

**PETRUS BONUS, *Pretiosa margarita novella* [The Precious New Pearl]**

**In Latin, decorated manuscript on paper**

**Spain (Catalonia), c. 1450-1480**

*i* (paper) + 92 + *i* (paper) folios on paper (watermarks, unidentified Oxhead, and Oxhead with eyes, nostrils, further features, above a crescent moon, similar to Briquet 14390, Montpellier 1458, Montpellier 1449-1466, and Clermont Ferrand 1460, and WIES, IBE 4435.02, Tortosa 1477), early foliation in faded ink, top outer corner recto, 1-30, with f. 10 bis, modern foliation in pencil, top outer corner recto (cited), complete (collation, i-vii<sup>12</sup> viii<sup>12</sup> [-9 through 12, cancelled with no loss of text]), horizontal catchwords inner lower margin, no signatures, ruled very lightly in lead, with full length vertical bounding lines and with the top and bottom horizontal rules full across on a few folios (justification, 205-203 x 144-140 mm.), written below the top line in a stylized cursive gothic bookhand with no loops in two columns of thirty-eight lines, red rubrics, alternately red and blue paragraph marks and two-line initials, large three-line initial, f. 1, darkened silver (?) on a notched ground that follows the shape of the initial (color damaged, yellow?) with a short spray of leaves and small flowers with black ink sprays extending from the initial into the inner margin, trimmed, with loss of some marginalia, f. 73, large hole in the top inner portion of the leaf (loss of text), f. 24, small hole top margin, f. 1, initial damaged, water stains upper margins and top lines of text, (text remains legible, with some passages rewritten in darker ink), smaller, darker stains lower margins, but in sound and legible condition. Bound in Spain in sixteenth-century dark leather (sheepskin?) over pasteboard, tooled in blind with two sets of triple rules forming a broad border, rounded spine with five raised bands and simple rules in blind, in sound condition, although worn and scuffed, damage to corners, and top and bottom of spine, edges speckled red, stained inside front cover, housed in a handsome hinged case with leather spine, lettered, "Petrus Bonus. Margarita novella, Ms" on spine, and "BPH" on front cover. Dimensions 286 x 212 mm.

This is one of only six known complete manuscripts of an important fourteenth-century alchemical treatise; all the extant manuscripts date from the fifteenth century or later. A modern critical edition of the text taking into account all the surviving manuscripts including this one is needed. The present copy includes lengthy contemporary glosses, possibly additions to the text, which deserve careful study, and notes in at least two hands, which are valuable evidence of the reception of this text in the fifteenth century. Its likely Spanish provenance adds to its interest.

**PROVENANCE**

1. The script, watermark, and binding support an origin in the Iberian Peninsula in Catalonia, c. 1450-1480, an origin also suggested by the Spanish spelling of alchemy, *alquimia* (for example, f. 3, last line; the more common *alkimia* is also used).

The manuscript was obviously read and used actively. It includes extensive passages copied in the margins in the same type of formal script as the text, although the color of the ink is slightly different, and the same red and blue paragraph marks as the text on ff. 10-11 (partially trimmed), 38, 62v-63, 71v-72, and 81v. Gentile, 1999 (p. 216) notes that the addition at the end of chapter fifteen is not found in Manget's edition. These passages deserve careful study.

Evidence of use by readers in the fifteenth century includes nota marks, added throughout in several hands, and marginal comments, in at least two different hands. Notes in one hand are found on ff. 10, f. 12, 21v, 22, 30, 43, 55, 63v (for example, f. 25v, "... qui vult transmutare metalla imperfecta in aurum oportet. Neccesario que hoc faciat ... per solum lapidem philosophorum"), etc. Another hand, adds notes that indicate interest in the practical aspects of the text on ff. 28, 33v, 34v, 39v (with a pointing hand, and a passage marked, "nota, nota, nota"; another passage on the same page has a cluster of 7-10 nota marks on each side of the column) 44, and 44v (again, "nota, nota, nota"), 46v ("... Tunc cessandum est ab opera et opus remouerendum ab igne"), 48, 55v, 63, 68 ("Nota, nota, nota, nota, nota"), and 86, etc.

2. Owned in 1532 by Johan Laborya de Mossach (or Mossacs[?] or Mossacis[?]) who states that he lodged with Anthony Laurens "de la dita vila de P<?>essis (inscription in Catalan, verso last leaf).
3. Signatures, "Despaigne," top margin f. 1, and at the end of the text, f. 92, in black ink, the suggestion that this may be identified with Jean d'Espagnet (1564-c. 1637), French lawyer and politician, and author of works on alchemy including the *Arcanum Hermeticae philosophiae* (1623), needs further research.
4. The manuscript was in France in the seventeenth century; inside front cover, note in ink, dated 1668: "Le 7 Septembre 1668 antoine velloun a eté la queste avec le pere anselme et on luy donné 4 livres pour trente jours ouvriers sans compter le festes. Nota le convent ne lui doit rien jusques au jour present 27 Septembre."
5. Lengthy handwritten description in German laid-in, early twentieth-century (?) (signed with the initials, A<R?>."
6. Belonged to Joost R. Ritman (b. 1941), the Dutch businessman and distinguished collector of art and books, who acquired it around 1982; Bibliotheca Philosophia Hermetica MS 18 ("Philosophia Hermetica"; bookplate inside front cover); briefly described in *Medieval Manuscripts in Dutch Collections* (Online Resources), in Gumbert, 1987, no. 21, as BPH MS 18, and in Gentile, 1999, no. 34, pp. 216-219.

## TEXT

ff. 1-92, *Incipit margarita nouella composita per magistrum bonum Lombardum de ferraria philosophicum excellentissimum*, incipit, "In quid bonus bonus [sic] lombardus de ferraria phisicus encia realia sunt in triplici gradu ... esse tale a forma esse tali etc."; f. 1v, *Capitulum primum hic poinitur modus speculativus huius artis*, incipit, "Omnis ars et omnis scientia aut est de rebus ..."; f. 6, *Hic incipit tractare margaritam. Et primo ponit diuisionem generalem tocuis libri ...*, incipit, "Postquam compleuimus dei fauente gratia ..."; f. 8v, *Hic intulatur questio principalis huius uel artis*, incipit, "Quia consuevit non solum apud antiquos ... Scripsimus prius similem questionem in ciuitate tragurii in m ccc 23 anno quam cassamus propter magnam excellentiam huius." *Explicit margarita nouella composite per magistrum bonum ferrariensis phisicum atque philosophum excellentissimum. In ciuitate pole in prouincia austrie sub anno domini milissimo ccc 38 laudetur altissimus omnium scientiarum largitor. Amen.*

There is no modern critical edition of this text, which was first printed by Aldus Manutius in Venice in 1546, in an abridged edition by Janus Lacinius Therapus (Jano Lacinio), who also added extracts from other authors (a subsequent abridgement, Nuremberg 1554, includes little of Bonus' text). The modern English translation by Waite, 1894 (repr. 1963 and 1974), is a

translation of the abridged text published by Aldus. It was next printed in Basel in 1572 as *Introductio in divinam chemicæ artem*, and in Montbéliard, 1602, in a text Thorndike, 1934, p. 148, records is close to the text in London, British Library, MS Harley 672, s. XV, and in Strasbourg, 1608; reprinted in the two important collections of alchemical texts, Zetzner, 1622, and Manget, 1702; extracts printed in Crisciani and Pereira, 1996, pp. 203-217.

The text survives in only six complete manuscripts including this one, which has not been mentioned in the scholarly literature; none of these manuscripts are earlier than the fifteenth century: Milan, Ambrosiana, Cod. Lat V, 29 supra; Modena, Bibl. Estense lat 299; Orleans, BM, MSS Lat 289 and 290; and London, British Library, MS Harley 672, and in an eighteenth-century copy of Lacinius's edition, and three collections of extracts in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century manuscripts. The only copy listed in the Schoenberg Database is a Barrois manuscript which changed hands in 1777.

In general, alchemical texts survive in very few manuscripts dating before the fifteenth century. Halleux, 1979, p. 90, suggests they perished in laboratories where they were destroyed by acid or fire; be that as it may, it makes manuscripts such as this one very valuable. A critical edition of this text, which takes into account all the manuscript evidence is needed, especially since the passages in the margins included in this copy suggests the text may vary, as is often the case with alchemical texts (Halleux, 1979, pp. 90-91, and 96). The modern edition by Crisciani, 1976, is an edition of an early Italian translation of the text, based on one manuscript, rather than an edition of the Petrus Bonus's original text.

Little is known about the author of this text, beyond his name, Petrus Bonus (or Pietro Buono), and his origin in Lombardy in Ferrara (he is sometimes called Bonus of Ferrara). Petrus states that he wrote the text in Pola (now Pula), a town in Istria, in 1330, according to most manuscripts, although the copy of the text described here lists the date as 1338, and others record the date as 1339 (Thorndike, 1934, p. 147, cites Orleans 289 as an example). The author also states that he discussed similar questions in Traù in Dalmatia in 1323. Since he is described as "physicus" i.e. a doctor of medicine, it is likely that he studied medicine at a university. The date given in the manuscripts has been questioned, since no fourteenth century manuscripts survive, and it has been suggested that the author may be identified with Petrus Bonus Advogarius, who taught astronomy and physics in Ferrara in the last third of the fifteenth century. Nonetheless, modern scholars, following Thorndike, are in agreement that the internal evidence of the text supports a fourteenth-century date, and that the attribution to the later author is unwarranted.

*The Precious New Pearl* is a discussion of the arguments for and against alchemy. Crisciani argues that Petrus Bonus's alchemical ideas are not new, but his work is important as an attempt to place alchemy in the broader tradition of fourteenth-century philosophy and religion. Petrus cites numerous earlier authors, including Aristotle, Avicenna, and Galen, as well as the body of alchemical theory from the ancient world – Geber, Morienus, Haly, and Rasis, among others. He discusses terminology and refutes arguments against alchemy. His discussion of the Philosophers' stone and transmutation is in keeping with other fourteenth-century treatises and emphasizes the importance of quick silver, or mercury. Although he states at the beginning that the whole of the alchemical art can be taught in one day – and even one hour – he confesses that he himself had not yet penetrated the secret, or experienced the philosophers' stone directly.

Alchemy was a philosophical tradition dating from antiquity that is most well-known for its search for the Philosopher's Stone that enabled the adept to turn base metals into gold and silver. Long scorned as a pseudo-science of little relevance to modern thought, historians of science now recognize the very real links between the modern experimental science, especially chemistry and medicine, and medieval alchemy. Modern scholars have recognized alchemy as crucial to the thought of such iconic figures as Isaac Newton (1642-1727) and Robert Boyle (1627-1691) "rather than as a misstep in a teleological history of science" (DeVun, 2009, p. 5). Alchemy's contributions to science include its construction of a theoretical framework, and a body of terminology, as well as experimental processes, and laboratory techniques.

## LITERATURE

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## ONLINE RESOURCES

The Ritman Library (Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica)  
<http://www.ritmanlibrary.com/collection/collection-profile/>

Medieval Manuscripts in Dutch Collections (Amsterdam, BPH, ms 18)  
<http://www.mmdc.nl/static/site/index.htm>

WIES – Watermarks in Incunabula printed in España  
<http://www.ksbm.oeaw.ac.at/wies/>

Briquet Online  
[http://www.ksbm.oeaw.ac.at/\\_scripts/php/BR.php](http://www.ksbm.oeaw.ac.at/_scripts/php/BR.php)

Cesare Vasoli. "Pietro Bono Lombardo," in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* 12 (1971)  
[http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/pietro-bono\\_res-864344c8-87e8-11dc-8e9d-0016357eee51](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/pietro-bono_res-864344c8-87e8-11dc-8e9d-0016357eee51)

Petrus Bonus, *The New Pearl of Great Price* (English translation of the edition by Waite by Janus Lacinus)  
<http://www.rexresearch.com/bonus/bonus.htm>

Petrus Bonus, *The New Pearl of Great Price* (also Waite's translation of Lacinus)  
<http://www.archive.org/details/newpearlofgreatp00laciiala>

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<http://xtf.lib.virginia.edu/xtf/view?docId=DicHist/uvaBook/tei/DicHist1.xml;chunk.id=dv1-04>

Alchemy website  
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[http://herve.delboy.perso.sfr.fr/bibliot\\_phil\\_chim.html](http://herve.delboy.perso.sfr.fr/bibliot_phil_chim.html)

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