

Aretino, Pietro

Arezzo 1492 – 1556 Venice

De le Lettere di M. Pietro Aretino. Libro primo.**Venice, Francesco Marcolini, 1538 (January)**

FOLIO (265 × 190 mm), (95) of (106)ff., signed A–Z⁴ AA–CC⁴ ♠² and foliated [1]–104 (2), LACKING ELEVEN LEAVES (A1, B3, D1, Y2–Y3, CC1–CC4 ♠1–♠2, see discussion below).

PAPER cardinal's hat surmounted by a cross (like Briquet 3416).¹

PROVENANCE Francesco Testa (1761–1846) — Leonardo Trissino (1780–1841), his inscriptions on endleaves, including *Leonardo Trissino Vicenza 10 gennaio 1817 Dono di Francesco Testa*² — Mario Lanfranchi, London — Bloomsbury Auctions, 'Libri, Autografi e Stampe', Rome, 10 December 2008, lot 35

Apart from missing leaves and defects to binding, in very good state of preservation.

BINDING 18th-century Italian vellum.

THE FIRST PRINTED COLLECTION OF LETTERS by a living person in the *volgare*, a major event in the history of the Italian language. It inspired a flood of *lettere volgare*, both the collected letters of individuals and anthologies, perhaps the most distinctive product of Italian literary life in the mid-Cinquecento.³

Aretino appears to have conceived the idea of publishing a collection of his letters in the spring of 1537 and it is likely that printing started in September and was completed in late

¹ Charles-Moise Briquet, *Les filigranes: dictionnaire historique des marques du papier dès leur apparition vers 1282 jusqu'en 1600*, edited by Allan Stevenson (Amsterdam 1968), I, p.225: 'Venise, 1535... Var. ident.: Vicence, 1533'; Fabio Massimo Bertolo, *Aretino e la stampa* (Rome 2003), pp.51(note 5), 63.

² Sebastiano Rumor, *Gli scrittori vicentini dei secoli decimottavo e decimonono* (Venice 1908), III, pp.177–183 (Testa), 251–253 (Trissino).

³ See the lists of authors who published their collections of letters after Aretino, in *Le 'Carte messagiere': Retorica e modelli di comunicazione epistolare: per un indice dei libri di lettere del Cinquecento*, edited by Amedeo Quondam (Rome 1981), pp.286–316; and Jeannine Basso, *Le genre épistolaire en langue italienne (1538–1662): Répertoire chronologique et analytique* (Rome & Nancy 1990).

December 1537;⁴ the colophon in all known copies of the edition reads 'Impresso in Vinetia: per Francesco Marcolini da Forli apresso a la Chiesa de la Terneta, Nel anno del Signore. MDXXXVIII. Il mese di Genaro' (M1).⁵ The book was an immediate success: within months, five editions had been produced by other publishers (in defiance of Marcolini's copyright), and another four such editions were based on a new edition issued by Marcolini in September 1538, incorporating twenty-five new letters (M2).⁶ In 1542, a second volume was published by Marcolini.

This first edition has been pursued by collectors since the eighteenth century and is widely recognised now as a rare book.⁷ Six copies are known, of which two only (London and Munich) are complete

- Florence, Biblioteca nazionale centrale, B.R.120⁸
- Forli, Biblioteca comunale 'Aurelio Saffi', Fondo Piancastelli Marcolini 20⁹
- Hamburg, Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, Handschriftenabteilung B/8277¹⁰
- London, British Library, 88.h.14
- Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, 2. Epist 2¹¹
- Pisa, Biblioteca universitaria, H F 3 4¹²

⁴ Charles Hope, 'Some misdated letters of Pietro Aretino' in *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 59 (1996), pp.304–314.

⁵ The page with register and colophon (folio CC4 recto) is reproduced by Servolini, *op. cit.*, Tav. IV (from the Louis Thompson Rowe — Biblioteca Comunale di Forli copy). 'M1' is the siglum established for the first edition by Fausto Nicolini in his edition of the first book of the *Lettere* (Bari 1913).

⁶ The outer sheet of the gathering A (conjugate folios A1 and A4) was reprinted for M2, and also quire CC (list of errors and register); otherwise, up to the new letters printed at the end, M1 and M2 are identical; see Hope, *op. cit.*, pp.304–305 (note 1), p.309 (note 31), and Bertolo, *op. cit.*, pp.49–55.

⁷ See, for example, Nicolini, *op. cit.*, p.410: 'Diventata fin dal secolo decimottavo assai rara, oggi è quasi introvabile'. Copies were offered in the Crofts and Pinelli sales: Samuel Paterson, 'Bibliotheca Croftsiana. A catalogue of the curious and distinguished library of the late Reverend and Learned Thomas Crofts', London, 4 April 1783 (and 42 days), lot 3849; Jacopo Morelli, *Bibliotheca Maphaei Pinellii Veneti magno jam studio collecta* (Venice 1787), IV, p.245, no. 1709.

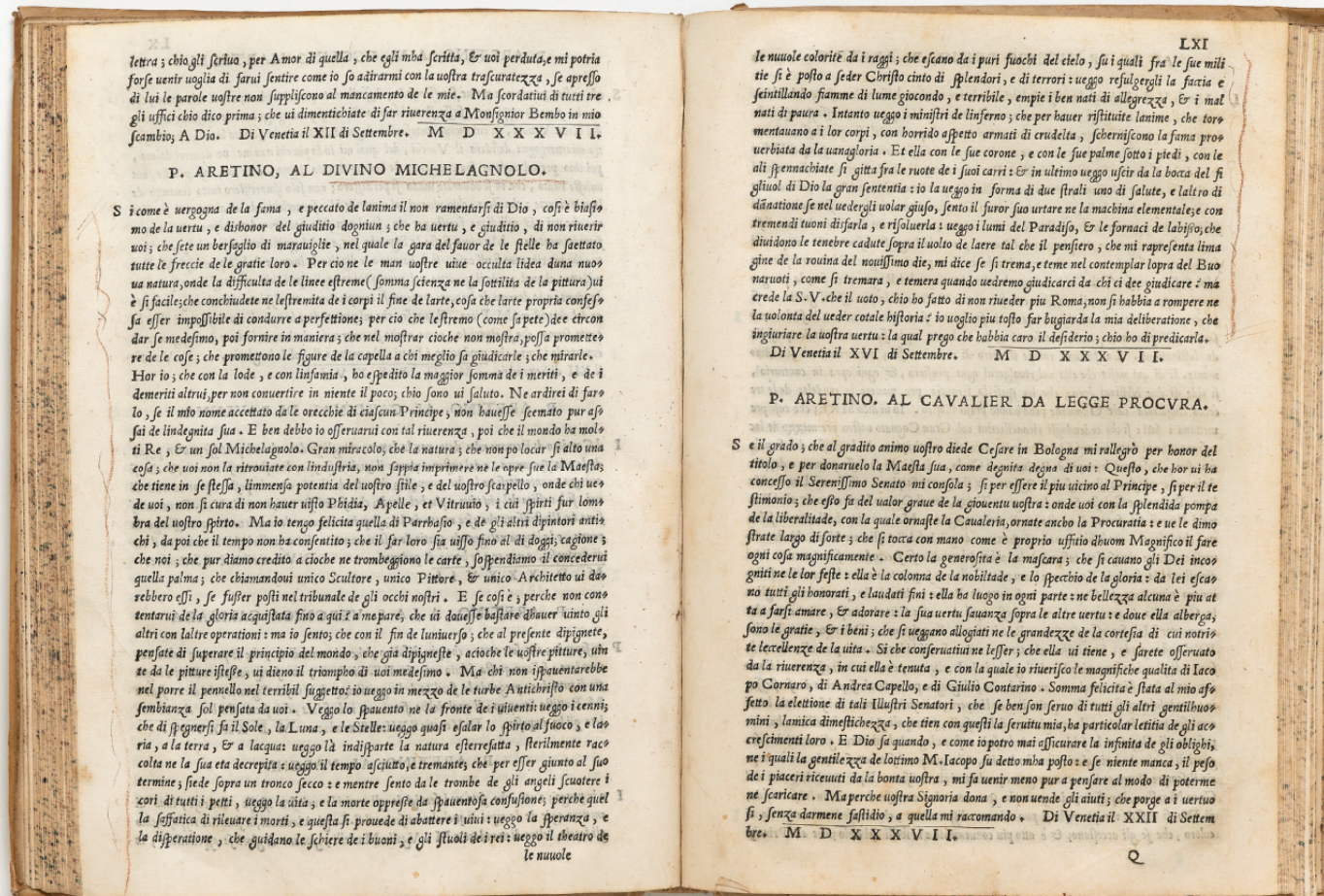
⁸ Lacking the terminal bifolium (signed ♠ and called for in the register); see Nicolini, *op. cit.*, pp.410–412. Basso, *op. cit.*, I, p.39: 'le feuillet 100 manque: il a peut-être été arraché parce qu'il contient la l. à Vasari d'inspiration ou obscène ou naturiste, comme le lecteur voudra'.

⁹ Collated by Servolini, *op. cit.*, p.10 no. 5, and found to be lacking the terminal bifolium.

¹⁰ At time of writing (September 2011), we are waiting for a collation to be sent by the University Librarian.

¹¹ *Index Aureliensis. Catalogus librorum sedecimo saeculo impressorum* (Baden-Baden 1966), II, 107.043; Bertolo, *op. cit.*, p.53, collated the copy and found it complete.

¹² Described by Nicolini, *op. cit.*, pp.410–412.

First printing of Aretino's letter of September 1537 'al divino Michelangelo', in which he offers to provide the *invenzione* the painter would need for his *Last Judgment*

Our copy lacks eleven leaves, including the title and final leaf, both of which are adorned with a woodcut portrait of Aretino set within an architectural frame.¹³ In the absence of these leaves, and also the colophon leaf (folio CC4), proof of first edition is found on folio A4 (letter to Francesco degli Albizi), where line 2 reads ‘... sua mosse’ (corrected to ‘...sua si mosse’ in errata and in M2).¹⁴

The folios lacking in our volume are these

⊗ A1 (folio 1), title: woodcut architectural title-border with terminal figures enclosing woodcut portrait of Aretino in profile, a cartouche lettered *De le lettere di M. Pietro Aretino. Libro Primo MDXXXVIII* | [below:] *Cum Privilegiis*; verso blank ⊗ B3 (folio 7), [Letter 9:] Federico II Gonzaga (6 August 1527), [10:] Cesare Fregoso (9 November 1527), [11:] Abate Gonzaga (8 June 1527), [12:] Giovanni Gaddi (7 October 1528), [13:] Federico II Gonzaga (11 May 1529), and five lines of [14:] Donato de’Bardi (6 April 1529) ⊗ D1 (folio 13), [37:] François I, king of France (10 November 1533), [38:] Conte Manfredo di Collalto (26 November 1533), [39:] Cardinal Ippolito de’Medici (19 December 1533), and portion of [40:] Pietro Paolo Vergerio (20 January 1534) ⊗ Y2 (folio 86), portion (appended verses) of [273:] Giovan Francesco Faloppia (5 December 1537), [274:] Biagio Iuleo (5 December 1537), [275:] Niccolò da Piombino (5 December 1537), [276:] Fortunio Spira (6 December 1537), and part of [277:] Lodovico Dolce (5 December 1537) ⊗ Y3 (folio 87), remaining part of [277:] Lodovico Dolce (5 December 1537), [278:] Domenico Castelù (5 December 1537), [279:] Contessa Argentina Pallavicini Rangone (5 December 1537), [Appendix 2:] Benedetto Varchi (7 December 1527) ⊗ CC1 (folio 101), [310:] Pietro Zeno (21 December 1537), [311:] Conte Giovanni di Porcia (21 December 1537), [312:] Pietro Zeno (21 December 1537), [Appendix 8:] Francesco Marcolini (20 December 1537), and beginning of [313:] Giorgio Vasari (7 June 1537 [dated 19 December in M3]) ⊗ CC2 (folio 102), remainder of [313:] Giorgio Vasari (7 June 1537), [314:] Polo Cicogna (20 December 1537 [dated 20 December in M3]), and beginning of [315:] Gioaniacopo Malatesta, ‘mastro di stalla’ (21 December 1537 [dated 20 December in M3]) ⊗ CC3 (folio 103), remainder of [315:] Gioaniacopo Malatesta (21 December 1537 [dated 20 December in M3]), [316:] Vittore Soranzo (21 December 1537), beginning of errata¹⁵ ⊗ CC4 (folio 104), remainder of errata, [Appendix 1:] Francesco Marcolini ([22 June 1537]), colophon with printer’s device and register ⊗ ♣1 (folio 105), ‘Tavola’ (index) ⊗ ♣2 (folio 106), architectural title-border

with terminal figures enclosing portrait of Aretino in profile (as on title-page), with (in place of place of the title) *Divus P. Aretinus acerrimus virtutum et vitiorum demonstrator | Veritas odium parit*.

The *Lettere* are a fundamental source of information about Aretino himself and his wide circle of friends and acquaintances, including many artists. The ‘Libro Primo’ contains many letters of great art historical interest, notably those addressed ‘Al Divino Michelagnolo’ (Letter 193),¹⁶ to Jacopo Sansovino (incorporating a list of that artist’s major works, Letter 237), Niccolò Pericoli detto Tribolo (including a description of Titian’s lost *Death of St Peter Martyr*, Letter 213), Titian (Letter 223),¹⁷ and Giorgio Vasari (Letters 201, 313). Fortunately, with the exception of the second letter to Vasari (Letter 313), all these famous letters are present in our incomplete copy.

REFERENCES Luigi Servolini, *Supplemento agli Annali della tipografia veneziana di Francesco Marcolini compilati da Scipione Casali* (Bologna 1958), p.10 no. 5; *Le edizioni italiane del XVI secolo: Censimento nazionale* (Rome 1990), A–2358

¹³ For the portrait, see *Lettere sull’arte di Pietro Aretino*, edited by Ettore Camesasca with commentary by Fidenzio Pertile and Carlo Cordié (Milan 1957–1960), III/2, p.214 and pl. 22; Harold E. Wethey, *The Paintings of Titian, 2: The Portraits* (London 1971), pp.76–77; David Rosand, *Titian and the Venetian woodcut*, catalogue of an exhibition held at the National Gallery of Art (Washington, DC 1976), p.270 no. 82. The frame had been employed by Marcolini for Serlio’s *Regole generali di architettura* (September 1537).

¹⁴ See Hope, *op. cit.*, pp.304–305 (note 1), and Paolo Procaccioli’s critical edition, *Edizione Nazionale delle Opere di Pietro Aretino, Volume Quarto: Lettere, Tomo 1* (Rome 1997), p.54.

¹⁵ ‘Correttione de gli errori’, transcribed in Francesco Erspamer’s edition (*Biblioteca di Scrittori Italiani, Pietro Aretino: Lettere, Libro primo*, Parma 1995, pp.XLIII–XLV).

¹⁶ The letters are numbered according to Procaccioli’s edition (*op. cit.*), in which letters printed only in M1 and M2 are relegated to an Appendix.

¹⁷ *Tiziano: l’epistolario*, edited by Lionello Puppi (Florence 2012), pp.94–95 no. 54.