

PRESS RELEASE

It is with great pleasure that the Fondazione Palazzo Coronini Cronberg of Gorizia announces an important discovery made in its library collections and related to the Renaissance history and culture. The bibliophile and book historian Duilio Contin has in fact discovered among the manuscripts and antique books gathered by Count Guglielmo Coronini a document dating from the end of the 15th C and considered lost for centuries: it is the manuscript of the famous mathematician Luca Pacioli (1445c.-1517c.) called “Game of Chess”, often mentioned in bibliographical documents but never found. This manuscript called by the author “De ludo scacchorum ...” and known as “Schifanoia” was dedicated to the marquise of Mantova, Isabella d’Este.

During his research commissioned by the Centro Studi of Aboca Museum of Sansepolcro concerning bibliographical studies on Pietro della Francesca and Luca Pacioli (both born in the Tuscan town), Duilio Contin had applied to the prestigious Fondazione Coronini Cronberg of Gorizia to examine the rich library containing more than 22,000 volumes.

Only by chance Serenella Ferrari Benedetti, cultural co-ordinator of the Fondazione, drew Contin’s attention to the anonymous manuscript on the game of chess, in which several scholars had been interested, ignoring it was Luca Pacioli’s most researched book.

The topic, the watermark surely belonging to the late 15C, the preciousness of the cover, the experience and the intuition of the bibliophile provide a convincing evidence of the discovery. The graphical characteristics of the code, after a palaeographical examination, would confirm the autography of Pacioli. Also the language of the manuscript – according to Enzo Mattesini, professor of Italian Linguistics at the University of Perugia and expert on the vernacular used by Pacioli in other works – would present characteristics which can be supposedly considered peculiar to the famous figure.

One of the most distinguished mathematicians of his time, Luca Pacioli was born in Borgo San Sepolcro (Arezzo) around 1445 and died (perhaps in Venice) in 1517. He studied theology and entered the Franciscan Order in 1470. He taught commercial arithmetic and algebra in Perugia, Rome (where he met Leon Battista Alberti), Naples, Urbino, Venice; he was at the Court of Ludovico il Moro (1496-1499), where he made friends with Leonardo da Vinci, then he moved to Venice again. His main work, the result of learned discussions at the Milanese Court, is “De Divina Proportione”, a text of platonic inspiration finished in 1497 and printed afterwards in Venice (1509). Additionally he wrote a “Summa de Arithmetica, Geometria, Proportioni et Proportionalità” (dedicated to Guidobaldo da Montefeltro), and edited the works of Euclid (published in Venice in 1509).

The forty-eight papers of the Coronini Manuscript containing numerous practical demonstrations of the game of chess with the solution keys, are perfectly kept and the chess pieces are finely drawn and coloured in black and red; so finely as to make the discoverer cautiously suspect that it might be the hand of another artist. In this connection Contin points out that the manuscript was written around the year 1500, the period in which Pacioli and Leonardo da Vinci worked together.

It is known that during their stay in Milan they were friends and collaborated to each other’s works: in Leonardo’s manuscripts in fact there are many traces of Pacioli’s lessons on *The Elements* of Euclid, while Leonardo’s touch is evident in some sketches of the magnificent drawings of the polyhedrons illustrating the text of the *Divina Proportione*, published in Venice in 1509 together with two treatises but written around 1498.

In 1499 when the king of France Louis XII invaded the Duchy of Milan, causing the escape of Ludovico il Moro, Pacioli and Leonardo repaired, in December of the same year, to Mantova under the protection of marquise Isabella d’Este, to whom the manuscript is dedicated, then moved to Venice and finally to Florence.

At the moment Contin is continuing his studies on the story of the manuscript which arrived at the Fondazione after Guglielmo Coronini, in 1963, had bought a collection of antique books from a bookshop in Venice owned by Giuseppe Malattia della Vallata, a Friulian poet and bibliophile.