

MARIA SCOTTI

University of Urbino Carlo Bo

## Between Paleography and Heraldry: the Case of *Urb. Gr. 141*

*In this paper I focus on the Urbinas Graecus 141, one of the poetic manuscripts from the library of Federico da Montefeltro. I give a summary of the manuscript's content and the main codicological and paleographical features, noting the presence of Angelo Vadio's hand, a 15<sup>th</sup>-century humanist from Rimini. After carrying out a survey on the Federico's heraldry and on the problematic aspects of dating methodologies based on the use of miniature, I focus on the coat of arms of the Urb. Gr. 141 to shed light on the intricate history of its acquisition. For this aim, I carry out a comparison with Urb. gr. 111, which shares the same decorative pattern as Urb. gr. 141. Additionally, I also examine the miniature as a whole and consider its position within the manuscripts. Then, I extend the analysis to other Urbinates Graeci codices adorned with a coat of arms but not flanked by the letters F.C./F.D. or FE.DUX, of which Urb. gr. 111 and 141 are part. Through comparative analysis with such codices, I conclude that it is plausible to propose a ducal period acquisition for Urb. Gr. 141 and 111.*

**Keywords:** Federico da Montefeltro, Library of Urbino, coat of arms, *Urbinas Graecus 141*

The manuscript *Urb. Gr. 141* is one of the 14 Greek poetry codices belonging to the library of Federico da Montefeltro. In 1657 by the will of Pope Alexander VII it became part of the Vatican Apostolic Library. It is one of the 53 Greek codices presenting a coat of arms.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> According to an analysis of the *Old Index*, the Greek poetic manuscripts arranged on

This manuscript is a paper codex, in 4° format, consisting of 191 folios. It contains five tragedies by Sophocles (*Ajax*, *Electra*, *Oedipus Rex*, *Antigone*, *Philoctetes* up to verse 1297) and four comedies by Aristophanes (*Plutus*, *Clouds*, *Frogs*, *Birds*), with a rich scholastic apparatus. The first 71 folios include Sophocles. Folios 72r-72v are blank. Folio 73r includes 27 hexameters from the poem by Michael Psellos Πρὸς τὸν σαββαΐτην (verses 262-288), followed by the *Epistula ad Innocentium Papam* by John Chrysostom; this text continues until folio 75r. Grammatical annotations appear continuously on folio 75r and 75v, and on folio 76r there is the incipit of Michael Psellos' poem Πρὸς τὸν σαββαΐτην. This textual arrangement, combined with the analysis of the quire structure, allows us to conclude that the folios have been transposed. The manuscript consists of 9 quaternions containing the Sophoclean part; 5 folios (ff. 73r-77v) are sewn in an inverted manner, since the correct order would be: 76r 76v 77r 77v 73r 73v 74 r 74v 75r 75v, and then from folio 78r, there are 14 quaternions containing Aristophanes. After the Aristophanic section, grammatical and lexicographical content annotations appear on folios 190r and 191r. Folio 190v is blank, and finally,

---

the shelves of the Library room were 14 (*Urb. gr.* 136, 137, 138, 140, 141, 142, 143, 144, 146, 147, 148, Ambr. Q. 88 sup., Ambr. H 77 sup. and R 429). The list of codices *Urbinate Graeci* with coat of arms can be found in MANFREDI-POTENZA (2022: 119, n. 372): «la presenza massiccia di emblemi aggiunti su codici greci si può constatare invece tra gli Urbinati, dove però gli emblemi e gli stemmi di Federico da Montefeltro sono ovunque; tra i libri greci lo stemma attualmente si ritrova, quasi sempre aggiunto, su 52 codici, gli attuali *Urb. gr.* 2, 7, 15, 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 22, 32, 33, 34, 36, 37, 42, 43, 44, 46, 49, 61, 64, 66, 78, 80, 81, 85, 94, 98, 99, 102, 108, 111, 112, 113, 114, 115, 116, 128, 129, 130, 131, 135, 136, 137, 139, 140, 141, 146, 149, 151, 157, 159». They listed 52 codices, but among these, the number 149 should not be considered as it features a non-Federician coat of arms. STORNAJOLO (1895: 284–285), advances the hypothesis that it is the ducal coat of arms of Emanuele Filiberto. Furthermore, Manfredi and Potenza omit from the list the numbers 69, 84, 101, and 148, which instead feature Federician coats of arms, and instead include number 84, which does not feature a coat of arms. They also include in the count the number 151, which does not feature a coat of arms, but only the decoration of the circle for the title. Therefore, the *Urbinate Graeci* codes decorated with coats of arms are 53.

on folio 191r, there is the ὑπόθεσις τῆς ὅλης Ἰλιάδος. This title proves that the manuscript originally transmitted the Iliad, now preserved in *Ambrosianus* H 77 sup., a witness dated to the 14th century that exhibits paleographical and codicological characteristics similar to *Urb. Gr.* 141, as proved by Battezzato.<sup>2</sup>

According to the paleographical analysis presented by Stefec, *Urb. Gr.* 141 shows marginal annotations written by the hand of Angelo Vadio, a 15th-century humanist from Rimini who played a significant role in importing codices from the East to the West.<sup>3</sup> As Stefec briefly suggests, it is probable that Vadio's manuscripts were integrated into the Urbino library as a collection shortly after the humanist's death, which, according to the scholar, can be dated before 1482. Some of Vadio's manuscripts indeed bear the *großen Wappen* of Federico da Montefeltro and therefore were likely acquired before 1482.<sup>4</sup> The *großen Wappen* is the ducal coat of arms of Federico; the German term translates the expression *tessera gentilicia maior* already used by Stornajolo in his work on the *Urbinate Codices* to describe the coats of arms of the ducal period.<sup>5</sup>

A brief excursion into Federico's heraldry becomes necessary, as an analysis of his coats of arms reveals different types with distinct characteristics.<sup>6</sup> First, there is the simple coat of arms, which takes the form of an inverted egg-shaped shield divided into six alternating bands of gold and blue, with a black eagle prominently displayed in the upper gold band (Fig. 1). Next, the quartered coat of arms appears, characterized by a polygonal shield divided into four quarters: the first and fourth quarters feature a black eagle on a gold background, while the

<sup>2</sup> BATTEZZATO (1996: 29–34).

<sup>3</sup> STEFEC (2012:142–143, n. 186).

<sup>4</sup> STEFEC (2012: 122).

<sup>5</sup> See STORNAJOLO (1902: XVIII).

<sup>6</sup> For this categorization see STORNAJOLO (1902: XVII–XVIII); RIOU (1982: 520–521); FRONZI (2000–2001: 38–54).

second and third quarters are adorned with three alternating bands of blue and gold (Fig. 2). Finally, the tripartite coat of arms emerges, consisting of a shield vertically divided into three compartments. The first and third compartments are further subdivided horizontally, with one section showcasing the black eagle on a golden background and the other presenting three alternating gold and blue bands. The central compartment, in contrast, is distinguished by the presence of papal emblems on a red background (Fig. 3).

Fig. 1 simple coat of arms



Fig. 2 quartered coat of arms









Fig. 3 tripartite coat of arms



I include here a summary table of the coats of arms associated with the letters F.C., F.D., FE.DUX as they appear in the *Urbinales Graeci*, where F.C. means 'Federicus comes', F.D. and FE.DUX 'Federicus dux'.

Table 1. Distribution of Federico's Coat of Arms in *Urbinales Graeci* Manuscripts

Coat of arms	F.C.	F.D.	no letters
simple	<i>Urb. Gr. 7</i> 	<i>Urb. Gr. 148</i> 	<i>Urb. Gr. 113</i> 
quartered	<i>Urb. Gr. 101</i> 	Not found in the <i>Urbinales Graeci</i>	Not found in the <i>Urbinales Graeci</i>
tripartite	Not found in the <i>Urbinales Graeci</i>	<i>Urb. Gr. 108</i>  FE.DUX <i>Urb. Gr. 146</i> 	<i>Urb. Gr. 64</i> 

Based on the assumption that the coat of arms was illuminated on the manuscript either prior to its entry into the library or during a period closely following its acquisition, it is possible to trace a coat of arms to

a particular moment in the history of the Urbinate library. The simplest dating criterion is constituted by the presence of letters: F.C. means the count period of Federico's reign, indicating a date before 1474, while the variants F.D /FE.DUX denote the ducal period, a title that Federico received from Sisto IV only in 1474.

Against the methodological validity of using the coat of arms as a dating element, two arguments can be advanced. Firstly, it is plausible that a codex could have been illuminated even years after its acquisition. Secondly, a previously affixed coat of arms might have been updated or replaced by another. However, contrary to the first argument, it is crucial to consider the establishment of the Federican library, which prioritized acquiring high-quality codices, superior to those already possessed, with the coat of arms serving as a marker of distinction for the most prestigious manuscripts. In this context, delaying the affixing of the coat of arms on purchased codices would have been counterproductive, as these manuscripts needed to be promptly placed on library shelves to showcase prestige and wealth. Contrary to the second hypothesis, it is worth noting that within the Greek collection, there are unquestionably 12 coats of arms associated with the count period, evident from the letters F.C. (*Federicus Comes*). Therefore, if one were to suggest the substitution of comital coats of arms with ducal ones, explanations would be required regarding the persistence of the 12 codices with count coats of arms. Moreover, analyzing the position of the coats of arms on the *codices* enables us to definitively reject the hypothesis of coat of arms replacement. Coats of arms of the count period are illuminated on the initial leaf of writing of each codex. Any replacement of these coats of arms would have caused the loss of the first leaf of writing.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> Regarding the validity of using miniatures as a criterion for dating, see STORNAJOLO (1902: XVII–XVIII) and FRONZI (2000–2001: 55–64). About the comparison with the Ducal Palace see ROTONDI (1950: 113–118).

For these reasons and thanks to a parallelism with the decorative project of the Ducal Palace *in toto* - entirely signed by Federico both as count and duke - the criterion of using the miniature as a dating element is considered reliable.

Among the *Urbinales Graeci*, 53 codices out of 168 (31.54%) present a Federician coat of arms: the codices with count letters, F.C., are 12 (*Urb. gr. 2, 7, 34, 36, 43, 46, 101, 114, 115, 116, 131, 137*); the codices with ducal letters, F.D. and FE.DUX, are 28 (*Urb. gr. 15, 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 22, 37, 42, 44, 49, 41, 66, 69, 78, 80, 84, 85, 94, 102, 108, 128, 129, 130, 146, 148, 157, 159*); the codices without letters are 13 (*Urb. gr. 32, 33, 64, 98, 99, 111, 112, 113, 135, 136, 139, 140, 141*).

Our attention will now be directed to *Urb. Gr. 141*. This codex presents dual Federician coat of arms on the flesh side of the third flyleaf that covers the manuscript. The coat of arms is of a simple (or minor) type, it does not present letters and is associated with the circle for the title. The latter exhibits a decoration of lanceolate leaves, green in color, oriented counterclockwise. There are joints at the north and south cardinal points, without any reversal in the direction of the decoration. The external decoration outside the circle, of a circular type, consists of a variably expanded weave of thin tendrils, made with a light brown ink. Then there are floral elements in blue and purple as well as numerous gold dots, bordered in black. Inside the circle, on a blank background, lies the title text featuring the authors' name, the title of the works, expressed both in Greek and Latin, alternating lines in blue and red ink (Fig. 4).

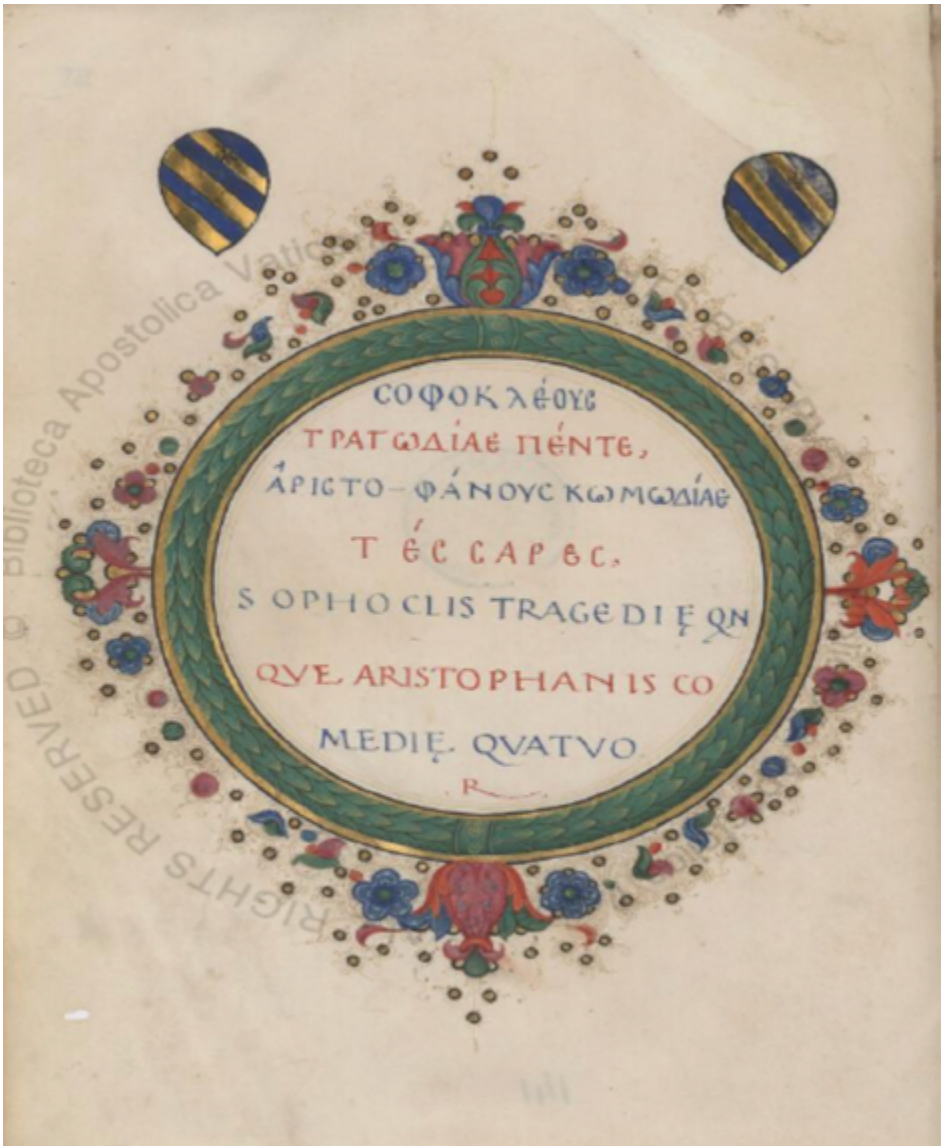


Fig. 4 Coat of arms of the Urb. Gr. 141

The decorative model of *Urb. gr.* 141 is also reproduced in *Urb. gr.* 111, another manuscript belonging to the library collection of Angelo Vadio, as evidenced by the presence of his marginal annotations.<sup>8</sup> (Fig. 5)

<sup>8</sup> STEFEC (2012: 146, n. 192).



Fig. 5 Coat of arms of the *Urb. Gr.* 111

The miniature of the *Urb. Gr.* 111 is described as follow by Martin:

‘sur le verso du second de ces feuillets, nous trouvons le blason de cette maison répété de chaque côté du feuillet, à droite et à gauche.

Au-dessous des blasons, le titre de l'ouvrage, en grec et en latin Ἰσοκράτους λόγιοι. Isocratis orationes, est enfermé dans une couronne de laurier, entourée elle-même d'ornements qui remplissent presque tout le feuillet'.<sup>9</sup>

The scholar, using the coat of arms as a dating element, merely states that this coat of arms belongs to the Montefeltro family and not to the Della Rovere family, thus predating 1508, hypothesizing that it was more likely annexed under Federico da Montefeltro rather than Guidubaldo.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, Pinto in 2003 argues that *Urb. gr.* 111: '[è] entrato a far parte della biblioteca dei duchi di Urbino prima del 1504, probabilmente già sotto Federico da Montefeltro'.<sup>11</sup> Already in 1895, Stornajolo clarified that it was acquired by Federico, as he describes the miniature of the *Urb. gr.* 111 manuscript: 'in summa pagella dextrorsum et sinistrorsum insunt duae tesserae gentiliciae minores ducis urbinatium Friderici, quae aquilam tantum, uti insigne familiare, praebent'.<sup>12</sup>

Now, the coat of arms defined as simple (also known as minor) - shaped like an inverted shield, divided into six alternating bands in gold and blue - could belong to either the count period or the ducal one, as suggested by the analysis of such coat of arms in the *Urbinales Graeci* manuscripts. The simple coat of arms may indeed appear associated with the letters F.C. (see *Urb. gr.* 7), F.D. (see *Urb. gr.* 148), or it may appear without letters, as in the case of *Urb. gr.* 111, 113, 136, and 141.

In his thesis on the Greek manuscripts of Palla Strozzi, Fronzi dedicates a section to the study of coats of arms in the *Urbinales Graeci* codices and considers *Urb. gr.* 111 as the only case of a manuscript with

<sup>9</sup> MARTIN (1881: 2–3).

<sup>10</sup> MARTIN (1881: 3).

<sup>11</sup> PINTO (2003: 38–39).

<sup>12</sup> STORNAJOLO (1895: 173).

a coat of arms from the count period associated with the circle.<sup>13</sup> *Urb. gr.* 111 is dated by Fronzi to the count period (before 1474) based on Stornajolo's assertion: 'antiquiores, ut mihi videtur, tesserae gentilitiae Friderici, unam aquilam nigram aut ad summum tres praebent'.<sup>14</sup>

As previously mentioned, Stornajolo in the analysis of the *Urb. gr.* 111 manuscript, describes the decoration as composed of 'duae tesserae gentilitiae minores ducis urbinatium Friderici'.<sup>15</sup> It is interesting to observe Stornajolo's description regarding the *Urb. gr.* 141 manuscript, which, as stated, presents a decoration similar to that of *Urb. gr.* 111. Concerning the *Urb. gr.* 141 manuscript, Stornajolo writes: 'in summo folio duae tesserae gentilitiae parvae comitis Friderici'.<sup>16</sup> The comparison between the descriptions of *Urb. gr.* 111 and 141 thus shows an oscillation in the use of the terms comes and dux.

Another aspect of the miniature that deserves attention is the decoration of the circle. The analysis of coats of arms in the *Urbinate Graeci* manuscripts shows that this element is never associated with comital coats of arms, while all the codices with ducal letters (F.D. or FE.DUX) present the circle as an additional decorative element for the title. Therefore, if *Urb. gr.* 111 and 141 were from the count period, they would represent the only two exceptions within this framework.

Furthermore, we need to consider the position of the miniature within the manuscripts. Codices from the count period feature the coat of arms illuminated on the first or the first few leaves of writing.<sup>17</sup> In contrast, manuscripts from the ducal period have the coat of arms illuminated on a blank leaf, frequently added specifically to include the coat

<sup>13</sup> FRONZI (2000–2001: 59). He does not include the *Urb. gr.* 141 codex among the list of manuscripts adorned with a coat of arms.

<sup>14</sup> STORNAJOLO (1895: XVI), quoted by FRONZI (2000–2001: 37, n. 4).

<sup>15</sup> STORNAJOLO (1895: 173).

<sup>16</sup> STORNAJOLO (1895: 267).

<sup>17</sup> See the following codices from the count period with letters F.C.: *Urb. gr.* 2, 7, 34, 36, 43, 46, 101, 114, 115, 116, 131 e 137.

of arms and the circle for the title.<sup>18</sup> Among the ducal codices, there are three cases where the decorative apparatus is spread across two different pages: the circle for the title on a separate blank leaf and the coat of arms on the writing page.<sup>19</sup> Both *Urb. gr.* 111 and 141 present the circle decoration and the coat of arms on the same page, particularly on the flesh side of an added parchment leaf to contain the decorative apparatus.

Examining all the 13 *Urbinales Graeci* codices without letters – as said more difficult to date – of which *Urb. gr.* 111 and 141 are a part, it emerges that *Urb. gr.* 112, 135, and 136 do not have the circle decoration and have the coat of arms on the first leaf of writing. Based on the characteristics outlined above, it can be inferred that they belong to the count period.<sup>20</sup> This conclusion gains further support from the analysis of the provenance of these three codices, specifically originating from the Florentine workshop of Vespasiano da Bisticci. He was the primary supplier of codices for Federico's library, having dispatched the largest number of manuscripts to Urbino before 1474.

Among the remaining ten codices without letters, all feature the circle decoration for the title, a characteristic exclusively associated with ducal coats of arms as already said. Two of them have the coat of arms and the circle decoration on separate pages (*Urb. gr.* 32 and 33), while the other eight display them together on the same page (*Urb. gr.* 64, 98, 99, 111, 113, 139, 140, and 141).<sup>21</sup> If we accept the miniature decoration as a valid dating indicator, these ten codices are dated to the ducal period. Consequently, their inclusion in the Federician library would have occurred after 1474.

<sup>18</sup> See the following *codices*: *Urb. gr.* 16, 17, 18, 22, 37, 42, 44, 49, 61, 69, 78, 80, 84, 85, 94, 99, 102, 128, 129, 130, 140, 146, 148, 157. They all are unquestionably from the ducal period as proved by the letters F.D. or FE.DUX.

<sup>19</sup> See *Urb. gr.* 15, 20, 21.

<sup>20</sup> See FRONZI (2000–2001: 136–137).

<sup>21</sup> Out of these ten manuscripts, Fronzi considers 32, 33, 64, 98, 99, 113 and 139 to be ducal. He does not count 140 and 141 and he considers 111 to be comital. See FRONZI (2000–2001: 135–145).

Additional support for the suggested ducal dating of 111 and 141 could come from their inclusion, along with numbers 64, 98, and 99, in the group of manuscripts belonging to Angelo Vadio.<sup>22</sup> None of Vadio's manuscripts present count coat of arms, as there are no miniaturized codices with the letters F.C. annotated by the humanist. Among the manuscripts unquestionably belonging to Vadio (totaling 51), those adorned with a coat of arms feature a ducal emblem.<sup>23</sup> Specifically, out of the 18 Vadio's codices displaying a coat of arms, 13 exhibit ducal letters (*Urb. gr.* 37, 44, 61, 66, 78, 85, 94, 102, 108, 129, 146, 148, 159), 3 have been attributed to the ducal period by Fronzi based on ornamentation to the ducal period (*Urb. gr.* 64, 98, 99). Although *Urb. Gr.* 111 and 141 have been overlooked in previous studies, they too can be linked to the ducal period based on the analysis of their coats of arms. The hypothesis of a ducal dating for these codices, based on the analysis of the miniature, thus confirms the argument proposed by Stefec. According to Stefec, Vadio's manuscripts were probably incorporated into the library after the humanist's death, which probably occurred shortly before 1482.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, Stefec's study of Vadio's biography suggests a timeline aligning with the acquisition of *Urb. gr.* 111 and *Urb. gr.* 141 after 1474. Vadio is documented between Padua and Vicenza in 1475, and from September 1476, he is recorded as a teacher in Cesena for two years, after which his whereabouts become uncertain.<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> About these manuscripts see FRONZI (2000–2001: 135–145).

<sup>23</sup> I regard manuscripts that were undoubtedly owned by Vadius as those that were partially or entirely copied by the humanist himself. In addition to these manuscripts, I also include those for which Stefec has reconstructed the acquisition history, identifying the places of purchase in Crete, Constantinople, Cyprus, and Italy. See the following *Urb. gr.* 6, 37, 39, 44, 47, 50, 51, 52, 55, 61, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 78, 81, 85, 91, 94, 95, 98, 99, 102, 103, 104, 108, 110, 111, 117, 118, 119, 120, 122, 127, 129, 141, 144, 145, 146, 148, 150, 152, 154, 155, 156, 158, 159, 160, 161e R429. See STEFEC (2012: 95–198).

<sup>24</sup> STEFEC (2012: 96; 122).

<sup>25</sup> STEFEC (2012: 121–122).

## Bibliography

- BATTEZZATO 1996 L. BATTEZZATO: *I codici Laur. C.S.66 + C.S. 139, Urb. Gr. 141 + Ambr. 441 (H 77 sup.) e la tradizione manoscritta di Sofocle*. Prometheus. Rivista di studi classici 22 n. 1 (1996) 29–34.
- FRONZI 2000-2001 R. FRONZI: *I codici greci di Palla Strozzi nella Biblioteca del duca Federico da Montefeltro*, tesi di laurea, relatore M. R. Falivene, Università degli Studi di Urbino, Urbino, 2000–2001.
- MANFREDI-POTENZA 2022  
A. MANFREDI – F. POTENZA: *I codici greci di Niccolò V. Edizione dell'inventario del 1455 e identificazione dei manoscritti con approfondimenti sulle vicende iniziali del fondo vaticano greco della Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana*. Città del Vaticano 2022.
- MARTIN 1881 M. A. MARTIN: *Le Manuscrit d'Isocrate urbinas CXI de la Vaticane. Description et histoire*. Paris 1881.
- PINTO 2003 P. M. PINTO: *Per la storia del testo di Isocrate. La testimonianza d'autore*. Bari 2003.
- RIOU 1982 Y.F. RIOU: *Les manuscrits classiques latins de la Bibliothèque Vaticane*. Paris 1982.
- ROTONDI 1950 P. ROTONDI: *Il palazzo ducale di Urbino*. Urbino 1950.
- STEFEC 2012 R. STEFEC: *Die griechische Bibliothek des Angelo Vadio da Rimini*. RHM 54 (2012) 95–198.
- STORNAJOLO 1895 C. STORNAJOLO: *Codices Urbinates Graeci Bibliothecae Vaticanae*. Romae 1895.
- STORNAJOLO 1902 C. STORNAJOLO: *Codices Urbinates Latini I: Codices 1–500*. Romae 1902.