

## **Michela Perrotta**

PhD Candidate, Università degli Studi della Campania “Luigi Vanvitelli”

Research Resident, Center for the Art and Architectural History of Port Cities “La Capraia”

*Reconstructing the history of Renaissance libraries in the Kingdom of Naples: the illuminated book collection of Antonello Petrucci († 1487)*

Studies on the production of illuminated books in Naples and in the Southern Italy have focused primarily on the celebrated Neapolitan Library of the Kings of Aragon and libraries owned by the Barons of the Kingdom, such as Andrea Matteo III Acquaviva, Duke of Atri and Count of Conversano, and Angilberto del Balzo, Duke of Nardò and Count of Ugento. So far, there have been few attempts to delve into the visual culture, the literary interests, and the libraries of those who filled the ranks of palace functionaries – perhaps due to the presumption that book collections of the ministerial ranks and the educated middle class were less significant than the royal ones.

In this context, I intend to pursue the systematic reconstruction of Antonello Petrucci’s library, the influential secretary of king Ferrante of Aragon from 1458 until 1487. On this date, he was sentenced to death for participating in the so-called Conspiracy of the Barons (1485-1486), and his possessions – including books – were confiscated by the sovereign.

Arguably, Petrucci’s library was one of the largest and richest in precious illuminated volumes of the Kingdom of Naples, but a focused study is still lacking. During the first months of my doctoral research, manuscripts and *incunabula* catalogs – as well as online databases of Italian and foreign libraries – have allowed me to identify eighty-five manuscripts and twenty-six *incunabula*, most of them illuminated, bearing Antonello’s coat of arms or a note of possession. On a general level, the purpose of my project is to reconstruct the book patronage and the cultural interests of Antonello Petrucci in the larger context of the history of Renaissance libraries in the South of the Peninsula.

The richness and the cultural relevance of the Secretary’s book collection – encompassing mostly classical texts, of which twenty-four were written in Greek – requires an in-depth investigation. My goal is to identify each volume and analyze its material composition, illumination, script, and any visible element that might contribute to its understanding. To this end, a firsthand study of the books and their materiality is crucial. Object-based research is essential for identifying the illuminators, understanding their methods of work, as well as the history of the artifact itself and its owner. Close examination of manuscripts and *incunabula* can reveal crucial information, such as handwritten notes by Petrucci himself or shelf marks indicating the original arrangement of the volumes and how they were used by their reader. Along these lines, my research will also address archival sources related to Petrucci’s mansions, including his residence of Seggio di Nido in San Domenico Maggiore square and his palace in Carinola, Caserta. While these buildings have been studied over the years, I plan to put a particular focus on the physical space in which the Secretary’s library was held or displayed.