

PSEUDO-ALBERTUS MAGNUS, *Secreta mulierum* with Commentaries (“Von den Heimlichkeiten der Frauen”), in a German translation

In German, decorated manuscript on paper

Southern Germany or Switzerland, c. 1510-1525

127 folios on paper, watermark, two types of Ox head, Piccard volume 2, Abt. X, 491, 1508-1516, numerous localities, including Alpirsbach, Bamberg, Bubenhofen, Giengen, Hagenau Kaufbeuren, Kempten, Strassburg, etc, and XI, 447, 1509-1512, Bruck, Lienz, Mulldorf, Toblach, Trient, Halle), modern foliation in pencil top outer corner recto, previous incomplete modern foliation began on f. 7, leaving the first six blank leaves unnumbered, missing one leaf (collation, i¹² [structure uncertain, probably -2, cancelled with no loss of text] ii¹⁰ [-10, following f. 20, probably cancelled with no apparent loss of text] iii¹⁴ iv⁸ [-8, following f. 41, with loss of text] v¹⁴ vi¹⁰ vii¹⁴ viii¹⁰ ix¹⁴ x¹⁰ xi¹⁴), no catchwords or signatures, frame-ruled in lead with the horizontal and vertical bounding lines full across (justification, 150-147 x 100-98 mm.), written along the top line in a decorative cursive gothic bookhand in twenty-one to twenty long lines, red rubrics through f. 25, thereafter in black, two-line red initial, f. 16 (in outline), blank spaces for remaining initials with guide letters visible, f. 4, bold four-line red initial with red pen decoration, in good condition, on f. 6 a small section of text (with a few words) is torn out and now adhered to f. 5v, paper reinforcement at the beginning and ends of some quires, with leaf cracking along the reinforcement on f. 12, soiling and foxing throughout. Bound in modern paper covers, title on spine “Albertus Magnus MS,” in good condition, some wear to top and bottom of spine. Dimensions 200 x 150 mm.

Pseudo-Albertus Magnus’s “The Secrets of Women” is a theoretical gynecological text of importance to historians of science, medicine and women in the Middle Ages and early modern era. The anonymous German translation in this manuscript (which originated independently of the translation by Johann Hartlieb) is found in only 15 manuscripts, all publicly held, and all but one in Germany; it has been edited only in an unpublished dissertation. Only one possible sale of the text is likely (Schoenberg Database, no. 189045, in 1875).

PROVENANCE

1. Written in Southern Germany in the first quarter of the sixteenth century as indicated by the script and the watermarks; it should be noted that both watermarks are distinctive types of ox heads, and can easily be identified in Piccard, thus suggesting that a narrower range of dates c. 1508-1516 is quite likely.
2. Modern owners or dealers’ annotations include, inside front cover, “Sch, 4366” (in pencil and circled).

TEXT

ff. 1-6v, blank;

ff. 7-10, [Contents] *Der Erst tractatt*, incipit, "Von der geburt Embrionis, Von den Wessenn der samen, Wie di samen vonn vater und muter ..."; f. 8, *Der ander tractatt*, incipit, "Wie die frucht hat ein aus gang aus Muter leib, ..."; f. 9v, *Der dritt Tractat*, incipit, "Von den Zeichenn der Empffahung und ob ein Frauw schwanger sey oder nit ..."; [f. 10v-11v, blank];

The treatise is here divided into three books: 1) On the generation of the embryo, 2) On the exit of the fetus (literally, the fruit) from the womb, and 3) On the signs of conception and whether a woman is pregnant or not. In addition to topics that we might expect from a medical treatise (some treated only briefly), such as the nature of menses, gestation, birth complications, signs of conception, the suffocation of the womb and impediments to conception, the author also discusses more theoretical (and to the modern reader, less scientific) subjects, including human nature, the influence of the planets on the fetus, spontaneous generation, and monsters in nature.

A detailed list of topics discussed in the work; the exact relationship between this list and the sections used to divide the text needs further study; but in general, there seem to be many more topics detailed here than sections in the work.

ff. 12-127, incipit, "Dem aller liebstenn etc. Dis buch wirt getailtt in zway stücke ... Des erstenn schreibt der meister ein brieff seinem aller leibstenn gesellenn gennant C und fremd von einer solchenn stat genant A ..."; f. 15v, *Das Erst Cappittel*, incipit, "Das erst capittel ... wirt vonn der geburt embrionis. Glosa, Embrio ist ein flaischenn stunt ..."; 57v, *Das ander tractat hat vier capittell* etc., incipit, "In dyssen tractat wirt gesagt werden wie die frucht hab ..."; f. 90, *Der dritt tractat diss buchs etc*, incipit, "[N]ach der lerer uel der meister sagen vonn dem zeichungenn ... der mit got dem vater lebt ... alle welt aller welt amen" [Ends top f. 127; remainder and f. 127v, blank].

One folio missing after f. 41v, with the end of the discussion of the children born under the influence of Venus, and the chapter on Mercury. Each of the three books of the text is then subdivided into four chapters (mentioned in the rubrics), but also into a few smaller divisions in Books two and three. Book one, chapters 1-3, are divided into numerous short sections, most with headings. The accompanying commentary is copied continuously, with no change in script or ink, but often introduced as "textus" or "glosa."

German translation of Pseudo-Albertus Magnus, *Secreta mulierum*, with commentary; this manuscript is almost certainly a copy of an anonymous Southern German translation, dating at the latest from the third quarter of the fifteenth century, which has been studied by Margaret Schleissner, and was edited in her 1987 dissertation; publication of the dissertation has been announced, but it has not yet appeared (*Verfasserlexikon*, 2004); she records fifteen manuscripts, not including this one; see Schleissner, 1987, 1991, note 2, and 1992, Bosselmann-Cyran, 1985, pp. 15-16, listing twelve manuscripts, not including this one, and the "Handschriftencensus" (see Online Resources), listing seventeen manuscripts of various translations, including this manuscript. Brief comparison of this text with the digital facsimile of Dresden, SLUB, MS H.121 (online resources below) suggests their texts are similar, but further study of the text of this manuscript and a more in depth comparison of its text with other manuscripts in this group, as well as its linguistic features is needed.

Two translations were made at around the same time in the fifteenth century: the translation written between 1460 and 1465 by Johann Hartlieb (c. 1410-1468), the court physician of Duke Siegmund of Bavaria-Munich, to whom the work is dedicated; and the Southern German translation found in this manuscript (Bosselmann-Cyran, 1985, pp. 14-19, and Schleissner, 1991 and 1992). This translation follows the Latin original (with glosses and passages of commentary) closely, and it circulated primarily among the Nuremberg patricians, in contrast with Hartlieb's very different version that was composed for the high nobility (Schleissner, 1991, pp. 110-111).

This is a German translation of the Latin text that circulated in the Middle Ages as Albertus Magnus, *Secreta mulierum*. In one of the earliest extant manuscripts (Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 22300 [1320, Erfurt], fols. 61rb–76rb), the work is called *Liber de generatione et corruptione*, an echo of the title of a text by Aristotle, but in general, the customary title was *Secreta mulierum*, or *De secreta mulierum* ("On the Secrets of Women"). Modern scholars have recognized that it was not by Albertus Magnus (c. 1200-d. 1280), the great Dominican theologian who taught at Paris from 1245-1248 and at the Dominican *studium generale* in Cologne, but was most likely written in the last quarter of the thirteenth century by an anonymous student of his (critical edition of the Latin, Nieto, 2012; studies by Wickersheimer, 1923, Ferckel, 1954 and Thorndike, 1955). It was a popular text; the earliest manuscripts date from the beginning of the fourteenth century (possibly as early as c. 1300), and by middle of fourteenth century it was often copied with passages from different commentary traditions; nearly one hundred manuscripts of these various versions are extant (see Schleissner, 1992, 986-987, Bosselmann-Cyran, 1985, p. 13; Green, 1998, note 11; Green, 2008; Nieto, 2012). The text was translated into French, Italian, Czech, and Dutch, and there were a number of translations into German. Its first printed edition appeared in Cologne, 1475, and it was printed in as many as fifty-five incunabula editions (GW 719-766, and others), and numerous subsequent editions down to the eighteenth century; modern English translation by Lemay, 1992.

The text has an undeniably misogynistic tone (warning especially of the evil nature of women, and the danger of menstrual blood), and Christine de Pizan (1363-c. 1430) in the *Livre de la cité des dames*, famously pronounced it a treatise composed entirely of lies ("... il est traité tout de mençonges"). The text draws on ancient philosophical and medical theories regarding sex and reproduction, using Aristotle, Galen, Hippocrates, and the Trotula as sources. Written in the form of a dialogue, it discusses conception, the astrological influences on the developing embryo, the nature of the menses, the determination of the sex of the fetus, birth defects, pregnancy, and the nature of the male sperm. As Monica Green has observed, it is somewhat misleading to refer to it as a "gynecological" text, since it has no therapeutic intent, and instead belongs to a natural-philosophical tradition (we thank Monica Green for sharing her comments on this manuscript).

LITERATURE

Kristian Bosselmann-Cyran, Kristian. *Secreta mulierum mit Glosse in der deutschen Bearbeitung von Johann Hartlieb. Text und Untersuchungen*, Würzburger medizinhistorische Forschungen 36, Pattensen 1985.

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ONLINE RESOURCES

Watermarks, Briquet Online (Kommission für Schrift- und Buchwesen des Mittelalters der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften)

http://www.ksbm.oeaw.ac.at/_scripts/php/briquet.php

Watermarks, Piccard Online

<http://www.piccard-online.de/ergebnis1.php>

Manuscripta mediaevalia (online catalogue of manuscripts in German Libraries)

<http://www.manuscripta-mediaevalia.de/handschriften-forum.htm>

Dresden, Die Sächsische Landesbibliothek – Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek (SLUB) MS Dresd. H.171 (digital facsimile of another manuscript of this text)

<http://digital.slub-dresden.de/id284648787>

Handschriftencensus; Eine Bestandsaufnahme der handschriftlichen Überlieferung deutschsprachiger Texte des Mittelalters (Census of manuscripts of medieval texts in German)

<http://www.handschriftencensus.de/werke/1988>

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