III. THE WRITING OF *DE VISIONE STELLARUM*: AUTHOR, DATE, TITLES, AND INFLUENCE

A. Authorship

Of course the single most important argument in favor of Oresme’s authorship of the *De visione stellarum* is its direct attribution to him in the second “variant ending” of the Florence manuscript, B.N., Conventi Soppressi, J.X. 19.\(^1\) It simply states: “Explicit N. Orem, etc. De visione stellarum tractatus brevis.” All other extant copies of the *De visione* are anonymous, including the “first ending” of the Florence manuscript. The two separate endings in the Florence copy of the *De visione* obscured Oresme’s authorship further. For when Axel Björnbo cataloged the Florence codex, he described the first complete copy of the *De visione* as anonymous, and the second variant ending (which bears Oresme’s name) as a separate fragment of an otherwise lost treatise by Oresme.\(^2\) Since this fragment attributed to Oresme was thought to be from an entirely different treatise than the *De visione*, the *De visione* itself was deemed anonymous. Later, when Lynn Thorndike examined the same manuscript, he too treated the second ending as a separate fragment, “which consists of only four lines from Nicole Oresme on the same topic of vision of the stars.”\(^3\)

Björnbo’s and Thorndike’s oversight is understandable for two reasons. First, according to Björnbo’s description, there appear to be several leaves missing between the *De visione* and the alternate ending (i.e., between fol. 42\(^v\) and 43\(^r\)), and thus it might be assumed that Oresme’s “lost” manuscript had been excised.\(^4\) Second, the explicits of the two endings are not the same.\(^5\) On the other hand, there

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\(^{1}\) Florence, B.N., Conventi Soppressi, J.X. 19, fol. 43\(^r\). The full nomenclature for this manuscript is Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Conventi Soppressi, J.X. 19; and it was previously referred to as the Codex S. Marci Florent. 202.


\(^{4}\) Björnbo, *Die mathematischen S. Marochandschriften in Florenz*, p. 71: “zwischen fol. 42 und 43 fehlen mehrere Blätter.”

\(^{5}\) Neither the second ending of the Florence manuscript nor the Lilly manuscript
were clues that these two pieces were actually part of the same work. For example, Björnbo himself lists the table of contents found on fol. 115v of the Florence manuscript, which does not separate the *De visione stellarum* from the so-called “Oresme fragment” (i.e., the second ending), but rather treats them as a single text. Also, there is a figure concerning refraction found directly beneath the “Oresme fragment.” However, this figure does not correspond to anything in the “Oresme fragment” text above it (i.e., the second ending), but does apply to the *De visione stellarum*.

Nonetheless, it was not until the 1960s that Graziella Federici-Vescovini’s efforts revealed the “Oresme fragment” to be a variant ending of the *De visione*. In examining the codex, she discovered that the four lines of the so-called “Oresme fragment” were also found in the anonymous *De visione stellarum*. These four lines are found near the very end of the treatise. Obviously the two are variant endings, not separate works: the first ending has the four lines followed by lavish praise of the Parisian arts faculty (quoted above) but gives no attribution, while the second ending disregards the praise of faculty passage and ends with an attribution of the *De visione* to Oresme. In chapters 9 through 11 of her *Studi sulla prospettiva medievale*, Federici-Vescovini not only analyzed the *De visione* itself, but surveyed all of the perspectivist treatises in the Florence codex that accompany it. From this study, she concluded that the *De visione stellarum* was probably by Nicole Oresme, just as the second ending states. But does the internal evidence validate this scribal attribution?

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8 While excellent in her analysis of the authorship of the *De visione*, there are a few points in Federici-Vescovini’s work that are less probable. For example, in discussing the relationship of Henry of Langenstein and Nicole Oresme, she states: “Determinare chi dei due abbia influito maggiormente sull’altro, specialmente nel campo della filosofia della natura, è difficile …” (p. 196) (In English, roughly: “Determining which of the two have had the greater influence on the other, especially in the field of natural philosophy, is difficult …”) This conclusion is curious, as Oresme probably received his master of arts degree by 1342 and had become the Grand Master of the College of Navarre in 1356 – having apparently earned his Doctorate in Theology by that time. On the other hand, Henry of Langenstein, who may have been born around the same time as Oresme (Henry, b. 1325), did not finish his master of arts until 1363 and his masters of theology until 1376. So while they certainly may have been at the University of Paris at the same time, Oresme was definitely the senior of the two. Moreover, Oresme seems to have finished most of his Latin scientific works well before Henry had started his. For biographical