

Marco di Bartolomeo Rustici's Amazing Adventure

» NERIDA NEWBIGIN AND KATHLEEN OLIVE

On 10 November 2015, Florence hosted the Council of Italian Bishops and the first visit to the city of His Holiness Pope Francis. To mark the occasion, the Florentine Curia offered to His Holiness a remarkable gift: a facsimile edition of the *Codex Rustici*, together with a critical edition prepared by two Australian scholars, Kathleen Olive and Nerida Newbigin, of the University of Sydney. The subsequent launch of the volume, in the Florentine Baptistery on 28 November, brought to an end an epic journey.

Some time around 1450, a Florentine goldsmith, Marco di Bartolomeo Rustici, began work on a *summa* of his readings in the form of an account of his journey to the Holy Land in the year 144-. His education was fairly typical of that of an ambitious artisan and guild member: he could read and write in Italian, he knew enough Latin to follow the mass and, like so many of his generation, he was a voracious consumer of *volgarizzamenti* of the classics of hagiography, theology, philosophy, history and geography, as well as of pilgrimage accounts and the works of Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio. He remained largely untouched by the renaissance of classical philosophy and letters, fuelled by the rediscovery of Greek and Roman texts

(left)

Folio 1r. The first four days of Creation: a series of circles inscribed first with the spheres; the separation into day and night; the separation into heavens above and earth below; and the separation into land and the waters below.

ALL MANUSCRIPT PHOTOS: ANTONIO QUATTRONE. COURTESY CASA EDITRICE LEO S. OLSCHKI & THE SEMINARIO ARCIVESCOVILE MAGGIORE, FLORENCE

and the arrival of scholars and ideas from Constantinople; his culture was based instead on the certainties of late-medieval lay piety.

Marco di Bartolomeo called his work by many titles in the course of its writing. It is (with variations) his *Dimostrazione dell'andata o viaggio al Santo Sepolcro e al monte Sinai—Guide to the Journey or Voyage to the Holy Sepulchre and to Mount Sinai*. He divided it into three parts. Book 1 maps the history and geography of his beloved Florence; Book 2 recounts his journey from Florence to Alexandria in Egypt; and Book 3 describes the holy sites of Egypt, Sinai, and Palestine. Onto that narrative scaffolding Marco then worked his other readings.

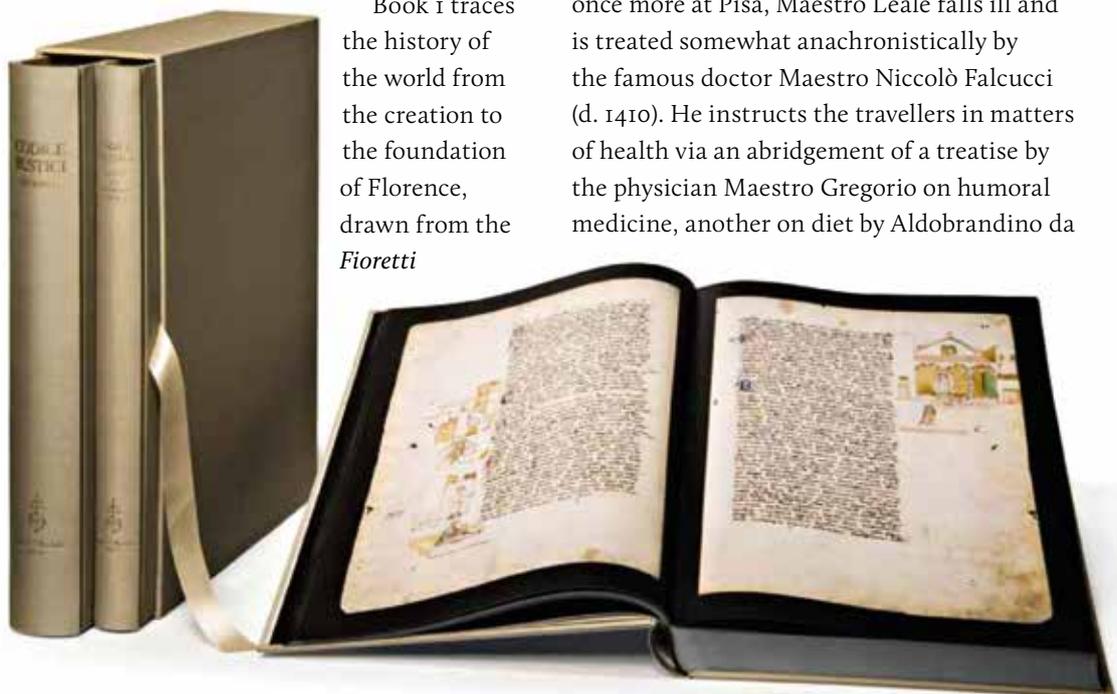
When it was 'complete', Marco had at least two copies made. One he kept for himself, and he continued to work on it until very close to his death in 1457. This is the copy now in the Seminario Arcivescovile Maggiore in Florence, known as the *Codice Rustici*. Some time before 1804 it was stolen from the Vignali family, and in 1812 'rescued' from a street stall by the rector of the seminary, Monsignor Antonio Dell'Ogna. Since then this large manuscript has lived in the Rector's study, and waited patiently to see the light of day. The codex measures 418 × 290 mm and consists of 281 folios; largely because of its size, it has defied attempts to describe it, to categorize it and above all to publish it. But this is the story of that journey.

Book 1 traces the history of the world from the creation to the foundation of Florence, drawn from the *Fioretti*

della Bibbia, Giovanni Villani's *Cronica* and Brunetto Latini's *Tesoretto* and a multitude of other sources. It then lists, quarter by quarter, churches and monasteries and convents, male and female, then hospitals, then religious institutions outside the city gates. And for each of those religious foundations Rustici describes the treasury of merit provided by its patron saint, drawing from Jacobus de Voragine's *Golden Legend* in its Florentine translation. Their lives and their miracles all embellish his description. To the first thirty folios — half of Book 1 — he added coloured marginal drawings, which have been plundered by legions of historians of Florence's art and architecture ever since.

In Book 2, Rustici and two companions (an allegorical Maestro Leale, Servite friar, and a Florentine wool merchant, Antonio di Bartolomeo Ridolfi) set out for Pisa, but having discovered that their ship has already sailed, they go instead to Genoa to find another. This narrative ruse allows Rustici to copy much of Petrarch's description of the Tyrrhenian coast in his *Itinerarium Syriacum*, which was similarly based on classical sources rather than his own experience. For good measure he copies part of a portolan — the list of distances between ports on which a portolan chart was based — in order to introduce cities that he would not be visiting, and to bring in a quick description of England and Ireland. Arriving once more at Pisa, Maestro Leale falls ill and is treated somewhat anachronistically by the famous doctor Maestro Niccolò Falcucci (d. 1410). He instructs the travellers in matters of health via an abridgement of a treatise by the physician Maestro Gregorio on humoral medicine, another on diet by Aldobrandino da

(right)
Marco di Bartolomeo
*Rustici, Codice
Rustici. Libro
intitolato
Dimostrazione
dell'andata o
viaggio al Santo
Sepolcro e al
monte Sinai. 1:
Facsimile; 2. Saggi,*
ed. Elena Gurrieri;
Edizione critica, ed.
Kathleen Olive and
Nerida Newbigin.
(Florence: Olschki,
2015)



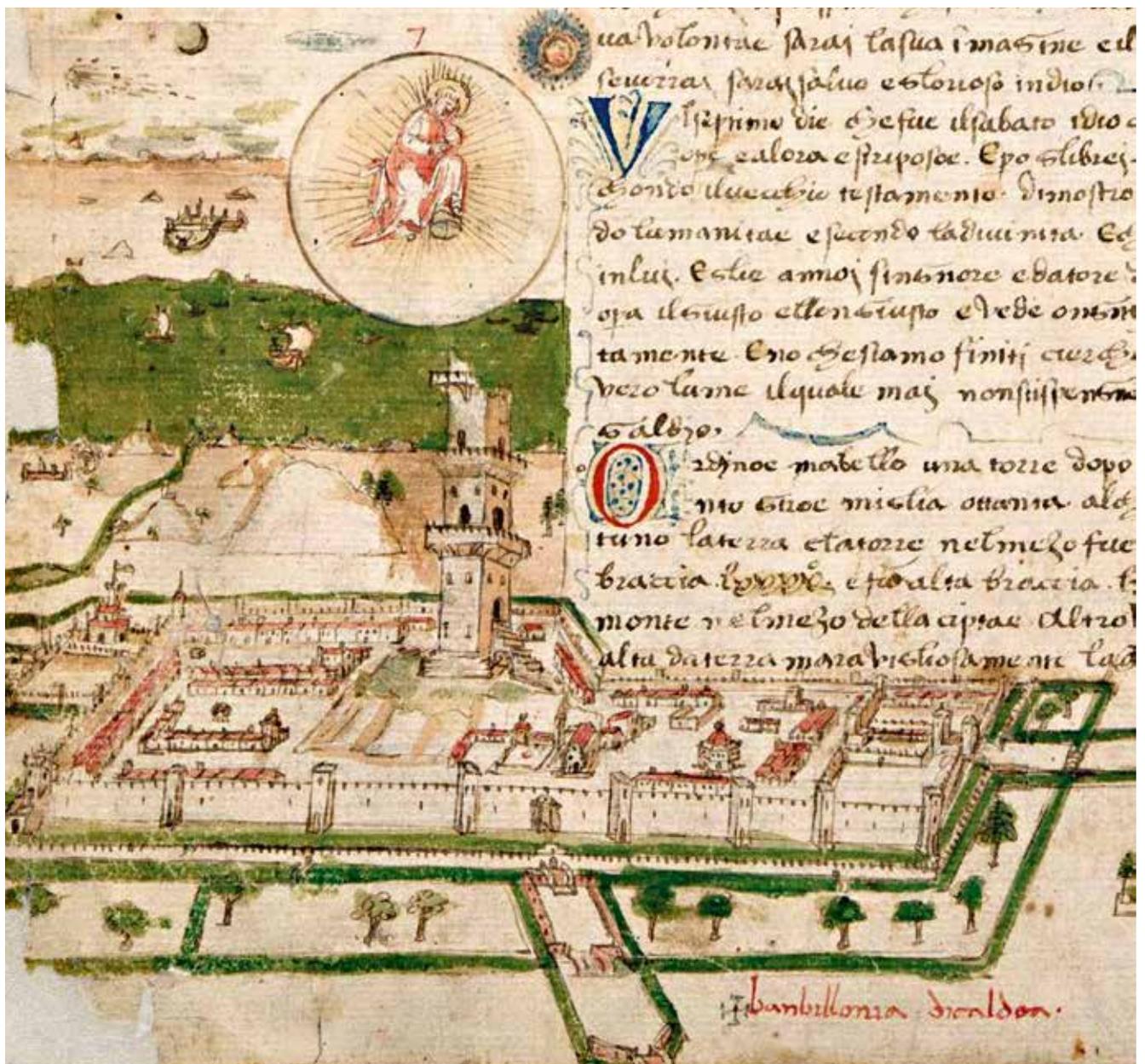
Siena, and one on conception and pregnancy by Giacomo Della Torre. With the body thus prepared for the journey, Rustici turns to the soul, and the pilgrims are instructed in matters of Christian doctrine, sin, confession and sacraments. Their passage past Rome is the occasion for a life of St Alexius, a garbled abridgement of Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy* and an *Art of Rhetoric*, filtered through Bono Giamboni, and a list of popes and emperors derived from Martinus Polonus and extended to the reign of Calixtus V. Cuma is the excuse for two excurses on the sibyls and prophets; Taranto in southern Italy occasions a much emended and augmented discussion of tarantulas and the effects and cures of their

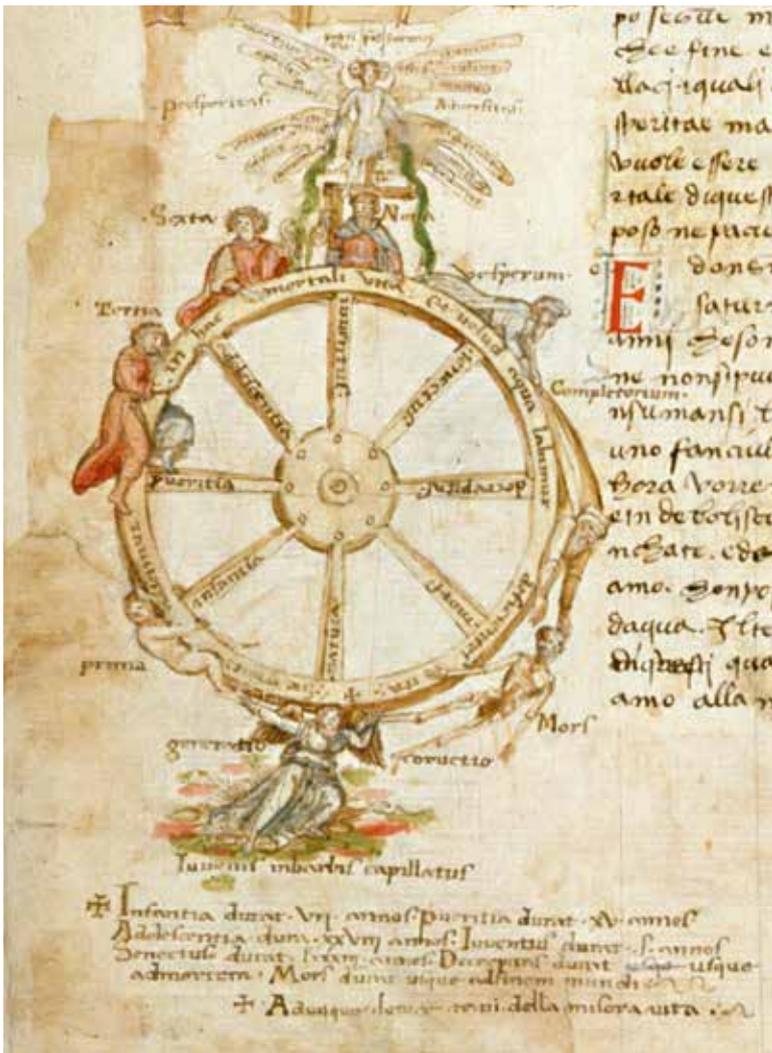
bites, even as the phenomenon of tarantism was evolving.

From Alexandria onwards, Rustici takes up a new work. The *Libro d'Oltramare* (1346) of the Franciscan pilgrim Niccolò da Poggibonsi is his principal source for all the physical aspects of his pilgrimage — appearance of the holy places, characteristics of the local people, where to stay, taxes, bribes, and how to hire camels. But around the places of that narrative Rustici weaves the hermits of the *Lives of the Desert Fathers*, a life of Mohammed from Jacobus de Voragine's life of St Pelagius (Pope Pelagius I, r. 556–561), the stories of the Old Testament, and finally, in Jerusalem, the gospel narratives associated with each of the shrines he visited.

(below)

Folio 1v. God rests on the seventh day. Below, the city of Babylon in Chaldea and the tower built by Mabello (that is, the Tower of Babel). The wall of the city wraps around the text, the hanging gardens flourish outside them.





(above)
Folio 4v. A wheel of Time and Fortune, superimposed with the canonical hours and the seven ages of man.

He creates for himself a huge theatre of memory, and onto each locus in that theatre he places part of the Christian narrative.

Late in his life, Rustici added to his codex, in his own hand, abridgements of two more thirteenth-century *volgarizzamenti*: Zucchero Bencivenni's *Trattato de la Spera* and Piero de' Crescenzi's *Trattato di agricoltura* (he had now acquired a country villa). The one author who influenced Rustici the most was the Greek cosmographer and astronomer Claudius Ptolemy. Ptolemy's *Geographia* had arrived in Florence in the 1390s, complete with its twenty-six maps. It was translated into Latin (but not yet into Italian), and Rustici's references to the maps are such that we conclude he had seen them. They were revised and reproduced in Florence, and he strives to visualise his journey in the context of those maps. When he reaches the top of Mount Sinai, he looks all around him and names — from Ptolemy's map — the

lands to the north, south, east and west. From Ptolemy, or his exchange of ideas with people who could read Ptolemy in Greek or Latin, Rustici understood that the earth was a sphere, that the poles were cold, the equatorial regions hot, that the winds of the northern hemisphere were reversed in the southern hemisphere. He cannot have begun to imagine Australia, nor that one day two 'studiose australiane' would be working under the 'stars of the other pole', as Dante called them, to make his life's work known.

Between Kathleen's PhD in the early 2000s and 2013, the internet — Google, archive.org, HathiTrust, Google Books, academia.edu and innumerable databases and digitisation projects — had made it possible to identify Rustici's sources not just to the level of Cicero, Boethius and Petrarch, but down to the finer detail of which *volgarizzamento* of his authors. Rustici would have loved the internet. In many ways his use of incompetent translations of bad manuscripts (his source for Petrarch's *Itinerarium Syriacum* is exemplary) resembles the worst kind of research cobbled uncritically together from internet sources. Rustici copied from the 'manunet' and often copied nonsense, trusting that the authority of the name would compensate for any deficiencies of the text. His manuscript constitutes a new witness — albeit scrambled — to the manuscript *traditio* of dozens of texts. Identification of the vernacular sources often caused us to backtrack on our proposed emendations. In his list of popes, for example, Rustici records that Pope Sabinian (r. 604–606) died 'opresato da molti muli' (beset by many mules, fol. 140v). A quick check of Martinus Polonus confirmed that 'muli' should have been 'mali', and the 'good pope was beset by many ills', but we found a related codex in the Riccardiana Library, MS 1939, that likewise read 'muli'. Rustici copied 'muli' not by accident but by intention, and mules were the cause of Sabinian's death.

Nerida Newbiggin's initial interest in the *Codice Rustici* was sparked by the illustrations that have made the codex famous. Her work on Florentine religious drama motivated her to look at its descriptions and drawings of churches and monasteries, and she was disappointed to find none that related to

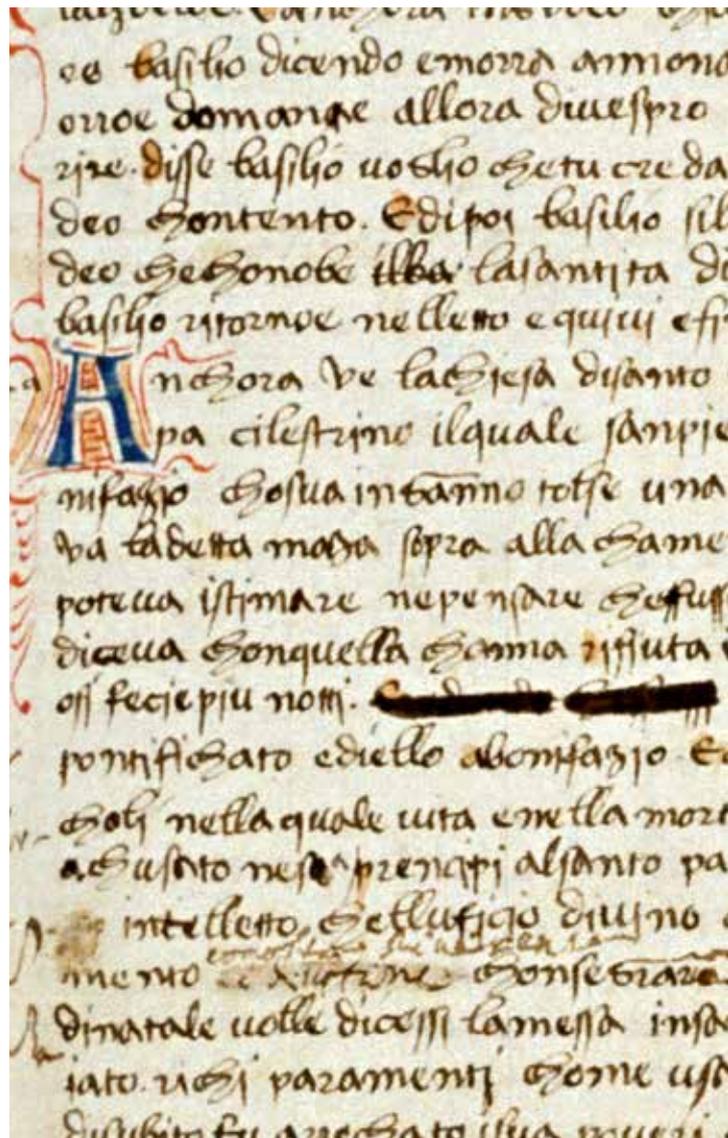


(left)

Folio 8r. The Baptistery of San Giovanni Battista, from the northeast. The porphyry columns on either side of Ghiberti's Gates of Paradise were a gift from the city of Pisa in 1117.

her plays. Nevertheless, curiosity, some research money found under a stone, and the assistance of Professor Riccardo Brusaglia of the University of Florence, led her to ask for a colour diapositive film of the whole jealously guarded codex.

Other projects intervened, as they do. But at the right moment, Kathleen Olive, who had been the University of Sydney's first student to study in Florence on exchange, came asking for a suitable manuscript-related PhD topic. It wasn't love at first sight, and Professor



(above)

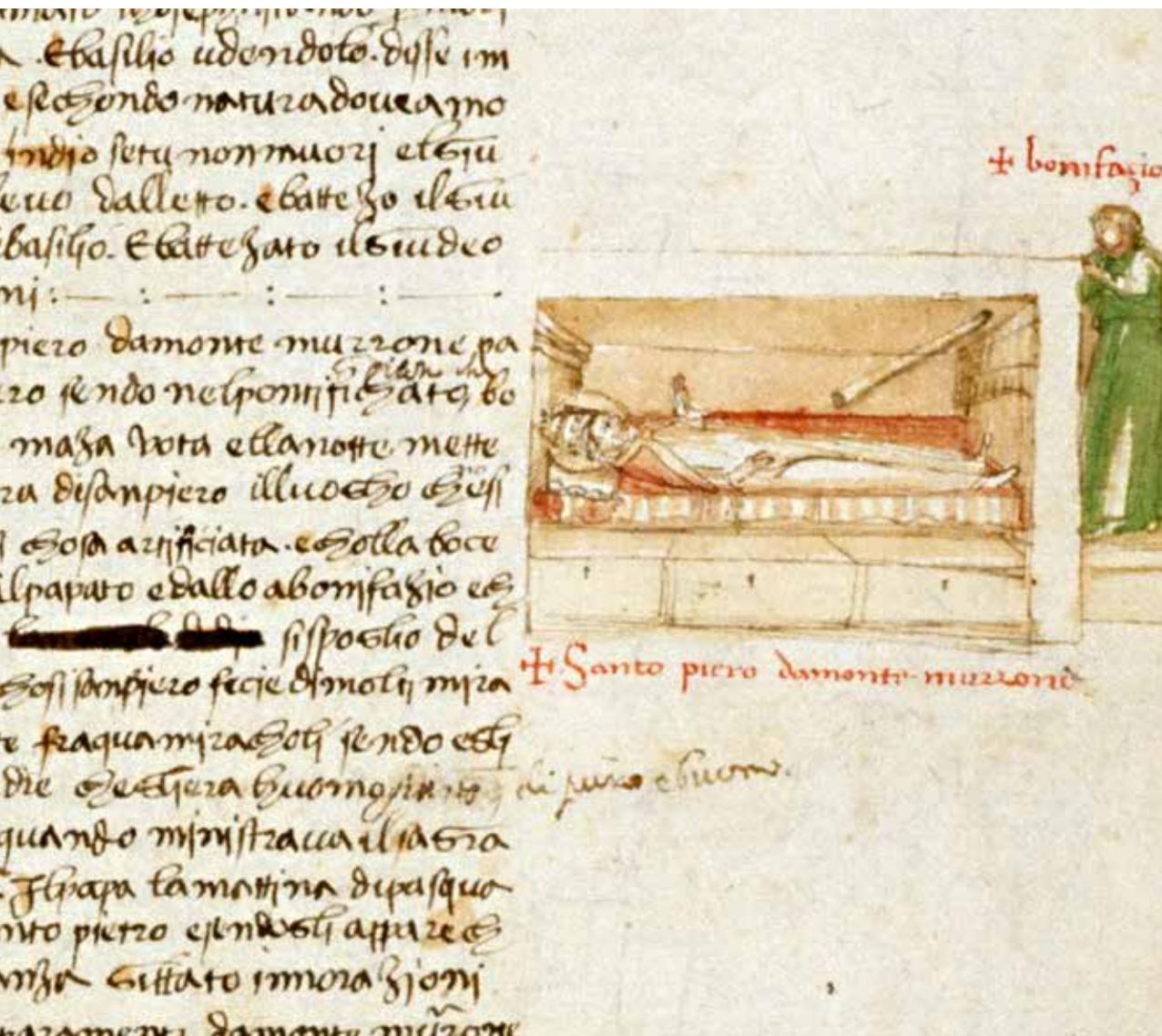
Folio 8v. The Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore, consecrated with great pomp in 1436, and Giotto's belltower. Arnolfo di Cambio's facade was stripped away in 1587 and the present Gothic Revival facade was completed only in 1887 after a series of competitions in the 1860s.

Bruscagli opined — probably rightly — that the manuscript was ‘too long to give as a thesis’, but for four years from 2001 to 2004 Kathleen toiled over the manuscript, over archival documents that fleshed out Rustici’s life, his family, the women whose fortunes kept him afloat, and above all his sources. Her three-volume thesis consisted of an annotated transcription with introduction and commentary. The next stage was to prepare a critical edition, with notes in Italian.

Talk of publication had already begun. From the beginning, the librarian of the seminary, Elena Gurrieri, had spoken of a facsimile with edition, but the global financial crisis severely damaged the bottom line of the Italian banks that traditionally fund such cultural activities, and Kathleen and Nerida were skeptical

about whether any source of funding would be found. Dottoressa Gurrieri was incurably optimistic, and just to be prepared, Kathleen and Nerida had the microfilm digitised and started thinking about how to transform the transcription into an edition.

In September 2013 we received the good news that the Ente Cassa di Risparmio di Firenze was providing the first tranche of what would be a very large subsidy, and publication would go ahead with a very precise and very real deadline: the first visit of His Holiness Pope Francis to Florence, on 10 November 2015. Kathleen added nights and weekends on the manuscript to her day job as a researcher, writer and tour leader with Academy Travel; Nerida, now retired from the University of Sydney, put the *sacre rappresentazioni* on hold and threw



(above)

Folio 13r. The church of San Piero da Montemurrone in Via San Gallo 66 is not depicted, but to illustrate the life of Pietro Murrone, the hermit who became Pope Celestine V and later abdicated, Rustici shows him asleep in his bedchamber, while his successor Boniface VIII whispers to him through a speaking tube, urging him to abdicate. Text is crossed out and in the margin the seminary's rector, Antonio Dell'Ogna, has written: 'No credence is to be given to this story of Boniface, for the author who wrote it was ill-informed'.

herself into the whole process of checking and re-checking the transcription, the edition and the footnotes.

In the course of various meetings with Elena Gurrieri, who co-ordinated the project, the historians of art, architecture, political and religious history, who contributed essays to Volume 2, the publisher Daniele Olschki and ourselves, the publication grew. The volume with the essays and critical edition of the text would be the same size as the facsimile of the manuscript. The layout would be in two columns, with a textual apparatus and footnotes on each page, an enormous challenge for our editor and our typesetter. This meant that once we started submitting final copy at the beginning of April 2015, we could not go back and change anything substantial. And

even as we were finalizing text in Book 3, proofs were being delivered for Book 1. For the Italians, the sacrosanct summer break intervened, but for the Australians proofing and indexing continued; then on 4 September it passed out of our hands into those of the printers.

Daniele Olschki, like us, had not let the absence of guaranteed finance limit his vision of what the volume would be. After various mock-ups, and in conjunction with the printer, Varigrafica of Viterbo, he determined the final format. The facsimile volume, printed on art paper, required a special printing process that dried each colour with ultraviolet light to stop the colours bleeding; the book blocks were sewn, trimmed, backed and rounded. Then, to harmonise the appearance of the two volumes, they were sent to Brescia in northern Italy to



(above)

Folio 28r. The church of Santa Maria degli Alberighi was suppressed in 1783. The Virgin is shown on a rug, playing with the child, with her book on her lap and her yarn winder next to her.

have gold leaf applied uniformly to the top edge. From there they travelled south again to the binder IMAG, near Salerno in southern Italy, where wooden boards and leather headbands were attached and the volumes covered in pearl grey silk from Germany, and placed in a beautifully constructed box. The finished product tips the scales at 15 kg.

When the time came for the presentation to the Pope, we were not present. A list of official gifts was published in Florence's daily paper *La Nazione* and these were exchanged between papal and episcopal secretaries, but a splendid launch followed, with a twenty-minute video' where the work of the 'due studiosi australiane' was duly acknowledged. The hundreds who assembled in the Baptistery, from all estates and every part of Florentine public and private life, made us more aware than ever of how central the codex is to Florentine identity as a city devoted to God, to

culture, to language, and to education as a path to self-fashioning. It has been an enormous privilege to have been part of the process, and the recipients of such generous patronage.

Collaborations are hard work and the path is not always smooth. Kathleen would still be sitting on an unpublished thesis if Elena Gurrieri had not been determined to see the codex published in a handsome form, and we are deeply indebted to her. Kathleen's thesis was the starting point of this project and she stayed with it joyfully all the way to the end. And for the next stage, an annotated English translation of Book 1 for publication by the Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies in Toronto, she has been awarded a publication subsidy by the Australian Academy of Humanities. ¶





(top left)

Nerida Newbigin and Kathleen Olive with their author's copies.

PHOTO: COURTESY N. NEWBIGIN

(bottom left)

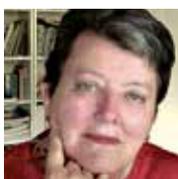
The launch of the volumes in the Baptistery on 28 November 2015. Further presentations were made to the Custody of the Holy Land in Jerusalem on 13 February 2016 and in the Vatican on 17 May 2016.

PHOTO: COURTESY N. NEWBIGIN



(opposite)

Folio 107v. Rustici illustrated the section on diet with sketches of plants and animals, taken not from his source – we did not find any illustrated copies of Aldobrandino da Siena's *Santà del corpo* – but from his own experience. Aldobrando's text derives ultimately from Arabic sources, and includes plants of which Rustici has no experience, for example galanga, cubin, cubeb (*Piper cubeba*), cardamom, and turmeric (*Cucurma zedoaria*), which are illustrated with three blades of grass or not at all. Others, such as galanga (*Alpinia galanga*), saffron (*Crocus sativus*), both local and imported, cloves (*Syzygium aromaticum*; in Italian 'chiodi di garofano'), aniseed and nutmeg are easily recognised, even when the caption does not align with the image.



NERIDA NEWBIGIN FAHA taught Italian language and literature at the University of Sydney from 1970 until her retirement in 2008. Since then she has divided her time

between Italy and Australia and is engaged full-time on research. Her recent publications include *Acting on Faith: The Confraternity of the Gonfalone in Renaissance Rome* (with Barbara Wisch), Philadelphia, St. Joseph's University Press, 2013. She is now preparing a monograph on the religious drama of fifteenth-century Florence.



KATHLEEN OLIVE's PhD (University of Sydney, 2004) consisted of a diplomatic edition with commentary of the *Codex Rustici*, and she has published essays with *Renaissance Studies*

and *Brepols*. She has taught courses on the history and culture of Italy at the University of Sydney and Western Sydney University. Kathleen currently works as a writer, researcher and tour leader for Academy Travel, Sydney, leading cultural tours to Europe and the United States.

1. See a link on the Codice Rustici's web page at <<http://www.olschki.it/codice-rustici-facsimile/>> [accessed 1 February 2016].