

PIETRO D'ABANO, *Trattati dei veleni* (Treatise on Poisons); More than 200 Medical Recipes; Extracts from Works by Avicenna, Hippocrates, Galen, Arnaldus de Villa Nova and others on Medical Topics

**In Italian and Latin, decorated manuscript on paper
Italy (Rimini), September 18, 1454, and before**

82 folios on paper, watermark "tête de bœuf," Briquet no. 14726, Briquet, 1968, vol. 2, p. 742, Brescia, 1454, contemporary foliation in red ink, 1-65, later foliation in brown ink, 66-85 (added after the loss of a leaf in quire seven, but before the loss of leaves in quires eight), lacking four leaves (collation i-vi¹⁰ vii¹⁰ [-10, one leaf after f. 69, with loss of text] viii¹² [-6, 7, 8, three leaves after f. 74, with loss of text] ix¹⁰ [original structure uncertain, but likely missing 5, following f. 78, and 9-10, following f. 81, with loss of blank leaves possibly with added text] x¹ [single leaf, now f. 82, but with earlier foliation as 92, suggesting loss of four leaves, either blanks or with later text]), no catchwords or signatures, ruled in brown ink (justification 150 x 90 mm.), written by two scribes (change of hand on line 24 of f. 66) in brown ink on 29 lines in a cursive southern Gothic bookhand without loops (hybrida) script (scribe one), and in a Gothico-Antiqua script (scribe two), capitals are decorated with yellow and red touches, rubrics and paragraph marks in red, blank spaces left for initials (five lines in the beginning two lines thereafter), 2-line red initials on folios copied by the second scribe only (ff. 66-74v), worming, bottom margin of f. 1 excised (without loss of text), blood(?) stains on ff. 64v-65, stains of use and of water damage on some margins, the first two leaves quite worn, otherwise in good condition. ORIGINAL BINDING of calf over wooden boards, blind-tooled with fillets, ribbons and small cinquefoil flowers, a central clasp missing but its catch, decorated with the word "ave," survives on the back board, spine replaced probably in the 19th century, worming and small areas of leather missing on the front and back covers. Dimensions 215 x 143 mm.

Poisons – and their antidotes – were an important topic in medieval Europe, particularly in Italy. This extensive collection of practical recipes copied in part by a surgeon from Rimini for his own use begins with one of the most important medieval texts on toxicology. One of only twenty-seven copies of the Italian translation of this text by Pietro d'Abano, the text is rare on the market (only one sale recorded in the Schoenberg Database). No copy of the Italian translation exists in North American collections. Signed and dated and still in its original binding, stains bear witness to its practical use.

PROVENANCE

1. Written in Italy in Rimini by two scribes; ff. 66-74v of the manuscript were transcribed on September 18, 1454 by Ranierus, the son of Anteno of Pisa, as the scribe identifies himself in the rubricated incipit on f. 66 (see below). The name Ranierus is common in Europe and can be found among scribes identified in Italy in the fifteenth century, but we have found no other mention of this Ranierus, son of Anteno. Ff. 1-66, copied by another scribe, date from the same period. They are contained within the same codicological unit, and are on the same paper, which is a variant of a "tête de bœuf" watermark attested in Brescia in 1454.

The recipe texts on the blank spaces on f. 24v and on ff. 75-82v by different later hands testify to the continued use of the manuscript, presumably by another doctor or surgeon. *Maniculae*, occasionally accompanied by "nota," were drawn in the margins to draw attention to important passages on ff. 22v, 59v, 60, 60v, 62v, 63v, 68v, and 69v.

The names mentioned in the rubric on f. 66 were crudely added to the space left blank for an initial on f. 1.

2. "Mss. V." was inscribed on the spine and inside the front board, probably in the nineteenth century.

TEXT

ff. 1-24v, incipit, "[A]d honor et laude del eterno et gloriosissimo summo padre nostro misser yesu christo maistro et governatore de tutta la humana generacion my piero dabano minimo medico habiadao con devocione concepto . . . uno tractado de veleni. Primo diro la divixion di veleni per che ogne cosa divixa in 30 se cognosce . . ."; *Divisio*, incipit, "[Q]ue se tracta la divixion di ueleni . . . ma ley si val contra tutti et pero la turiaga da si medesina se chiama madre de tutte le medexine," *Et sic est finis huius operis. Nota che el manca in questo libro la seconda questio 3oe se algun ueneno se po dar atermendado*;

Pietro d'Abano, *Trattati dei veleni*; after the dedication to the Pope (whose identity is debated), the author goes on to introduce the six sections of his work, beginning with the division of the poisons. Partial modern edition of the Latin text by Alberico Benedicenti (1949); English translation, Brown, 1924. A new scholarly edition by Alba Aguilera as part of her doctoral thesis defended at the Autonomous University of Barcelona in 2018 is planned for publication; first printed in 1472 in Mantua, and survives in at least nineteen incunable editions (Collard, 2015), known in 72 Latin manuscripts, but in only 26 manuscripts in Italian, not including this manuscript (Collard, 2015, Annex no. 3). The title of our manuscript suggests that it may be the same translation as the one contained in MS VII B. 29 at the Biblioteca Estense in Modena. Only two manuscript copies, both in Latin, are known in the United States, one at the Library of the New York Academy Medicine, the other at the Morgan Library and Museum (Collard, 2015; De Ricci, 1961, pp. 1311, 1464).

f. 24v, [three medical recipes added in a contemporary hand], *De dolore lingua, . . .; Vnguentum de gamba, . . .; Sequita vna poluere mirabile prouata contra pesto, . . .;*

ff. 25-64v, *Sequita uno unguento mirabile e buono*, incipit, "[U]nguento el qual se chiama unguento precioxo . . .; *Vnguento da messier dauid, . . .; Per choxa in fitolida, . . .; . . . Al panno*, incipit, "Nol assenzo eradize de se nochio . . . ne dentro dy ochi," *Et sic est finis*;

Extensive (well more than 200) medical recipes including remedies against various illnesses and conditions; organized according to the type of medicine: ointments; poultices; electuaries (medicines in a honey base); oils(?); powders; and waters. Sources are usually not given apart from the "master David" mentioned on f. 25, and "master Anselm of Genoa," mentioned on ff. 40 and 40v. Some are described as "mirabile" (admirable), and some include affirmations that they have been proven to work ("e provado da molti"). There are a number of recipes with the heading *Vnguentum apostolorum* (ointment of the apostles), since they include twelve ingredients. There is a charm on f. 57v to be used to stop the flow of blood from the nose.

ff. 64v-66, [Three additional recipes], *Qui sequita un bon e notabel prouedemento a guardar chel pestilenciado, . . ., Sequita vna medicina nobile contra la friue [sic] quartana provada e bona, . . .; Sequente vn vini precioxo molto*

perservativo de la peste, incipit, Primo tuoli day pogni da foglie scabiosa ... lassar dormire se non a y tempi," e *provado*;

ff. 66-74v, *Incipit extractio de plurimis libris et auctore avicena ypocrate galieno mesare bruno guglielmus arnaldo de villa nova scriptum per me ranerium de anteno de pisis cyrugico principiato die 18 settenbris 1454 anno rimano et primo*, [f. 66v, chapter list], incipit, "Capitulo x [sic] que humeribus constat corpus humanum ..."; incipit, "Corpus humanum ex quatuor humoribus constat ... castorum e fuccum apii edecique et pone// [ending imperfectly]";

Extracts from medical treatises copied by a surgeon in Rimini, Ranierus of Pisa ("Here begin extracts from many books and authors Avicenna, Hippocrates, Galen, Mesare Bruno, Guglielmus (William), Arnaldo de Villa Nova, copied by me Ranierus, the son of Anteno of Pisa, principal surgeon, on September 18, 1454 in Rimini"), relating to various illnesses and conditions, including headache, hair loss, white hair, continuous fever, epilepsy, and paralysis.

ff. 75-82v [previous foliation, 78-81, 83-85, 92], Originally blank pages used for recipes in at least two different hands occasionally accompanied by small drawings in the margins, and the beginning of a contents list (f. 78rv); [ff. 76v-77, 80v, and 82, are blank].

Although in the modern world we usually think of recipes as instructions for preparing food, in the Middle Ages and well into the early modern era a "recipe" was understood in a much broader sense as a how-to instruction, usually brief, related to various crafts (including disciplines such as alchemy and medicine), as well as guides to making various things related to the household and agriculture. This medical manuscript, owned and partially copied by a surgeon in Rimini in 1454, includes more than 200 medical recipes, together with a very popular treatise on poisons and their antidotes, and extracts on various medical topics from works by famous physicians. Signs of use, including pointing hands, added recipes, and even blood stains are proof that the owners of this medical compendium found it to be very useful.

Pietro d'Abano (c. 1250-1316) was a famous Paduan physician, philosopher and astrologer. He obtained a degree in medicine and philosophy in Paris in the late thirteenth century, before returning to teach in Padua. After returning to Padua, Pietro was in trouble with the Church, being accused of heresy and magic. He may have had to face the Inquisition, but these details of his life are disputed, some scholars rejecting them as fifteenth- and sixteenth-century fabrications. Thanks to the support of powerful patrons, Pietro was exonerated in 1306, and in 1314 he was offered the chair of medicine at the University of Treviso.

The *De venenis et eorum remediis* is a medical work on poisons and their possible remedies. The composition of the *De venenis* around 1300 followed new inquiries made by physicians in Paris and Montpellier at the end of the thirteenth century into the nature of poison and medicine (Gibbs, 2013). Pietro d'Abano quickly became one of the most frequently cited authors on the topic. The *De venenis* describes the toxic characteristics of minerals (silver, gypsum, copper, iron, magnet stone, lapis lazuli, arsenic, litharge, cerussite, green copper, lead, azurite, vermilion, cinnabar, and realgar), plants (including cicuta or water hemlock, opium, cursed buttercup, anacardiaceae, mushrooms, and the juices and seeds of wild cucumber, coriander, mandrake, black poppy seeds, scammony, nerium, daphne mezereum, hellebores, and nettles) and animals (including fishes, bovine blood, sea frog, and the bites and stings of various poisonous animals,

such as the scorpion, spider, rutela, bee, various snakes, leopard, salamander, ape, and dog). *De venenis* describes the action of toxins on the human body in a complex theoretical system based on the Avicenna's theory of specific form and the role of celestial forces on that form. The work also describes remedies for different types of poisoning. In the case of poisoning caused by the mineral litharge, Pietro prescribes methods of making the patient vomit and thus eliminate the poison, such as drinking either almond oil, or water with honey and chicken fat (f. 13).

Pietro's *De venenis* was immensely popular in the later Middle Ages, as numerous surviving manuscripts and printed editions testify. The success of the text in the later Middle Ages is explained by the obsession, especially in Italy, with poison and the danger of being poisoned. It was a popular method of murder due to its effectiveness, leaving the victim with very little means of defense. Honorat Bovet stated at the end of the fourteenth century in the *Apparition de Jean de Meun* that as soon as sickness or death arrived in princely circles, people suspected sorcery or poison (Collard, 2010, p. 195). Special precautions were therefore taken; servants were ordered to taste the food and drink before it was given to popes, bishops, kings, princes, and nobles. Political poisonings were numerous, even within a family, and notoriously among the Visconti of Milan. For the royal Valois family, F. Collard has discussed some fifteen cases of poisoning, including those of the princes Louis de Guyenne and Jean de Touraine, and the alleged poisoning in 1450 of King Charles VII's mistress, Agnès Sorel, which was blamed on Jacques Cœur (Collard, 2010).

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