proceeded directly into the heart of chronological – in most cases ambiguously compressed within the bounds of the 15th century – and topical coordinates. When not expressly ignored, these coordinates have, in fact, been derived from outdated compendia, both in terms of content and methodological approaches. Hence, a return to the manuscripts in their materiality is the foremost requirement to move towards the aforementioned primacy of philology.

The opportunity to enhance and systematize the primary data provided by the examination of all the manuscript copies of *AVC* was presented to me within the framework of the preparatory work for the eagerly anticipated critical edition, coordinated by Daniele Solvi and promoted by the Scientific Committee of the *Edizioni Nazionali dei Testi Mediolatini d'Italia*, with the support of S.I.S.M.E.L. (Società Internazionale per lo Studio del Medioevo Latino) in Florence¹².

5. MARTÍNEZ RUIZ 1996, pp. 447-468; IDEM 1997, pp. 275-278, with some improvements in IDEM 2014, pp. 113-147.

6. MOSSMAN 2009, pp. 199-280; IDEM 2010, pp. 87-92.

7. The most recent overview of the historiographical debate of the last century can be found in SOLVI 2022, pp. 72-78 e in SAIANI 2023.

8. SOLVI 2022, p. 64.

9. Two copies of the *incunabulum* printed under the supervision of ANDREAM BONETTIS DE PAPIA in 1485 (Hain 4551; ISTC iu00055000) are available online. One has been digitized by the University Library of Ghent (https://books.google.it/books?id=lyFNAAAaAAJ&printsec=frontcover&hl=it&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false), and the other by the Universidad Complutense de Madrid (<http://hdl.handle.net/2027/ucm.5316857765>). The diligent and necessary use of this version of the work, still lacking a critical edition, is demonstrated by the reprint edited by DAVIS 1961. Of particular interest in this latter publication is the introductory section (pp. III-VIII), which effectively summarizes the issue of the circulation of the work in both Latin and vernacular languages throughout Europe.

10. Still by SOLVI 2022, pp. 78-82.

11. According with the terminology coined by MENESTÒ 1997, pp. 117-143, in which the scholar made an explicit «call to Lachmann» (p. 130), not only to emphasize the absolute and necessary «primacy of philology» (p. 117), but also to reiterate a specific methodological approach to be followed.

12. The metaphorical construction site for a new edition of the work was first presented during the XII Seminar on the History and Theology of Mysticism titled *Per l'edizione critica dell'Arbor vitae di Ubertino da Casale (Towards the Critical Edition of the Arbor vitae by Ubertino da Casale)*. This seminar took place at the headquarters of the Ezio Franceschini Foundation in Florence on July 9th, 2014. The event began with an introduction by Stefano

The preliminary quantitative data, which I will quickly present, is as follows. The *census* campaign conducted exclusively on the Latin witnesses of the work establishes a total of sixty-six manuscripts for this corpus. Twenty-six of these contain the work in very partial forms (to clarify: less than 20% of the text, *i.e.*, less than a single book) or even simple *excerpta*. Forty witnesses, on the other hand, transmit the *AVC* in a configuration known as «integrum aut fere»: a setup that considers witnesses containing either all five complete books or only one of them as comparable¹³. However, it is necessary to adjust this count by two units, as four of the previously considered “integral” manuscripts are, in fact, part of the same historical units¹⁴.

Among these, only twelve manuscripts present the complete five-book work, following the editorial plan provided by the author at the conclusion of the first Prologue (**Pro**)¹⁵. Eleven are organized within a single volume, while one, though complete, is divided into two tomes¹⁶.

In addition to this established number, I propose adding two more manuscripts that transmit *excerpta* from individual books, which would bring the total number of *AVC* witnesses to sixty-eight and the corresponding number of *excerpta* sections to twenty-eight¹⁷.

Brufani, followed by contributions from Silvia Nocentini (*Gli studi sul testo dell'Arbor e situazione del censimento dei manoscritti*), Massimiliano Bassetti (*Il manoscritto A dell'Arbor*), Silvia Pane (*La struttura dell'Arbor attraverso le sue rubriche. Indagine sul testo trasmesso dal testimone di Assisi*), Marina Soriani (*L'Arbor e la predicazione francescana*), Donatella Tronca (*Qualche osservazione catalografica sulla storia dei codici dell'Arbor*), Daniele Solvi (*Testi, nuove redazioni e rifacimenti nella letteratura religiosa tra XIII-XIV secolo*), and concluding remarks by Francesco Santi. New results from the first steps of *collatio* and *recensio* of each book witnesses of *AVC* are expected to be share: currently Daniele Solvi is working on Books I and II, as long as Pietro Filippini on Book III and Andrea Alessandri on the last one, Book V.

13. A first, renewed census of the codices that constitute the manuscript tradition of the work was carried out by Silvia Nocentini and is available in SOLVI 2020, pp. 278-281. The scholar had identified sixty-five witnesses, of which twenty-six transmit the work in the form of *excerpta*, including pseudo-epigraphic texts (*Tractatus de septem statibus ecclesiae*). To the thirty-nine “complete” witnesses, a recent addition has been made, another manuscript (already catalogued in the *Manus online* portal), information about which is provided in IDEM 2020, p. 63.

14. Indeed, the two volumes of the *AVC* housed in Lisbon at the National Library of Portugal, Fundo Geral, II. 81 and II. 82, should be considered as unified units, respectively nn. 16-17 in the *census* compiled by Nocentini (in SOLVI 2020, p. 279) and here in appendix **Lb**_{1,2}, as well as the two copies held at the Library of the University of Liège, 236 and 356 (nn. 13-14 in the same *census*), here in appendix **Lg**_{1,2}.

15. «Hunc autem librum *Arborem crucifixe vite Iesu* censui nominandum, quem in quinque libris sive voluminibus isto mox distinxi: ut primus liber radicem arboris contineat: incipiens ab eterna generatione Iesu de Patre usque ad gaudiosam nobis temporalem nativitatem ex matre. Secundum liber erigit huius sacre arboris stipitem incipiens a circumcissione Iesu usque ad manifestationem ipsius per testimonium precursoris. Tertius explicat huius arboris ramos in virtuoso predicationis Iesu decursu et electo discipulorum cetu incipiens a Iohanne Baptista usque ad ingressum ipsius in sacra civitate Hierusalem in die palmarum, in qua pro nobis se Deo Patre obtulit holocaustum. Quartum consumat huius felicis arboris summum ponens Iesu et sue reverendissime matris virtuosum passionis conflictum et gloriosissimum regnum: incipiens a regio ingressu Iesu in Hierusalem usque ad gloriosam assumptionem regine celi in Hierusalem supernam. Quintum et ultimus est de multiplici huius sacre arboris fructu in multitudine fidelis prolis ex gentili ecclesia sibi de novo martyrio copulata et pretendit usque ad eternum sposalitium beatificate universaliter humane nature»: ANDREAM BONETTIS DE PAPIA 1485, p. 3.

16. Concerning the overmentioned manuscripts **Lb**_{1,2}, both of which can be dated to the mid-15th century (see footnote 14).

17. These are the manuscripts: Assisi, Biblioteca della SISF, Assisi, Biblioteca di Chiesa Nuova, 13, ff. 93r-94r (15th century), paper, 157 folios; Milano, Biblioteca nazionale Braidense, Manoscritti, AD.XIII.41, ff. 4r-13v, 29r-35v (15th century: partially dated to 1426), paper and parchment, composite from antiquity, originating from the Certosa di Pavia. On ff. 79r, there is a dating indication: «MCCCCXXII die primo mensis Augusti. Hii sermones dentur dono Johanni (corrected to *Jacobo*) de Puteobonello monacho et professo monasterii domne Sancte Marie de Gratia ordinis Cartusiensis prope civitatem papie».

The fragmentary nature of this surviving specimen in relation to the original manuscript “population” – that is unreconstructable by definition, because, as Luigi Schiaparelli said, we are working with fragments – is indicated by the certain knowledge of six additional witnesses that are now lost. Some of these are of particular importance within the context of the author’s biography. This includes the case of the two manuscripts listed in the 15th-century catalogs of both the Franciscan convent of Santa Croce in Florence¹⁸, and the Convent of San Francesco in Siena¹⁹, as well as the manuscript that was exchanged between Franciscan *loca* in Venice and Mantua in 1467²⁰.

However, the research group currently tasked with the editorial work has decided to exclude from the collation base those witnesses that contain excerpts of the work, in order to focus attention solely on the thirty-eight manuscripts that are considered «*integra aut fere*», to use the adopted formula²¹.

The first and essential preliminary task for the reconstruction of the context in which to place the affiliations suggested by the collation of the transmitted texts is to provide new and more accurate chronological and topical datings for these *specimina*. This is a delicate and complex operation, inevitably permeated by the relativism that every attempt to classify the galaxy of XIV and XV centuries textual writings carries with it²². It should be clarified from the outset that, in the absence of *explicit* indications provided by individual manuscripts, when I refer to topical datings based on the examination of the script, such datings should not be understood as allusions to the geographical context of the production of the books, but rather as indications of the probable places of origin of the scribes. Moreover, regarding this matter, the five manuscripts explicitly dated based on their *colophones* – of which I will elaborate further – do not

18. See MAZZI 1897, p. 136; the manuscript is indicated as «Arbor vite Ubertini de Casali, in XXX banco, ex parte claustra». Also, see FIESOLI – SOMIGLI 2009, pp. 104-105, n. 616.

19. See HUMPHREYS 1978, pp. 50-165 (cfr. FIESOLI – SOMIGLI 2009, pp. 287-288, n. 1698), specifically n. 497: «in duodecimo et ultimo a dextris iuxta murum sunt hi libri omnes in pergamento uno excepto et cathena».

20. Refer in this regard to RUSCONI 1975, p. 95. It is also worth mentioning two manuscripts that have certainly been destroyed more recently: the one formerly held at the Escorial, which was burned in the fire of 1671, and the copy with the first two books, which belonged to the Augustinian canons of Böddeken in Westphalia, preserved at the University Library in Münster (with the signature Staender 528) until 1945. For these aspects, see PIRON 2014, pp. 427-428; ANTOLIN 1910, p. 409 e MOSSMAN 2009, p. 206.

21. SOLVI 2020, p. 279.

22. Renowned scholars have issued cautionary notes regarding such endeavors, providing masterful insights both in terms of methodology and practical application. Notable among these are Armando Petrucci (for a comprehensive overview, see PETRUCCI 2017, pp. 127-246), Stefano Zamponi (ZAMPONI 1988, pp. 315-354), Paola Supino Martini (see at least the foundational works SUPINO MARTINI 1993, 1995, 2000), and Attilio Bartoli Langeli (BARTOLI LANGELI 1999, particularly p. 18). They concur in underscoring the inherent relativism in any attempt to categorize the array of textual scribal writings from these two centuries. The *littera moderna* (or *textualis script*: formerly known as Gothic script) employed in scholarly books from the 13th to the 15th centuries, as a result of its easily learnable technique (comprising mainly short straight strokes known as pen touches or strokes), was standardized to such a degree that traditional methods of paleographic analysis are now scarcely useful for distinguishing individual or even geographic characteristics of various executions. Naturally, attempts have been made in this direction, although such efforts have not always garnered unanimous agreement. A notable example is DEROLEZ 2003, which builds upon and expands the teachings of LIEFTINCK 1954, pp. 15-34, and LIEFTINCK – GUMBERT 1988, particularly pp. 23-34. A vigorous defense of the classification system proposed by Lieftinck, and thus the immense utility of results provided by dated manuscript catalogs, has been offered more recently by Derolez in DE ROBERTIS – GIOVÈ MARCHIOLI 2017, pp. 61-74, and in his nomenclature proposal for Gothic scripts in COULSON – BABCOCK 2020, pp. 301-320.

really contribute to articulating the picture more distinctly with the areas of dissemination of the work as already established in critical discussions, albeit with the caution stated here: the Italian peninsula, the Franco-Iberian areas, and the Rhenish-Brabantian region.

Drawing on the signals provided solely by the material construction of these thirty-eight specimens – and thus, for the moment, without highlighting textual data – the three *testimoni antiquiores* reflect graphic styles firmly established for scribes trained in northern Italy. If not already «contemporaries of the author», the *littera textualis* of the elegant illuminated manuscript, commissioned by a secular and aristocratic patron, now held at the Public Library in Cardiff (**Ca**), should be considered just slightly later. This manuscript, with sound reasons, can be regarded as the oldest surviving witness of the *AVC*²³. Moreover, the graphic features of the principal scribe show more than significant correspondences with manuscripts whose dating to the first half of the 14th century and to the northwestern area of the Peninsula is certain. An illustrative example is the case of the so-called Codex Cocharelli, definitely associated with Genoa and recently dated to the two decades between the 1330s and 1340s, with the support of a suggestive dated example²⁴. **Ca** is also, along with the ms. Assisi, 328 (**A**), the only other codex in the entire tradition that transmits the image of Ubertino in the inhabited initial of the second prologue (**Pro**₂; **Pro**₁ being missing)²⁵. This is an extraordinarily vivid and realistic portrait, wherein the author, depicted in profile, tonsured and with a hint of a beard at the chin, wears a Franciscan habit with rich drapery. Kneeling with crossed arms on the chest, palms facing inward (a sign of humility and voluntary submission), he meditates before a large crucifix, subject to subsequent cropping²⁶. From the hand of the same skillful illuminator, two male figures

23. An essential description of the manuscript can be found in KER 1977, pp. 367-368. According to Hauf I Valls, this copy would be considered the oldest exemplar of the manuscript tradition of the *AVC*, even possibly «contemporani de l'autor» («contemporary with the author»): HAUF I VALLS 1986, p. 13.

24. Under this definition, we gather fragments that were detached from their original bookbinding due to market reasons. These fragments can be identified as originating from a small codex containing a treatise on moral edification concerning the seven deadly sins (with a section, apparently, reserved for virtues). The author compiled this treatise as a guide for the education of his son, Giovanni, by weaving together the family stories surrounding their ancestor Pellegrino Cocharelli. The Cocharelli family were merchants who arrived in the Levant from the South of France and became present in Genoa starting from the late 1320s, holding prominent positions in the Republic's government. The twenty-seven cuttings are currently organized into six preservation units, distributed across three collection sites: London, British Library, MS. Add. 27695 (fifteen folios, assembled by mounting on paper bifolia after their acquisition by the British Museum on May 10, 1867), MS. Add. 28841 (seven folios), Egerton MS. 3127 (two folios), Egerton MS. 3781 (a single folio); Cleveland, Cleveland Museum of Art, J.H. Wade Fund, MS n. 1953.152 (a single folio); Florence, Museo del Bargello, inv. 2065 (a single folio). The most recent attempt to reconstruct these fragments, based on textual considerations, has been proposed by CONCINA 2016, pp. 189-265. Valuable information about the British Museum's acquisition of the two most significant sets of illuminated folios is provided by NICOLINI 2016, pp. 9-22. The cuttings, given the purpose for which they were created, each contain one or more miniatures executed by the hand of an extraordinarily skilled artist referred to as the "Entomologist Master of the Cocharelli Codex". For more on the identity of this artist, refer to FABBRI 1999, pp. 305-20, plates 2 [f. 5v], 4 [f. 7], 5 [f. 15v]; EADEM 2011, pp. 289-310, and EADEM 2013, pp. 95-106.

25. Regarding the opening miniature of ms. Assisi 328, reference can be made to the papers of CIARDI DUPRÉ DAL POGGETTO - ASSIRELLI - SESTI 1990, pp. 150-152, and BALDINI 2007, pp. 147-165. In the latter work, not only is the style of the illuminator associated with some «ascendenza nordica, legata cioè agli sviluppi internazionali del nord Italia, e quindi lombardi» («Northern influence, linked to the international developments of Northern Italy, particularly Lombardy»): BALDINI 2007, p. 148), but this manuscript is also attributed with the responsibility of disseminating the unique iconography in the Ubertinian style that can be observed in the wall paintings of Central Italy.

26. Whatever the reasons for the cuttings might have been, it is possible to speculate that they were created to be used as votive images for personal devotion, perhaps during the period between the 15th and 16th centuries.

armed with shield and sword are depicted in the lower margin of the same page, facing a gilded and quatrefoil azure panel, within which an Italian-French shield is placed, banded in red and pink in six overlapping horizontal zones.

Following in terms of antiquity are the well-known and just mentioned manuscript **A** from the Sacro Convento of Assisi²⁷, and the codex now housed in the Estense Library in Modena, lat. 904 (**Mo**)²⁸. Both are manuscripts of medium-large format, adorned with particular care. The double-column layout and the use of competent variations of *littera textualis* betray their indebtedness to the graphic-codicological styles of the academic and *Studium* book. In both cases, the script is dense and broken, with modest intrusions of cursive derivation. The approaches of the scribes and the artists responsible for ornamental designs can be compared with manuscripts confidently associated with the Northern Italian milieu, with a potential leaning toward the Emilia region for **Mo**, and the Paduan area for **A**. It is important to note another shared element among these *codices antiquiores*: they all transmit the work in four books, with the common absence of Book V. A contemporaneous marginal note transmitted by **A**₁ shows the difficulty in locating this section of the work, which was early subject to censorship²⁹. So the absence of this Book V, seemingly missing in the higher tiers of transmission, continued to be lamented until the entirety of the 15th century³⁰.

Moreover, a very early example in the corpus speaks in favor of a separate and predictably less official circulation of the Book V during the 14th century. This is the oldest surviving

However, it is less likely that this was a cutting operation aimed at supplying the art market, which was flourishing between the 18th and 19th centuries.

27. The proposal for its chronological and topical dating is credited to Massimiliano Bassetti, who outlined the prospects for a new paleographic and codicological study within the framework of the Seminar mentioned earlier on July 9th, 2014 (see above, footnote 12). The fact that the manuscript was not in the library of the Sacro Convento before 1381 (or more accurately, before 1381) is demonstrated by the fact that it had not been cataloged or inspected by the librarian Giovanni di Iolo. This does not exclude – but makes it rather unlikely – that it was produced at the Sacro Convento only to leave it soon afterward (before 1381), and then return after a couple of centuries (as evidenced by the notes of possession from the 16th and 17th centuries). In Cenci's catalog, it is listed as one of the «manoscritti del Sacro Convento» («manuscripts of the Sacro Convento»), of which the scholar hypothesizes that they «entrati posteriormente [...] ammonticchiati nell'archivio senza porvi alcun segno di appartenenza» («entered later [...] piled up in the archive without any sign of ownership»: CENCI 1981, I, p. 49). An essential description of the manuscript can be found on the following page. The manuscript, although textually uniform, is a composite ab antiquo in terms of its construction, composed of two elements that were produced by different scribes and intentions and were separated by some distance in time. The first element comprises ff. 1r-221r and transmits Books I-IV of the work, while the second element is found on ff. 223r-280v, where the V final Book of the work is transcribed, albeit incomplete at the end.

28. The manuscript, which belonged to the private collection of Tommaso Obizzi del Catajo (as revealed by the ex-libris on the front flyleaf) and entered the Biblioteca Estense in 1817 through his testamentary bequest, has a recent entry in *Manus online. This is part of the Catalogo Nazionale dei Manoscritti Digitalizzati delle biblioteche italiane* (National Catalog of Digitized Manuscripts in Italian Libraries) and can be accessed at the following link: <https://manus.iccu.sbn.it/en/risultati-ricerca-manoscritti/-/manus-search/cnmd/0000236295>.

29. The rubricator used the phrase «quintum librum usque adhuc reperire non possum» on f. 220rb at the end of Book IV, seamlessly continuing from the rubric itself.

30. In this sense, I would say, should be understood the annotation «religiosissimi patres, supplicamus caritati vestre ut velitis nobis procurare Ubertinum pro exemplari, quia partem eius habemus...» traced by a mid-15th century hand on a folium now reused as a guard for the codex containing the *Summa de casibus conscientiae* by Bartolomeo da San Concordio, currently housed in Bagnone, Biblioteca del Centro studi umanistici “Niccolò V”, 2 (15th century, second quarter).

witness of this missing fragment, known as the «fragment d’Ubertain»³¹, containing only the censored Book. It originated from the Carthusian monastery of Notre Dame in Villeneuve-lès-Avignon³² and is now housed at L’Alcazar in Marseille, with the shelfmark 79 (**Mr**₂). The manuscript, of the small dimensions typical of a portable codex, is transcribed by a main scribe educated in a rounded *textualis* similar to those prevalent in Central and Northern Italy. This script style is doubtfully earlier (if so, only slightly) than the mid-14th century. It is supplemented by other scribes who were educated in cursive models akin to documentary hands in use in the Provença region between the second half of the 14th century and the first two decades of the subsequent century³³.

Another significant area of early dissemination for the work is revealed in Southern France. Graphical features consistent with the book scripts of this region just beyond the mid-14th century are found in two other witnesses. The first (**Ti**) is one of the five dated manuscripts in the tradition, equipped with a colophon referring to the year 1371. It is the first complete and structurally unified witness of the *AVC* in five books. It belonged to the Franciscan convent of the same city where it is still preserved, thus representing the first instance of this testimony explicitly originating in a Franciscan context³⁴. The second witness, on the other hand, transmits only the Book III in the form of a personal codex for study and work. It was part of the library of the Franciscan friar Guglielmo di Malavalle, of the Franciscan custody of Alès, in the same Province of Provence. This manuscript is now the Pluteo 26.18 among the great collection of Medicea Laurenziana Library in Florence (**Fi**)³⁵.

31. The codex was referred to in this manner in the section dedicated to the codices held by the Bibliothèque Municipale de Marseille in ALBANES 1892, p. 29.

32. The terms of its foundation (1356), certified by a papal bull of Innocent VI issued on 1356, May 31rd, are recounted in LE COUTEULX 1889, pp. 545-558, and mentioned in VERNET 1948, pp. 76-82. According to Pane and Ruiz, authors of a recent study on the manuscript, its absence from the original monastery inventory serves as evidence of its external origin, further confirmed by the analysis of the hands responsible for its copying, which suggest a pre-existing manuscript predating the establishment of the institution itself: «le manuscrit parvient à la Chartreuse de Villeneuve-lès-Avignon, de fondation pontificale, entre les premières donations curiales successives à 1356 et avant la fin du XIV^e siècle ou, au plus tard, au tout début du XV^e siècle» («the manuscript arrives at the Chartreuse de Villeneuve-lès-Avignon, a papal foundation, between the first successive curial donations in 1356 and before the end of the 14th century, or at the very latest, at the beginning of the 15th century»): PANE - RUIZ 2016, p. 22).

33. *Ibidem*

34. Toulouse, Médiathèque José Cabanis (formerly Bibliothèque Municipale), 224 (I. 42), whose *colophon* is written by the same scribe as the main text on f. 234r: «Iste liber fuit scriptus anno Domini MCCCLXXI XII die mensis Augusti» («This book was written in the year of our Lord 1371, on the 12th day of the month of August»). A note of ownership is added in the upper margin of f. 1r by a modern hand: «Ubertinus de Casali in libro qui dicitur Arbor vite crucifixi [*sic*] Iesu. Ex Bibliotheca magni Conventum sancti Francisci». In the lower margin, the same hand writes a formula of anathema against the theft of the relic, from which the precious rectangular quadrant of the initial illumination, made on a gold leaf, had likely already been removed: «Anathemati qui hunc librum furabitur, occultabit aut quomodocumque clunabit» («Let he who steals, hides, or does anything with this book be under *anathema*»).

35. In this case, based on paleographic analysis, the dating of the manuscript from the general 15th century should be brought forward to the third quarter of the 14th century. The ownership note is found in the upper margin of f. 1r: «Iste liber est ad usum fratris Guillelmi de Malavalle O.F.M. Provincia Proventiae custodiae Alesie» («This book is for the use of Brother Guillelmus of Malavalle, O.F.M., of the Province of Proventiae in the Custody of Alesie»). It is a medium-sized parchment manuscript (mm 160 x 230), composed of 201 leaves, densely annotated and underlined by the same hand that added the *ex libris* in regular cursive script, likely the same friar Guillelmus. A description of the manuscript, albeit outdated and with some errors, can be found in BANDINI 1774, coll. 768-769.

Five more witnesses can be attributed to the graphic styles prevalent in central-Northern Italy during the second half of the century. Among them are two complete examples. One of these, now in the Biblioteca Estense of Modena (**Mo**₁), seems to have been transcribed by a scribe educated in Emilia, on partially palimpsestic leaves from the *Moralia in Iob* (a practice also shared by **A**). The layout characteristics of this manuscript are typical of the academic books from Bologna³⁶. Equally complete, albeit with lacunae in several places, is the manuscript now labeled as Subiaco, 43 (**Su**₁). It was transcribed by a mixed team of three scribes. One scribe employs a *textualis* influenced by transalpine manners, while the other two scribes use cursive hands for practical use, imparting their distinctive traits³⁷. Although not necessarily produced at the Sacro Speco in Subiaco, it is certain that the manuscript arrived there early, no later than the mid-15th century. At that point, a library hand added an explicit ownership note to the end of the last column of the text: «+ Iste liber est Specus Sancti Benedicti».

Towards the end of the same century, a more ambitious manuscript in Central Italian rotunda *textualis* script can be dated. This codex is housed at the Holy Name Library of St. Bonaventure (**Sb**) and comprises the first three books³⁸. In the last quarter of the century and within the Sant'Antonio Province (converging in this direction is also its ownership note: «Iste liber est Canonorum Monasterii Sancti Salvatoris de Venetiis»), the nearly entirely palimpsestic manuscript preserved at the University Library of Pavia (**Pa**) should also be placed. It still maintains the four-book configuration³⁹. This period, which remains partly unexplored by specialized studies, particularly in northern Italy, witnessed a resurgence in the palimpsestation of manuscripts. Specifically, the case of a large-format 11th-century antiphonary from the same period and possibly the same territory also falls within this scope⁴⁰.

However, the manuscript does not appear in the more recent *census* by DAVIS 1963, pp. 399-414.

36. The manuscript with the shelfmark Modena, Biblioteca Estense, lat. 734, is of medium size (293 x 220 mm) and features a mixed quire structure and a double-column layout for the text. On f. 317rb, an interesting ownership note is present, though partially legible due to intentional erasure. I propose the following reading for now: «Iste v[olumen.....] est [Can(onicorum)] regular(um) | co(n)g(re)gationis [.....astadis S(ancti) Benedicti] |ia computatis de S. Georgio [7.7] 87».

37. The manuscript, made of parchment, is preserved in the Library of the National Monument of the Monastery of Santa Scolastica in Subiaco. It is of medium-large size (mm 340 x 240) and has been transcribed by at least three main scribes: A: ff. 1r-29v, 31r (l. 38)-36 (l. 5); B: ff. 29v-31r (l. 37); C: ff. 36r (l. 6)-163. The first scribe's handwriting seems to show traces of what might be considered Transalpine influences (such as the Tironian note for *et* in which the vertical stroke is crossed out with a pen stroke, as is common in the *Parisiensis* variants of the *litterae scholasticae*).

38. St. Bonaventure (NY), Holy Name Library of Franciscan Institute, 77. See DE RICCI 1935, I, p. 482; PELLEGRINI 2009, pp. 29-47.

39. The manuscript now held in Pavia, at the University Library, Aldini Collection, 330, of small size (133 folios) and medium-large format (mm 370 x 250), is written by a single hand in double columns and finely decorated with vegetal and animal motifs in the margins of the first leaf, using recycled leaves from an antiphonary produced around the late 11th century. A description of the codex, although with some inaccuracies, can be found in DE MARCHI - BERTOLANI 1894, pp. 180-181.

40. Indeed, if the Franciscan friar Salimbene da Parma took care to immortalize the memory of the Cistercian monk from Fontanaviva, near the city, whose skill in «radere cartas» (scraping parchment) required young apprentices to ensure that this important competence was not lost (cfr. SALIMBENE DE ADAM, *Cronica*, in CCCM, 125A, p. 663, ll. 8-13: «Quidam frater erat in isto monasterio qui optime sciebat radere cartas, et dixit abbati: 'Pater, beatus Iob dicit loquens cum Deo: Scio quia morti trades me, ubi constituta est domus omni viventi. Et Ecclesiastes dicit: Nemo est qui semper vivat et qui huius rei habeat fidutiam. Et Apostolus, ad Heb.: Statutum est hominibus semel mori. Cum igitur michi luce clarius constet quod mori debeam, quia non sum ego melior quam patres mei, rogo vos, pater, si

Similarly, the copying operations for only Book V of A can be attributed to this period. This was done with the intention of completion, as already indicated by the rubricator of the first element («quintum librum usque adhuc reperire non possum»)⁴¹.

The last two codices, belonging to the period between the third quarter of the 14th century and the early years of the next one, are two luxuriously illuminated medium-large format manuscripts currently held in two different locations in Valencia. Manuscript 289 (385) of the city's University Library (VI₂) originates from the Cistercian monastery of S. Miguel de los Reyes. This library was transferred there after the death of Ferrante, the last Duke of Calabria⁴². His collection, comprising about a thousand books, included many from the extraordinary collection of the Aragonese kings, saved from confiscation ordered by Charles VIII and brought back to Valencia in 1527 by the Duke-Viceroy⁴³. This is the only witness in the tradition to

vobis videtur, ut michi aliquos discipulos assignetis, qui velint adiscere radere cartas, quia post mortem meam isti monasterio utiles esse poterunt. Cumque nullus inveniretur, qui vellet adiscere, nisi ego, ita post mortem magistri mei et Veronensis illius abrasi omnes libros suos, quod nec una littera remansit in eis, tum ut haberem materiam super quam radere adiscere possem, tum etiam quia occasione illarum prophetiarum habueramus scandalum valde grande», in the university city of Bologna, the activity of *rasores* or *abrasores cartarum* (parchment scrapers) had become equally significant in the fragmented process exacted by the city's book industry, alongside the more prestigious professions of the *stationarius*, the copyist, and the illuminator: cfr. SUPINO MARTINI 1993, p. 99. This is also discussed by PETRUCCI 2017, p. 198.

41. See *supra*, footnotes 26-27. For a more extensive treatment of this topic, see SAIANI 2023.

42. The monastery was built by Ferrante himself to bind to it both the fate of his collection, consisting of 795 codices (resulting from a certain mobility in the collection formed in the eighteen years preceding the donation to San Miguel de los Reyes), and other valuable objects for the royal family, as well as his personal fortunes after his death. Furthermore, due to the suppression of the institution in 1835, many codices were sold and others dispersed: the inventory of the University Library of Valencia, where they converged, lists only 233 of them. The bibliography on this luxurious exemplar is quite extensive; at least consult the following key works: REPULLÉS 1875, p. 60; DEL CAÑO 1913, I, p. 182, n. 503; ALCINA FRANCH 2000, p. 51.

43. The examination of the seven available inventories from 1412 to 1550 informs us that the manuscript must have arrived in Ferrante's library through acquisition, dispatch, or gift after 1527, and not as an inheritance from his predecessors (not even from the sixteen codices brought back to Spain in 1535, after the death of his mother Isabella del Balzo, and from many other printed volumes, marked with the *ex-libris* "*Las infantas*"). Actually the books that Ferrante recovered from Italy represent only an infinitesimal fraction of the Neapolitan library. As recently clarified by Teresa De Robertis: «Sul perché si sia salvato dalle razzie francesi e dalle vendite proprio questo gruppo, si possono fare solo ipotesi che sono legate al contenuto dei libri. Se è possibile trovare un senso alla raccolta di Ferrante, questo andrà, infatti, cercato nel legame diretto e a volte esplicito che almeno due gruppi di libri hanno con i membri della famiglia. È il caso, ad esempio, dei messali, dei libri d'ore, dei breviarii o comunque di opere di devozione che forse costituivano, all'interno della raccolta napoletana, una sorta di zona riservata in modo esclusivo ad un uso domestico e privato della famiglia reale. Sembra dunque che, al momento della disfatta del regno di Napoli, dovendo salvare qualcosa della biblioteca, si preferisse sottrarre al saccheggio francese ciò che più era legato alle vicende e alle consuetudini familiari» («Regarding why only this group was saved from French pillaging and sales, one can only make hypotheses that are tied to the content of the books. If a purpose can be found in Ferrante's collection, it should be sought in the direct and sometimes explicit connection that at least two groups of books have with the family members. This is the case, for example, with missals, books of hours, breviaries, or other devotional works that perhaps constituted, within the Neapolitan collection, a sort of reserved area exclusively for the domestic and private use of the royal family. It seems, therefore, that at the time of the defeat of the Kingdom of Naples, when something needed to be saved from the library, what was most closely tied to family events and habits was preferred to be spared from French plundering»: CHERCHI - DE ROBERTIS 1990, pp. 109-347: 129). As for the other surviving inventories, the oldest is that of the possessions of Alfonso I of Aragon compiled in Barcelona in 1412, edited by HURTEBISEI 1907, pp. 148-188; followed by a second one compiled in Valencia in 1417: D'ALÓS 1924, pp. 393-406 and DE MARINIS 1952, I, pp. 219-224. The list of the book dowry brought (and sent in multiple shipments) from Milan by Ippolita Sforza, wife of Alfonso II in May 1465, can be found in MOTTA

feature a striking pen illustration of *Christus patiens* on the upper half of the first leaf. This image is executed in a style close to that adopted for several copies of Francesc Eiximenis's *Llibres dels àngels*⁴⁴.

The second one is an elegant codex housed at the Archivio-Biblioteca Capitolare of the Cathedral (VI₁), still organized in the *typical* four-book configuration. Each book is introduced by elaborate painted miniatures of initial letters in green, purple, and blue inks with gold leaf. Both of these manuscripts require great caution and more than simple supplemental investigation. Their diverse forms and graphical and ornamental styles are best understood through the involvement of scribes and illustrators (educated in the style of Catalan international Gothic), active both in the Avignonese court and the Aragonese court. This suggests a kind of mobility among the most respected artisans that eventually standardized the luxury book production across the entire Pyrenean region⁴⁵.

As we delve into the Quattrocento and the spiritual literary landscape of the *devotio moderna*, the surviving testimonies of the *AVC* multiply significantly, and the contributions of the Franciscan Observant movement in Italy, especially in the four-book configuration, become particularly noteworthy. The manuscript U.VI.1 from Siena (Si) stands out as a remarkable example, meticulously produced under the direct oversight of Saint Bernardino in Siena and with interventions traceable to his hand⁴⁶. This aligns with the well-documented

1894, p. 71. The Inventory delivered by Ferdinand I of Aragon to Battista Pandolfini as a guarantee for the loan of 38,000 ducats for the war against the Turks is known as *Inventory A*: the document, dated January 19th of 1481, is preserved in ms. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Nouv. acq. lat. 1986, edited in DE MARINIS 1957, pp. 187-192 and reproduced in the insert between pp. 198 and 199 of the first volume. Also edited in DE MARINIS 1957, pp. 193-200 is the so-called *Inventory B* («Index regalium codicum Alfonsi Regis ad Laurentium Medicem ex Neapolitana eius Bibliotheca transmissus»), transcribed by Fabio Vigili from Spoleto around 1508-1513 and preserved in ms. Vat. lat. 7134, as well as *Inventory D*, that is, the list compiled in 1529 of the objects contained in two chests found in Ferrara in the previous January: DE MARINIS 1957, pp. 205-206. The only list that, as mentioned, includes the entry for our codex is *Inventory G*, containing the list of books donated by Ferrante to San Miguel de los Reyes, edited by MAZZATINTI 1897, pp. CXXVIII-CLV, then by DE MARINIS 1957, pp. 207-224. Finally, it is not reported in the latest and most reliable edition of Cherchi and De Robertis' inventory found in a manuscript acquired by the University Library of Valencia on the antiquarian market (now marked as 974) of the 306 books Ferrante arranged to be sent from Ferrara to Valencia, compiled on May 10th of 1529, and organized into sections corresponding to the shipping blocks ("partite") with a dual registration system, allowing the Ferrarese collection to be reassembled in Valencia in the same order: partially anticipated by CHERCHI 1989b, pp. 255-259 and Idem 1989a, pp. 163-165, it can be found in CHERCHI - DE ROBERTIS 1993.

44. The illumination occupies the upper half of f. 2r of the manuscript, and there is a description of it on the website https://weblioteca.uv.es/cgi/view.pl?sesion=202304281703016504&source=uv_ms_0289&div=7: «miniatura a mezza pagina in cui compare la scena della Crocifissione con la Vergine e san Giovanni ai due lati della Croce. A fare da sfondo alla scena appare la porta del muro con una delle torri disegnata sul margine sinistro di essa. Lo stile della miniatura si inquadra nei canoni degli esordi della pittura fiamminga. Il disegno viene eseguito a penna utilizzando un pigmento a base d'acqua. Alla base del disegno, più precisamente ai piedi di san Giovanni, si notano alcuni ripensamenti da parte del miniatore» («Half-page miniature featuring the scene of the Crucifixion with the Virgin and Saint John on either side of the Cross. In the background of the scene, there is a gate in the wall with one of the towers drawn on the left margin of it. The style of the miniature falls within the early Flemish painting canons. The drawing is executed with a pen using a water-based pigment. At the base of the drawing, specifically at the feet of Saint John, some revisions by the illuminator can be observed»). In this regard, see BORDONA 1933, fig. 656; GÓMEZ GÓMEZ 1982, p. 108; BOHIGAS 2000, p. 511.

45. See BILOTTA 2022, pp. 545-573.

46. See PACETTI 1934, pp. 224-238, 530, and the recent reconstruction of Bernardino's *scriptorium* and his manuscripts by DE PIERRO 2014: the description of this manuscript can be found on pages 98-99, n. 19. According to De Pierro, it was copied by the scribe identified as "mano G", who was active, along with at least fourteen others, in

practice of editorial autography observed among the leaders of the Observant movement⁴⁷.

While the ambiguous label of a “Franciscan codex” is indelibly marked on this small book by the authoritative hands of the Bernardino circle, the Pluteo D.XIII.5 held in the Malatestiana Library (Ce) earns this label in a broader and retrospective sense, due to its early entrance into the library of the friars. The manuscript bears all the hallmarks of its intended purpose for a high-level local commission. Its conspicuous material characteristics (format, *mise en page*, elaborate ornamental design), as well as its script, would indeed suggest a workshop of advanced technical skill operating in the Padan region⁴⁸.

The discrete dissemination of the *AVC* across the Low Countries and along the Rhine Valley during the 15th century, primarily in connection with the *Devotio moderna* movement, has been comprehensively examined by Stephen Mossman. His recent and compelling analysis has left no room for additional contributions on this matter⁴⁹.

Turning our attention to the dissemination of the same phenomenon within the Kingdom of Aragon, a unique case within the tradition is worthy of attention. The codex H-28 from Soria (So₁₊₂), held by the Cistercian Abbey of Santa Maria de Las Hueltas until its dissolution⁵⁰, represents the outcome of an ancient composite operation between two distinct literary units (the first containing Book I: So₁, the second containing Books II and V: So₂). These units were copied from different models of varying quality, yet they are united by content homogeneity and uniform formatting choices (the same writing material, arrangement of quires, and the adoption of the same general ruling criteria). This is demonstrated primarily by the unassuming appearance of the first codicological element (So₁): it resembles a working copy, rather basic in its page layout, devoid of ornamental elements, with ample margins created from the not-so-wide full-page writing area. In direct contrast, the second unit (So₂) seems to adhere more rigorously

the *scriptorium* of the Observant Franciscan Convent of Sant’Onofrio in Siena, better known as La Capriola, between the years 1430 and 1444. Bernardino’s hand is believed to be responsible for the table of contents at the end of the work, as well as for the refinement of more technical and paratextual elements. The previous codex designation («E») suggests that the manuscript was kept in the saint’s cell during the first half of the 15th century.

47. Indeed, GIOVÈ MARCHIOLI 2015, p. 202, addresses this issue, and it was previously explored by the same scholar in EADEM 2014, pp. 161-188.

48. «Lo *scriptorium* è da intendersi non tanto topograficamente, quanto come attività programmata, che fa capo al signore e ai suoi consiglieri. Forse coinvolgeva più luoghi della città e del territorio» («The *scriptorium* should be understood not so much in a topographical sense, but as a planned activity that is led by the lord and his advisers. Perhaps it involved more places in the city and the territory»): this is discussed in the introduction to the catalog of manuscripts by ERRANI - PALMA 2006, p. 11 n. 21. The establishment of the Biblioteca Malatestiana began in 1447, according to sources, initiated directly by the friars of the San Francesco Convent, who had long desired to build a library for their studium, which had been active for several decades. The control of the collection that came together there (items were brought from the best libraries of the city’s aristocracy, as well as from Malatesta Novello’s own collection and that of his wife Violante di Montefeltro) was entrusted to the friars. However, the first inventory, drawn up on March 6th of 1461, is lost, as well as the subsequent one from 1474. Our manuscript is listed in the oldest surviving inventory, compiled around 1515 by Fabio Vigili from Spoleto and preserved at the Vatican Apostolic Library, Barb. lat. 3185, ff. 117r-179r: 179r («Ubertini de Casalis super arbore Crucifixi»): see DOLCINI 1985, pp. 120-127.

49. See above, footnote 6.

50. A minimal description of the manuscript can be found in the catalog of manuscripts from the Santa María de Huerta monastery, presented in an article by ROJO ORCAJO 1929, pp. 196-219: p. 216. More recently, there is also a mention of the manuscript in PIRON 2014, p. 429, although it is partially misleading («[...] contenant les cinq livres [...], le premier livre est copié sur papier, les quatre suivants sur parchemin»: «[...] containing the five books [...], the first book is copied on paper, the next four on parchment»).

to the model of calligraphy masters, with double-column script and *mise en page*, prominent tables of chapters introducing each book, and extensive running titles. This second unit was probably joined with the first because, even though it lacked the other three original books it originally contained, it supplemented the first unit for apparent archival purposes. This is revealed by the partially erased portion of a purchase note from the late 15th century in Catalan language found on f. 104r⁵¹.

The density of corrections and annotations in the interlinear spaces and margins of the codex gives it the appearance of a “service copy”, likely prepared for specific work and study needs that arose later than the compilation of the individual units. Among these annotations, still awaiting necessary interpretation, is the presence of a mixed progressive numbering, using both Roman numerals and Arabic numerals, sometimes introduced with the notation «.fo./folium.» in the outer margins of the pages, maintaining a fairly consistent ratio (1:2). This practice somewhat resembles the annotations found in the margins of manuscripts prepared in urban *scriptoria*, counting the number of *peciae* copied⁵². Hence, it can be hypothesized that this numbering alludes to cross-referencing with a collation copy, with the aim of improving the manuscript through various corrective campaigns, enhancing its textual reliability⁵³. Only through a comprehensive recension process can more informed hypotheses be put forth regarding the actual function of this dense paratextual apparatus and the possible interactions it might have had with the text itself.

CONCLUSIONS

In the end, it is time for a provisional summary. Numerically, as observed, there are only twelve out of thirty-eight witnesses of the *AVC* in five books (thus constituting 31.5% of the sample considered). Among them, a significant position is held by the six manuscripts with probable origins in the North Italian region, and the three that reflect the characteristics of the graphic *koinè* developed between Occitania and eastern Spain (the Spanish March and Catalan counties), here referred to as the «Pyrenean corridor». However, a substantial portion of this tradition is structured in four books, presented progressively. This category includes seven “Italian” examples (to which the earlier configuration of manuscript A should also be added), as well as one from the Pyrenean area, representing 23.6% of the sample. This specific section of the manuscript tradition is of particular importance, as it includes some of the earliest witnesses: books commissioned by the laity and, seemingly, the aristocracy, which by the mid-14th century showed a distinct dissociation of the *AVC* from its more predictable mediation within the monastic context, transforming it into a manual for private meditation.

51. Here is my proposed interpretation: «Lo present liber ensemps ab 3 alt(re)s volums, qui son d(e) Uberti d(e) la vida d(e)l sen(n)ior [.] messer noster | Je(s)u (Chr)ist ||| costen sez IIII volums y XXX flo[rins]» («This present book together with three other volumes, which are about Ubertino’s life of our Lord Jesus Christ. This costs 4 volumes and 30 florins»). From this, it is possible to infer that **So**₂ (or its exemplar) constituted one unit (coinciding with the II and V books) of a copy made up of three other “volumes” or books – it’s not clear if they were deposited, rented, or sold – which cost thirty florins.

52. Certainly, here is the essential information provided for reference to the proceedings of the conference on the topic of university book production: BATAILLON - GUYOT - ROUSE 1988. Specifically, take note of the contributions by SHOONER 1988, pp. 17-38, along with the proposed terminology by BOYLE 1988, pp. 39-40, and BOUGEROL 1988, pp. 205-208.

53. See on this matter the speculation by ORNATO 2003, pp. 29-31.

Book V, which has been the focus of substantial historiographical debate, is widely attested within the manuscript tradition considered here (found in 46% of the manuscripts), although in varying associations. In the six Italian manuscripts and the four Pyrenean ones (produced in the 15th century), it forms an integral part of complete copies of the work. In Northern Europe, Book V circulated in both configurations, in manuscripts produced in the latter half of the century and beyond. It is found in three complete codices of the work as well as in four other manuscripts containing Books IV and V, which were presumably originally intended to follow a comprehensive plan for the work, divided into multiple volumes. These considerations further highlight the distinctiveness of **Mr**₂, which embodies the autonomous circulation of only Book V with exceptional precocity. The exceptional nature of this operation can only be compared in relation to the slightly later copy of the detached unit from **A**, also fully complete with all original chapters.

From a quick overview like the one presented here, it becomes abundantly clear that there is no prevalent book form within the surviving *AVC* tradition. Nearly all formats, material supports, various mise en page layouts, corresponding graphic and illustrative choices available to the late medieval European literary culture are employed to shape the *AVC*. It is a plausible hypothesis, although not demonstrable, that this lack of a specific book form may be due to the absence of a specific form-book imposed or suggested by an authoritative circulating copy under the reputation of an autograph or authorial exemplar. Furthermore, neither Ubertino nor most ecclesiastical authors of the 14th century seem to have shared the authorial scruples that Petrarch, first and with a group of closely connected disciples, brought to the extreme consequences of books lavishly crafted by the very hand of the author.

Certainly, the most attested form, based on the surviving manuscripts, is the organization in four books, which almost immediately required an “alternative” copying method for individual books of the work, to be sent as exemplars and models for translations in the early 15th century, both to the regions of Northern Europe and through the nearby Pyrenean corridor to the Kingdom of Aragon and Castile. This phase of quantitative expansion of Latin manuscript copies fed, by the early 1400s, the translation workshops for the work into more popular forms: Dutch and German for the Rhineland-Brabant regions where the *Devotio Moderna* was spreading; Portuguese, Castilian and Catalan in the coastal region of the Aragonese kingdom, where interest in the genre of the life of Christ was already deeply rooted due to the widespread presence of royal foundation Cistercian monasteries and the close connection between the court and mendicant orders⁵⁴.

54. An exemplary instance of this is the choice to entrust the initial project of translating the *AVC* into the vernacular to the Majorcan friar Joan Eiximeno, directly under the direction of King Martino I and Queen Maria de Luna. Not only was he a relative of the queen, but also the personal confessor of the monarchs and their true spiritual director, overseeing the selection of doctrinal and devotional readings. His direct influence across all aspects of court life, even extending to politics, offers just a glimpse of the deeply intertwined bond between the monarchy and the Order of Franciscans, enriched by substantial gifts and book exchanges, and marked by a generous embrace of the Observant movement within the order. This openness extended not only to the Dominicans, but also to the Augustinian canons, Carmelites, and Cistercians, who served as almost new apostles, heralding the impending third age of the world. The vibrant circulation of *llibres de spiritual intelligentia* served as an initial foundation for the process of transferring and adapting a renewed system of values underlying the kingdom with an eschatological perspective: the *christiformitas* of the rulers, now positioned at the pillars of that *arbor vite*, grounded in *paupertas* and contemplative prayer, as expressed by the strictest canons of Franciscanism, as well as by the Carthusians and Cistercians. See IVARS 1931, pp. 568-594; and IDEM 1933, pp. 255-281 and 416-432; see also to IVARS - WEBSTER 1982, pp. 81-123.

At the dawn of this new era, the *AVC*, stripped of its controversial heterodox contents, became a work whose original identity had lost its urgency. It became a text like any other, yet one that now presents itself as an extraordinary compilation of sources and materials from the patristic and Franciscan traditions, thereby offering limitless possibilities for combinatorial solutions in the eager hands of scribes and readers in monasteries and courts across Europe.

APPENDIX

I. Complete manuscripts [= 12]

Italian origin:

A₁₊₂ = Assisi, Biblioteca Comunale, Fondo antico presso la Biblioteca e Centro di Documentazione Franciscana del Sacro Convento, 328 [*compositus ab antiquo*= A₁: saec. XIV *med.* (Books I-IV) + A₂: saec. XIV *ex.* (Book V)].

Mo₁ = Modena, Biblioteca Estense Universitaria, lat. 734 (alfa.K.4.6) [saec. XIV *post med.*].

Su₁ = Subiaco, Biblioteca del Monumento Nazionale del Monastero di Santa Scolastica, 43 (XLI) [saec. XIV *post med.*].

Va₁ = Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. lat. 4319 [saec. XV^{1/2-2/4}].

Ma₁ = Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional de España, 17.851 [saec. XV *ante med.*].

Su₂ = Subiaco, Biblioteca del Monumento Nazionale del Monastero di Santa Scolastica, 303 (CCX-CVI) (*olim* 4016) [saec. XV^{3/4}: 1466-1485; Pro₁ and Pro₂ are inverted; mutilated; Book V is missing (*adespotus*)].

French origin:

Tl = Toulouse, Médiathèque José Cabanis (*olim* Bibliothèque Municipale), 224 (I. 42) [dated: 12.VIII.1371].

Pyrenean-Iberian origin:

Vc = Vic, Arxiu i Biblioteca Episcopal, 53 (XXXIII) [saec. XV *in.*, *t.a.q.*: 1433-1438; Pro₁ missing].

Tg = Tarragona, Biblioteca Pública del Estado (Provincial), 157 [saec. XV *med.*].

Portuguese/Iberian origin:

Lb_{1,2} = Lisboa, Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal, Fundo Geral II. 81-82 [saec. XV *med.*; in 2 voll. = Lb₁ (Books I-III), Lb₂ (Books IV-V)].

Rhenish-Brabant origin:

Mc = Manchester, John Rylands University Library, lat. 200 (*olim* Phillips 599) [saec. XV *med.*].

Br₁ = Bruxelles, Bibliothèque Royale «Albert Ier», 1273 [saec. XVI].

II. Manuscripts containing 80% of the work (4 books) or at least 60% (3 books) [= 14]**Italian origin:**

Ca = Cardiff, Public Library, 3.244 (*olim* Phillipps 4440) [saec. XIV^{2/4}; Books I-IV; Pro₁ missing].

Mo₂ = Modena, Biblioteca Estense Universitaria, lat. 904 (alfa.X.2.1.) [saec. XIV^{3/4-4/4}; Books I-IV].

Pa = Pavia, Biblioteca Universitaria, Aldini 330 [saec. XIV *ex.*-XV *in.*; Books I-IV].

Sb = St. Bonaventure, NY, Holy Name Library of Franciscan Institute, 77 [saec. XIV^{4/4}- XV *in.*; Books I-III, mutilated].

Si = Siena, Biblioteca Comunale degli Intronati U.VI.1 [saec. XV^{1/4} (*t.a.q.*: 1444); Books I-IV].

Ce = Cesena, Biblioteca Comunale Malatestiana, D.XIII.5 [saec. XV *ante med.*; Books I-IV].

Na = Napoli, Biblioteca Nazionale «Vittorio Emanuele III», VII.A.27 [saec. XV^{3/4}; Books I-IV].

Pyrenean-Iberian origin:

1. So₁₊₂ = Soria, Biblioteca Pública del Estado, 28-H [*compositus ab antiquo*: So₁ = saec. XV^{2/4} (Book I) + So₂ = saec. XV *med.* (Books II, V)].

2. Vl₁ = València, Arxiu i Biblioteca de la Catedral, 88 (237) [saec. XIV *ex.*-XV *in.*; Books I-IV; mutilated at the beginning: Pro₁ missing].

Rhenish-Brabant origin:

1. Lg_{1,2} = Liège, Bibliothèque de l'Université, 236 [sec. XV^{1/2}; libri I-II], 356 [saec. XV^{1/2}; Books III-IV].

2. Gr = Groningen, Bibliotheek der Rijksuniversiteit, 17 [dated: 1460; in 2 voll: Gr₁ (Books I-II), Gr₂ (Books IV-V)].

3. Br₃ = Bruxelles, Bibliothèque Royale «Albert Ier», 728 [saec. XV; Books I-III].

4. Br₄ = Bruxelles, Bibliothèque Royale «Albert Ier», 1164 [saec. XV; Books I-III, mutilated].

5. Br₂ = Bruxelles, Bibliothèque Royale «Albert Ier», 646 [dated: 1524; Books I-III].

III. Manuscripts containing 40% of the work (2 books) [= 7]:

Italian origin:

1. Va₂ = Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. lat. 7732 [dated: 29.III-21.VI.1482; Books I-II].

Pyrenean-Iberian origin:

1. Vl₂ = València, Biblioteca de la Universitat. Biblioteca Històrica, 289 (385) [saec. XIV^{3/4-4/4}; Books I-II].

Rhenish-Brabant origin:

Ut₁ = Utrecht, Bibliotheek der Rijksuniversiteit, 309 (3.B.11, *olim* Eccl. 145) [saec. XV *ante med.*; Books I-II].

Ut₃ = Utrecht, Bibliotheek der Rijksuniversiteit, 348 (4.D.5, *olim* Eccl. 200) [saec. XV *ante med.*; Books IV-V].

Ba = Basel, Universitätsbibliothek (*olim* Öffentliche Bibliothek der Universität), A.V.27, ff. 3ra-201ra [dated: 19.IV.1443; Books IV-V].

Ol = Oldenburg, Landesbibliothek, Cim I 45 [aa. 1446-1447; Books IV-V].

Li = Lincoln, Cathedral Library 93 (A.4.1) [*ca.* 1460; Books IV-V].

IV. Manuscripts containing 20% of the work (1 books) [= 5]:

Pyrenean-Iberian origin:

1. Ma₂ = Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional de España, 11.523 [saec. XV *in.*; Book I].

French origin:

Mr₂ = Marseille, Bibliothèque Municipale L'Alcazar, 79 (Eb. 387) [saec. XIV *ante med.*-XV *in.*; Book V].

Fi = Firenze, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Plut. 26.18 [saec. XIV^{3/4}; Book III].

Mr₁ = Marseille, Bibliothèque Municipale L'Alcazar, 78 (Eb. 94) [saec. XV *med.*; Book IV].

Rhenish-Brabant origin:

1. Ut₂ = Utrecht, Bibliotheek der Rijksuniversiteit, 310 (4.D.9, *olim* Eccl. 205) [*ca.* 1470; Book III].

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