

Boncompagno da Signa, *Amicitia* and *De malo senectutis et senii*

by M. Dunne

DESCRIPTION:

Boncompagno was born in Signa, not far from Florence, sometime between 1165 and 1175. He first studied at Florence but soon moved to Bologna, becoming a teacher of grammar and rhetoric there. One of the most famous teachers of rhetoric in his time, he was regarded by his contemporaries as being the most skillful, the most original, and the most fertile in imagination of them all. The *Amicitia* was written toward the end of 1205 at Rome. Its unspoken purpose is to act as a guide in identifying and classifying the various kinds of people who try to gain our trust by posing as friends. Indeed, the text excels in describing in exuberant detail the many 'false' friends we encounter in life. Boncompagno's last work (he died sometime after 1240), the *Libellus de malo senectutis et senii*, was written when he was old and, as a final irony, without friends. It contains a stark description of the human condition as each one enters into old age and decrepitude and finally encounters death. To the end, Boncompagno continues to regard all of human life with a skeptical, even cynical eye, a detached observer of and commentator on the society of his time.

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