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PIETRO D'ABANO, *Trattati dei veleni* (Treatise on Poisons); Recipe for a Bezoar; *Regimento per la sanita* (Regimen to conserve health during the plague)

In Italian, with a few rubrics in Latin, decorated manuscript on parchment

Northern Italy, c. 1440-1460

i (paper) + 59 + i (paper) folios on parchment, original foliation in ink in Arabic numerals (a few red) top outer corner recto, occasionally trimmed and supplied by a modern hand in pencil, complete (collation i² ii-v¹⁰ vi⁸ [-8, cancelled blank]), paper guards between some quires, horizontal catchwords (the first in penwork banderole and decorated in red), horizontal rules in ink, single full-length vertical bounding lines in hard point (justification 110-108 x 72 mm.), written in a rounded Italian gothic bookhand influenced by humanistic script in 25 long lines, red rubrics, contents list entirely in red ink, red paragraph marks, 1- to 3-line red initials, ink flaking on some leaves (text remains legible, if faint on a few leaves), occasional passages rewritten in darker ink, some old stains and discoloration to first and last leaves, overall very good condition. Bound in modern parchment over pasteboard, reusing leaves from another manuscript (a sixteenth-century Prayerbook?), and reusing earlier flyleaves, smooth spine, in very good condition, old (19th-century?) fitted green card case. Dimensions 163 x 115 mm.

Poisons and plague were two things people worried about during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. This popular text on poisons and their remedies is very rare on the market (this and the manuscript offered by Les Enluminures in 2019 may be the only two examples of this treatise in Italian to appear on the market in almost a century). It is paired with an extensive health regimen, also in Italian, by an unidentified author, with advice and medical recipes to defend oneself against the threat of the plague, which offers significant opportunities for further research.

PROVENANCE

1. Written in Italy, most likely in Northern Italy, c. 1440-1460, based on the evidence of the script, ruling pattern, and decoration.
2. Inside front cover, eighteenth-century(?) shelf mark in brown ink: "B 3 36."

TEXT

ff. 1-4, [chapter list], incipit, *Tractato de li ueneni composto et edito per maestro petro de abano*, incipit, "In prima noi meteremo uno prologo; Capitolo primo nel quale se mette de uisione de li ueneni; ... Il septimo captiolo muoue una questione se la triacha libera per occulta proprieta da li ueneni;

ff. 4-43v, *Qui commença il prologo*, incipit, "Al reuerendissimo in christo patre et signore misere I. per la diuina prouidentia summo pontifico Petro da Abano minimo medico con deuotione manda la presente scriptura ... ; [f. 5], *Capitolo primo nel quale se mette le diuisione de li ueneni*, incipit, "Sapi che il ueneno si e opposito al cibo del co[r]po nostro ... ; ... [f. 42], *Capitolo vii. Nel quale se mete la soluzione de questa questione ...*, incipit, "Cerca le predicte cose cade questa questione ... Et impero la triaccha da li medici se chiama matre de tute le medecine, Deo gratias," *Finitus est*

*tractatus de uenenis magistri petri de abano pro quo non laus sed honor et gloria prima sede potito [sic] super laudes
existenti omnibus factoribus meliori referamaus Amen, Amen, Amen; Explicit pōlex de uenenis;*

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, it survives in at least nineteen incunable editions (Collard, 2015), and 72 Latin manuscripts, but in only 27 manuscripts in Italian, not including this manuscript (Collard, 2015, Annex no. 3; Aguilera, 2018, lists 56 manuscripts, all Latin). Only four manuscript copies, two 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); an Italian translation was sold by Les Enluminures in 2019 (formerly TM 989).

f. 44rv, *Confectio de bezoar*, incipit, "Recipe seminis iuniper, gariofilorum, ... Conserue rosarum, ... Conserue buglose";

Copied in two columns in a very formal, easily legible script, with a list of ingredients in the first column, followed by annotations describing the amounts and the process in the second column; a bezoar was valued as a universal antidote against poisons.

ff. 45-55, *Regimento per la sanita*, incipit, "Questo sie il regimento per conseruare la sanitate nel tempo de la peste ...; Recipe silo aloes una dragma meza ...; *Pilule che poco menano*, incipit, "Infrascripte pilule menano poco del corpo senza tortione ..."; ... La Giandola o uero petrarca ... la seconda parte de questo tractato a pieno," *Deo gratias amen*; [ff. 55v-59v, blank but ruled].

A health regimen, as the text explains, specifically to conserve one's health during a time of the plague; this is a comprehensive treatise presenting numerous medical recipes and other advice, including preventive medicines: an "electuario optimo" (the best electuary, or sweetened medicine, here including among other ingredients the "bones" from a stag's heart, *ossis de corde cervi* and nutmeg), *poluere da usare in la scudela* (a powder to use as a shield), a cordial against the plague, and advice on proper eating (encouraging vinegar, and warning that fruit is to be eaten sparingly); but also discussing various treatments should one be unfortunate enough to contract the plague.

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* (On poisons and their remedies) was written around 1300, following 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). The *De venenis* describes the toxic characteristics of minerals, plants, and animals, 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, and remedies for different types of poisoning. The numerous surviving manuscripts and early printed editions testify not only to the popularity of Pietro's text, but also to the obsession during the later Middle Ages, particularly in Italy, with poison and the danger of being poisoned. Poisoning was a popular method of murder due to its effectiveness, leaving the victim with very little means of defense. 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 (notoriously so among the Visconti of Milan).

The text that follows Pietro d'Abano's treatise is a *regimen sanitatis*, or health regimen, by an unidentified author. Health regimens were an established genre in the Middle Ages from the thirteenth century on, often based on late Antique and Arabic texts; the most well-known example being the Latin translation, the *Tacuinum sanitatis*, of the treatise by Ibn Butlân (†1068). These texts stressed the role of diet, regular sleep, exercise, and the control of one's emotions in the conservation of health (for general background, see Nicoud, 2007). The text in our manuscript in contrast is focused directly on the problem of preserving one's health during the plague; there are general discussions within the text, but the number of recipes included for various powders, cordials, and so forth is notable, and seems to set it apart from more general *Regimina sanitatis* that focus on Galenic principals to living a healthy life. We have not identified any other copies of this text; further research and a comparison with other treatises would be a rewarding project.

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