

**Source:** Stewart Tiley's unpublished descriptive catalogue of the post-1500 western manuscripts at St John's College, Oxford (2018). Uploaded to the St John's College Digital Library in October 2023 as part of the digitization project, at which point a note about the date was added.

## 396. *Algebra*

Italy. 15<sup>th</sup> c?  
[see note below]

Fair copy of an Italian treatise on algebra, possibly an abacus book dating to the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Given to St John's as part of a larger bequest of mathematical works owned by Ivor Bulmer-Thomas (1905-1993, writer and politician). The identification and much of the content information in this description is based on rough notes left by Dr Jackie Stedall (Queen's College, Oxford) in 2014.

### *Physical Description*

Paper. Fol. 136 leaves (an early modern? foliation in ink from fols 2-136). 322 x 225 mm. Text area: typically 230 x 140 mm.

Binding: 17<sup>th</sup>/ 18<sup>th</sup> c? stiff vellum over pasteboard. Evidence of four book ties on each board, two on fore-edge, and one each on bottom and top edge. Remains of 4 raised bands to spine, but originally 6 sewing bands. Remains of gaufered pattern to all edges of textblock. A large figure 9 painted in red on spine, also the figure 14 in black ink. Remains of two later printed paper book labels: the first originally wrapping round the spine, now fragments on both boards, bearing a printed border and the text "B ... GNI"; the second on the top right corner of the front board bearing the typed? number '14796'. 331 x 238 mm.

### *Contents*

1. Fols 2r-132r: *Algebra*. Italian. Single 15<sup>th</sup> c? humanistic hand in black ink. Written in long lines with 30 lines to a page. Divisional numeration in left hand margin. Impressions of ruling on paper. Major divisions thus:

- a. [Fol. 1 blank]: Fol. 2. Preface. "Perche ogni Libro, che è fatto diue esser fatto p[er] Quattro rispetti ... Lo titolo del libro si è ditto algebra in rabesco ... si come nel processo di questo libro si dimostrera p[er] ordine."
- b. Fols 3r-16r: Treatise on roots: "Trattato delle regole le quail s'appartengono ... ."
- c. Fols 16r-132r: *Algebra*:
  - i. Fols 16r-22r: Standard types of equation.
  - ii. Fols. 22r-132r: 194 rules, each followed by an example beginning "Fammi" or "Trouami". Fols 119v-120. 4 exceptions, cubic equations.
  - iii. [Fols 132v-136v blank.]

### *Provenance*

1. Markings and labelling mentioned in the binding note, perhaps associated with two pencil inscriptions inside: on fol. 1r a statement of material and extent in Italian, “Composto di carte P-136”; and inside front board a pencil shelfmark? “CEX90.”
  2. Inside front board are a book label detailing bequest by Bulmer Thomas to St John’s and 20<sup>th</sup> century bookplate of St John’s College, with the current shelfmark in pencil above.
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**Note 18/10/2023:**

The College Librarian and the Resource Description Librarian suspect that the handwriting might point to the manuscript being from the sixteenth rather than the fifteenth century. For comparison, a preliminary analysis of the watermarks suggests that the paper may have been made in Fabriano, Italy after c.1530—though this is by no means certain.