

PSEUDO-ARNALDUS DE VILLANOVA, *Le petit rosaire*, translated by J. B. de G.; JEAN DE MEUN, Extract on Alchemy from the *Roman de la Rose (la Table de maistre Jehan de Meun)*

In French, illustrated manuscript on paper
Northeastern France, c. 1600-1640

i (unnumbered pastedown) + 120 + *i* (unnumbered pastedown), original foliation in Arabic numerals in ink upper outer corner, with five unnumbered folios + 1-115 [incorrectly foliated with f. 65 followed by f. 67] + one unnumbered leaf, apparently complete (collation, *i*¹² [1, unnumbered pastedown, 2-6, unnumbered] *ii*¹² [beginning f. 7] *iii-vii*¹² *viii*¹⁴ *ix*¹³ [13, f. 106, single] *x*¹⁰), no catchwords or leaf or quire signatures, frame ruled in ink with all rules full-length and with an extra rule at the top for the running titles (added) and folio numbers (ruled space, 253 x 153-145; justification, 244 x 150-145 mm.), written in a very small cursive script in forty-two to thirty-three long lines, headings and other rubrics in a larger more formal bookhand, NINETY-FOUR pen-and-ink ILLUSTRATIONS within the text in spaces left blank by the scribe, described in detail below, f. 1, top outer corner damaged, edges darkened, some soiling especially outer margins, some stains (as if something damp had been placed on the page?), cf. ff. 35-45, within the text but only obscuring a few words on ff. 40-41v, where it is larger and darker (long and narrow). Bound in CONTEMPORARY LIMP VELLUM over pasteboard, smooth spine with title in ink, "Petit Rosaire d'Arnaud de Villeneuve," rubbed, darkened and slightly soiled, ties missing, covering at top and bottom corners and bottom of spine slightly damaged, but in sound condition. Dimensions 315 x 205 mm.

This is a seventeenth-century copy of a fifteenth-century translation and re-working on the *Rosarius Philosophorum*, one of the most important texts in the corpus of alchemical works that circulated under the name of Arnaud of Villanova. Extant in only two known copies, this text deserves study in its own right. This particular copy, notable for its numerous detailed illustrations of alchemical equipment and contemporary marginal notes, is of interest as evidence of alchemical studies in early seventeenth-century France.

PROVENANCE

1. Written in France in the early seventeenth century, perhaps c. 1600-1640, most likely in Northeastern France in the area of Arras or Cambrai, or possibly Rouen, as suggested by the fact that it is a copy of a fifteenth-century manuscript copied in Arras (now in the Bibliothèque municipale of Cambrai, see below), and its subsequent ownership in the eighteenth century by a doctor in Rouen.

Added in Latin on the verso of the last blank leaf in a contemporary hand is a wry piece of advice for the alchemist: "Qui philosophorum secretum quaerit et non est philosophus fatuus est. Nam hoc secretum est abditis et obscuris naturae" (He who seeks the secret of the philosophers [the philosophers' stone] and is not a philosopher is a fool, for this secret lies among the hidden and obscure things of nature).

This is a careful copy, with wide margins providing room for contemporary annotations throughout in several hands that deserves careful analysis. These annotations may shed light on the question of the use of this text; was it read for its practical information on alchemical methodology? (cf. marginal notes using symbols, f. 30, 47v, 57v, and so

forth). The manuscript continued in use into the nineteenth century, when a reader added running titles and various marginal notes on the contents.

Early, possibly contemporary inscription, perhaps the scribe (?), lower margin, f. i, and f. 115v; now vigorously crossed out and mostly illegible, "Ferrier"; see also f. 18, outer margin, written vertically to the text, "quatre" followed by initials (possibly a monogram?), also crossed out.

2. Belonged to J. Gilbert, the physician of the Archbishop of Rouen (?), who signed his name in 1743: "J. Gilbert, adr[?] l'archeveque medic. Rothomag. 1743" (inscription, f. ii, signature repeated on f. 115v, and verso of last blank).
3. Signed "B.D. Delevue[?], in ink, f. i (eighteenth- or nineteenth-century).
4. Unidentified early engraved heraldic bookplate, inside front cover, lion rampant azure or.
5. Modern cataloguing notes in pencil, f. i.
6. Belonged to Joost R. Ritman (b. 1941), the Dutch businessman and distinguished collector of art and books; acquired in 1999 from Chastenay (as reported in *Medieval Manuscripts in Dutch Collections*); *Bibliotheca Philosophia Hermetica* MS 204 (bookplate, inside front cover); briefly described in *Medieval Manuscripts in Dutch Collections* (Online Resources).

TEXT

f. i, recto, verso, blank; ff. ii-iv verso, *Cy commence la table de ce petit liure en recapitulacion des commencement de tous les chappistres. Premièrement, incipit, "Le proesme du traicté a follio 1, . . .," Icy sont acheuées les preparaciones des choses pour sublimer esperits, . . ., Cy commence la table des chappitres du second liure pour appareiller les esperits . . ., Icy est acheué tout le petit Rosaire; La table de M^d Jehan de Meun . . .; [added] incipit, "Des trois pierres principales de lart, 115" [f. v, recto, verso blank but ruled];*

Contemporary table of chapters; the folio references were added in a different ink, presumably after the manuscript was complete.

ff. 1-109v, *Icy commence le petit Rosaire de M[aistre] Arnould de Villeneuve fait et composé sur la Rose d'alquemie translaté de latin en françois par J. B. de G.*, incipit, "Comme il soit ainsy que ja pieça noz peres et patrons en nostre science cest ascavoir Herme Platon et son filz Aristotil ... [line 13] ... Et est ce livre appellé rosaire des philosophes sur les preparations des esprits et des vray elixirs naturelz et artificiex et sur la preparation des corps metallins qui planettes terrestres pouvent estre nommez. Ce Rosaire contient en luy quatre Rosiers desquelx vient une Rose qui illumine tous les dicts des anciens sages et est appellees Secret souverain en terre laquelle, moy Arnould de Villeneuve ... au siècles des siècles. Amen," *Ycy est acheuè le petit rosaire sur la rose d'alquemie de maistre Arnault de Villeneue. Deo Gratias. Amen;*

ILLUSTRATIONS

The ninety-four illustrations add considerably to the interest of this volume. They are an integral part of the text, added in spaces left blank by the scribe, and introduced by captions. Like the text, a comparison of available images suggests they are a copy of the illustrations found in Cambrai, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 918, although a more thorough study of the

question would be of interest. The drawings in this manuscript are generally more detailed and more carefully drawn than those in the earlier manuscript, and certainly seem to be depicting actual alchemical equipment with care and realistic details.

ff. 3-4v, [captions introducing illustrations] *Voicy la figure du marbre sur lequel iay broye mon sel bien menueement...*; *Voicy la figour des four et des baissen ...*; *Voicy la figour de distille ...*; *La maniere de [agelde?] en totz baissene ...*; *La maniere de ...*; *La figure du four...*; *Voicy la manier du <?> poutrefaction...*; *Voicy la figour du four aux la lambic ...*;

Eight pen and ink drawings of alchemical equipment; added running title, "De la preparation des choses pour sublimer les esprits."

Illustrations also found on ff. 7 (two), 7v, 8, 11v, 13v, 14, 15, 15v, 16 (three), 16v, 17v (two), 18v (two), 22 (three), 22v (four), 23, 27, 30v, 32 (three), 35, 35v (six), 36 (six), 36v (three), 37, 41 (two), 56v (two), 64, 64v (four), 66v (two), 67v, f. 74v (three), 79, 79v, 80 (three), 84 (five), 84v (four), 87 (three), 87v, 91v (three), 114v (three).

Blank spaces for drawings never completed found on three pages: f. 62, *Voicy la roué Astrolabicqe de laquelle iay faict mention cy dessus* (left blank); f. 97v, *Voicy la figure de la four ...* (most of the page left blank); f. 98, *Voicy la figure de la four ...* (most of the page left blank).

This is almost certainly a previously unknown copy of *Le Petit Rosaire*, also found in Cambrai, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 918, ff. 1-200, written in 1426 in Arras by Charles Pecquart, which despite its title ("The Little Rosary") is a lengthy, expanded French translation of the text by Pseudo-Arnald of Villanova, the *Rosarius philosophorum*. The translation in the manuscript now in Cambrai is attributed to "J. B. de G^a" (Calvet, 2006, pp. 180-181; Corbett, 1939-1951, vol. 2, no. 10; Muzerelle, 2000, pp. 107-8, and plate 113; and selected images at Enluminures [Online Resources]). In the manuscript described here, the text begins with a statement that it was translated from Latin into French by J. B. de G. (with an abbreviation stroke above the G; a nineteenth-century note in pencil suggests the name should be read "Jean Benoit de Gréon," although the basis for this suggestion is not clear). Calvet describes the text in the Cambrai manuscript – the only copy known to him – as a very loose paraphrase, enriched by other sources by the translator, J. B. de G^a, and a doctor, Jehan de Rhodes, who is mentioned in the Cambrai manuscript on f. 183v (see Corbett, p. 29. There are two entries for Jean de Roda in Wickersheimer, 1936, vol. 2, p. 473, one a doctor active in Paris, c. 1396-8, the other a cleric from Bayeux, and student of medicine in Paris in 1403).

Cambrai, Bib. mun. MS 918 now concludes with an alchemical text in Latin that was evidently added to the manuscript later and replaces the French text originally found in the manuscript on ff. 228-238, as described in its table of contents. The manuscript described here was copied from the Cambrai manuscript before this alteration in its contents, and thus preserves the original texts found in the earlier manuscript, here on ff. 110-115 (see below).

The *Rosarius philosophorum* was one of the most influential and widely disseminated texts in the alchemical corpus that circulated under the name of Arnaldus of Villanova. Arnald of Villanova (c. 1240-1311), was a Catalan physician; his authentic writings include important medical treatises, as well as numerous works of theology. His ties with the spiritual Franciscans and beliefs concerning the imminent coming of the Antichrist led to the condemnation of his writings by the theology faculty of the University of Paris. None of the corpus of alchemical texts – including twenty alchemical texts, recipes, and two medical-alchemical works – that

circulated as his, however, like the Pseudo-Lullian alchemical corpus, are now considered authentic works by Arnald (Calvet, 2011, pp. 33-103). In addition to the *Rosarius*, important titles in the Pseudo-Arnaldian corpus, are the *Flos florum*, the *Epistola super alchimia ad regem Neapolitanum*, the *Speculum alchimie*, and the *Novum Lumen*.

The Latin text of the *Rosarius philosophorum* (The Rose of the Philosophers), survives in numerous manuscripts (Calvet, 2006, lists two from the fourteenth century, and fourteen from the fifteenth century, an incomplete list, since he notes that there are more than forty fifteenth-century examples extant; Calvet, 1997, an earlier list includes forty-five total). His edition of the Latin text, with French translation, reproduces the text in Turin, Biblioteca Nazionale Universitaria, MS E IV 22, with variants from Manget's edition (Calvet, 2011, pp. 268-357; Manget, 1702, vol. I, pp. 662-76); the text was printed several times in the sixteenth-eighteenth centuries (see Calvet, 2006, 181-191), from single manuscripts, and with editorial changes, there is no modern critical edition based on all the manuscripts. In addition to the Cambrai manuscript related to the manuscript described here, there is a different French translation in Paris, Bibliothèque de l' Arsenal, MS 2872, datable between 1361 and 1400, and possibly made for Charles V (reigned 1364-1380), and a French version in Bologna, Bib. Univ. MS 457, as well as a version in langue d'oc, Paris, BnF, n.a.fr. MS 4141 (edited in Calvet, 1997), and two versions in Castilian.

Calvet argues that the *Rosarius* was probably composed between 1323 and 1343 by an anonymous cleric, most likely a Franciscan, who assembled a "rosaire," that is a florilegium, or extracts from the most up to date alchemical works available to him, and importantly arranged them according to the progression of the alchemical "opus" (Calvet, 2006, p. 165), probably dedicating the work to Robert I, King of Naples (1277-1343). The *Rosarius*, like the pseudo-Lullian *Testament* (see TM 692 on this site), were products of a school of alchemical thought that flourished in the fourteenth century in Southern France, especially Montpellier, and Catalonia, that had important links with England – and were associated and protected by powerful people including the Kings of England and Naples (Calvet, 2006, p. 202). The treatise was important for its transmission of the alchemical theories formulated by Roger Bacon, and the theory of "mercury alone," articulated in the *Summa perfectionis magisterii* of Pseudo-Geber (stressing that mercury is the unique principle of all metals, and contains its own sulfur, and that therefore the alchemical work is based on various mercurial compositions made from metals).

ff. 110-111, *Cy commence la Table de maistre Jehan de Meun seu [en?] magister aux philosophes ... [added], "tiré de son Roman de la Rose Chapitre de nature de homme"*, incipit, "Bien dalquimie tant apprendre/ Que tou[s] metaulz en coullor taindre/ .../ Travaillent tant cum il vivront/ La nature n'aconsivront";

Jean de Meun, *Roman de la Rose*, ed. Lecoy, 1965-70, v. 16035-118; eighty-four line passage in his continuation to the *Rose*, discussing the principle behind the alchemical transmutation, describing the reduction of the metals to their primary matter, sulfur and mercury, and the preparation of the elixir; this passage circulated independently, as in this manuscript, and is the source of Jean de Meun's reputation as an alchemist, and the attribution of other alchemical poems to his name (as well as interpretations of the entire *Rose* as an alchemical allegory; see Badel, 1992, pp. 262-285, and Schuler, 1995, 123-129).

The *Roman de la Rose* originated as a 4028-line romance in verse written c. 1230 by Guillaume de Lorris that centers on the Lover's quest for the Rose – his lady's love. It was continued in a very different style by Jean de Meun. His contribution, composed c. 1270-1280, greatly

expanded the original, adding around 18,000 lines, and forming as one author puts it, "a veritable encyclopedia of medieval learning," with Reason, Nature and Genius all playing important parts in the allegory. In the passage on alchemy, Nature begins with the arguments against transmutation, but concludes that it is a true art, by means of which man can imitate nature.

ff. 111-114 , *Addition subsequente pour faire Elixir natural, A ceste Rubriche estudier*, incipit, "Qui <?> et moy de elixir compose/ Si ..."; *Soleil et lune tu prendrae, A <?> E si la distineræ ...*"; [f. 111v] *Comment pratique et Theorique enseignent a lart le cours de nature*, incipit, "Mais ..., Si practique ..., Qui toutdiu du flour d'alquimier/ De ton cours du philosophie," *Amen*;

Unidentified text; this does not appear to be the continuation of Jean de Meun's discussion of alchemy from the *Rose* found in a number of manuscripts, the *Fleur d'Alkimie* (and other titles), incipit, "Qui en son cuer vouldra penser" (see Badel, 1992, note 21).

ff. 114v-115v, *Le premier ouurage aux phillosophes si est dissouldre*, incipit, "La grosse matiere et ...," [f. 115], *Des trois pierres principalles de Lart*. "Derechef en cet art sont trois pierres principalles mises transumptivement (scilicet alienae res) par Aristote au livre des pieres ..." [followed by a blank unnumbered leaf]."

The beginning of a treatise similar in content to the main text in the volume; appears incomplete; a later hand added cross references to passages in the *Rosaire* where similar topics are discussed.

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ONLINE RESOURCES

The Ritman Library (Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica)

<http://www.ritmanlibrary.com/collection/collection-profile/>

Medieval Manuscripts in Dutch Collections (as Amsterdam, BPH MS 204)

<http://www.mmdc.nl/static/site/>

Enluminures: images from Cambrai, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 918

http://www.enluminures.culture.fr/documentation/enlumine/fr/rechexperte_00.htm

Antoine Calvet, "La tradition alchimique latine (XIII^e-XV^e siècle) et le corpus alchimique du pseudo-Arnaud de Villeneuve," *Médiévales* [Online], 2007

<http://medievales.revues.org/2003>

English translation Pseudo-Arnaldus of Villanova, *Rosarium*

<http://www.rexresearch.com/rosarium/rosarium.htm>

Alchemy Sources (Workshop; On the Fringes of Alchemy, Budapest, 2010)

http://members.upc.hu/bobory.dora/alchemyproject/On_Alchemy.html

Alchemy Website

<http://www.alchemywebsite.com/index.html>

Bibliotheca Chymica

http://herve.delboy.perso.sfr.fr/bibliot_phil_chim.html

TM 700