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[ANDREAS VESALIUS, *De humani corporis fabrica librorum epitome (On Human Anatomy)*],
in an anonymous Yiddish translation entitled *Fon der menshn koyrbrs antomei*
In Yiddish, manuscript on paper
[Germany, Hesse?, c. 1590-1595?]

64 folios, complete (collation: i⁴⁴, ii¹⁸, iii²⁴, iv⁵⁴ [4th fol. of last quire cancelled]), on paper (watermarks close to Briquet 154-155, an eagle with the letter F on its breast: Babenhausen, 1593 and Eltsville (near Mainz), 1593-1597), modern pencil foliation in the upper recto margins, corners rounded, with generous margins, written by an unknown scribe in Yiddish in Ashkenazi Hebrew characters, on 19 to 24 long lines, unruled, in dark brown ink, some discoloration of the ink, a few marginal notes, a few intra-textual corrections, a few words translated into Latin, titles of chapters set off from the text, text in Latin on an inserted stub between ff. 59 and 60, bound in a modern brown leather binding in imitation of medieval stamped leather bindings with modern paper pastedowns and flyleaves. Dimensions 205 x 155 mm.

This extremely rare manuscript of a unique and unpublished Yiddish translation of Vesalius's work on anatomy is one of only 50 surviving manuscripts in Yiddish dating before 1600, of which only five are on medical subjects, the other four containing medical recipes and folkloric cures. Its survival shows the interest in Vesalius among Jewish doctors in the schools. There are no medieval Jewish writings on anatomy, in Hebrew or in Yiddish.

PROVENANCE

1. Written in Germany, where Ashkenazi script was practiced and perhaps in the region of Hesse, judging from the watermarks. It seems probable that the manuscript was written by a physician for his personal practical or pedagogical use.
2. Private Collection, Israel (accompanied by a certificate of title).

TEXT

The text of this manuscript follows the structure of the six chapters of the "Epitome" and "Anatomia Deutsch."

ff. 1v-8r, [title of the treatise], "Fon der menshn koyrbrs antomei, eyn kurtsr ober ust folkomntr unt noytslikhr oyztsug oyz der Andri Vesulia fun Brisl bukhern fon im zelbst eyn lteynshr sprokh beshribn unt turkh den alboen vriem fertolmetsht" (in English, "On Human Body Anatomy, a short, but complete and useful, excerpt of the work of Andreas Vesalius from Brussels, written by him in Latin and earlier [sic] translated by [...]); [incipit of Chapter 1, On Bones and Cartilage],

"Fon der baynn unt krosbaynn oder gldren zo den kurbr tragn und befestign" (corresponding to the Latin "De ossibus et cartilaginibus");

ff. 8r-26v, [incipit of Chapter 2, On Ligaments and Muscles], "Fon der baynn unt krosbaynn bantrimen unt mayzlin instrmentn der fieviligen bivegns" (corresponding to the Latin "De ossium ac cartilaginum ligamentis et musculis arbitrarii motus instrumentis");

ff. 26v-39r, [incipit of Chapter 3, On the Digestive System], "Fon den instrmentin velkhi der ornering di van shpays unt trink gishikht dienn" (corresponding to the Latin "De organis nutritioni, quae ex cibo potuque fit, famulantibus");

ff. 39r-45v, [incipit of Chapter 4, On the Heart], "Fon dem hertsn unt instrmenten di im seynm ampt dinstlikh zaynt" (corresponding to the Latin "De corde, ac organis ipsuis functioni subministrantibus");

ff. 45v-56v, [incipit of Chapter 5, On the Brain], "Fon dem hirn unt instrmentn di dem hirn tsu dinn gishafn zint" (corresponding to the Latin "De cerebro et organis cerebri officiorum nomine extractis");

ff. 56v-61v, [incipit of Chapter 6, On the Reproductive System], "Fon den instrmentn di tsu oyztpreyting dez menshlikhn gishlekhts dinen" (corresponding to the Latin "De organis speciei propagandae famulantibus").

Born in Brussels, Andreas Vesalius (1514-1564) received his medical education in Louvain and Paris. He later moved to Padua, where he graduated and then taught anatomy. He became physician of the German emperors Charles V and his son Philip II. He died in 1564, returning from a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and the Holy Land.

Considered the father of modern anatomy, Andreas Vesalius challenged, through his revolutionary findings, the older medical teaching based on Galen that dated from the second century. Galen did not dissect cadavers, in observance of Roman law, and throughout the Middle Ages both the Latin Church and the Jewish religion upheld the interdiction against dissection. However, Vesalius based many of his new observations on evidence obtained from human dissection. Vesalius was thus able to collect a vast knowledge from which he taught, sometimes in public dissection sessions, and which he thoroughly described in his famous treatise written in Latin "De humani corporis fabrica libri septem" (The Seven Books on the Structure of the Human Body). Vesalius's treatise was published for the first time in 1543 in Basel, illustrated with its famous naturalistic woodcut figures (dissection scene, portrait of Vesalius, skeletons, muscle manikins, Adam and Eve etc.), made under the author's close supervision. In the same year, also in Basel, a shorter book was published, less bulky and less expensive, called "De humani corporis fabrica librorum epitome" (An Abridgement of the Structure of the Human Body), which was intended for the use of beginning medical students. The Epitome is organized in six chapters and was illustrated with the same woodcuts.

In 1551 Jul. Paulo Fabricio published in Nuremberg a pirate translation of the "Epitome" in German, called "Anatomia Deudsch." Its subtitle is "Ein kurtzer Auszug der beschreibung aller glider menschlichs Leybs" (a short excerpt of the description of all members of human body). The words "kurzer Auszug" are used in the manuscript title as well. This leads to the most likely conclusion that "Anatomia Deudsch" is the source used for this manuscript.

The scribe had access to the printed books of Vesalius. On page 2, words in Latin are occasionally used, either in the margin or within the text. In the margin, the scribe translated some key words like "ossa" or "cartilagine." In the text the scribe chose to leave the Latin word instead of translating it. After this page he stopped referring to Latin. Note that the scribe demonstrates proficiency in Latin calligraphy, using very neat round letters, different from the standard German script. This shows the level of education of this scribe, mastering Latin, German, and Jewish-German (or Yiddish) and may also confirm his access to Latin printed books and manuscripts

Most likely a teaching manual, the present treatise of anatomy served the purpose of disseminating cutting-edge knowledge of the time among Jewish medical students. There are no other known manuscripts serving that purpose. In fact, there are no medieval Jewish writings devoted to anatomy. Shatzmiller (p. 51) mentions that the chapter on anatomy in the thirteenth-century encyclopedic "Shaar ha-Shamayyim" by Gershom b. Solomon's was especially interesting to medical students. The present manuscript is thus a rare witness to the transfer of medical knowledge among Ashkenazi Jews in the sixteenth century. It is also a unique source showing Jews studying modern anatomy as early as the second half of the sixteenth century.

The few extant Jewish medical treatises deal mostly with remedies, charms, and medicinal plants. Only one manuscript on medicine *per se* predates the present copy, a fifteenth-century manuscript located at the Bibliothèque nationale de France in Paris that deals with anatomy (MS heb. 1120, written in Hebrew in Ashkenazi script, which is a compilation of different compositions with a short anonymous piece on anatomy; described briefly in Zottenberg's catalogue of the Hebrew manuscripts in the BnF and very generally in M. Garel's *La main Forte*, without reference to the piece on anatomy as Garel was interested in the illuminations). It is older than this manuscript, therefore still leaning on the teachings from Antiquity. Three other recorded manuscripts in Yiddish with medical texts date from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. They are: New York, Jewish Theological Seminary, no. 2780 (unpublished; includes hundreds of medical recipes and folk remedies); Vatican, Hebr. MS 371 (unpublished; catalogue in preparation notes that it contains medical and other recipes in Yiddish); and Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Opp. 689 (Neubauer catalogue, no. 2144, contains two separate compilations of medical recipes from the late sixteenth century).

There are only 50 Yiddish pre-1600 manuscripts extant. Of these, half are translations or commentaries on the Bible, one-third are translations of liturgies, 12% are dictionaries or grammar, and 10% are literature (mainly versions of Biblical stories and a couple on religion. The oldest Yiddish text known to us is a blessing copied by the scribe in 1272 in the Worms Mahzor (http://jnul.huji.ac.il/dl/mss/worms/about_eng.html)).

LITERATURE

H. Cushing. *A Bio-Bibliography of Andreas Vesalius*, Hamden and London, 1962, pp. 79-88.

Jerold C. Frakes. *Early Yiddish Texts 1100-1750*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004;

Neil G. Jacobs. *Yiddish: a Linguistic Introduction*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005;

Dovid Katz. *Words on Fire: The Unfinished Story of Yiddish*, New York, Basic Books, 2004.

J. Shatzmiller. *Jews, Medicine, and Medieval Society*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1994.

ONLINE RESOURCES

On Vesalius

<http://vesalius.northwestern.edu/flash.html>

http://www.bvh.univ-tours.fr/Consult/index.asp?numfiche=56&numtable=CESR_47294

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