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Woven Bands, Medicines and Recipes: Cod. Pal. Germ. 551.

The Adventures, Provenance and Contents of a 15th Century Manuscript Held at the Library of Heidelberg University in Germany.

Ute Bargmann

Today, we are going to visit Heidelberg, the city where the earliest German University was founded in 1386. On account of its romantic setting, it became one of the internationally popular institutions in the 19th century. Here, we will visit the University Library, where the manuscript we are to discuss today is housed. It is on the shelf in the Department of Manuscripts, bound in a modest working cover of the 19th century.

History. - We shall embark on a journey of more than 500 years into the past and through some very trying times that helped shape present-day Central Europe. Finding the manuscript was not an earth-shaking discovery, but rather the following of the Haensel-and-Gretel trail of crumbs which were dropped by a book on medieval trades by Gerhard Eis, and the later mention of the manuscript by Leonie von Wilckens, the now deceased Curator of Textiles at the Germanisches Nationalmuseum in Nuremberg. It is part of the famous Palatina Collection of the University of Heidelberg, that is to say, it once belonged to a prince of the Palatinate.

The manuscript was collected some time before the 1550's by Ottheinrich (1502-1559), then count Palatine of Palatinate-Neuburg. He was a lavish Protestant Renaissance Prince, a notable collector and bibliophile. This ran him into great financial trouble - especially in view of his pocket-size realm - and his eclectic art collection counting many famous Italian paintings and objets d'art wound up on the auction block, since the trades no longer consented to support his extravagant lifestyle by paying his debt. He had to lie low and leave the country for a while. His magnificent castle from that time at Neuburg can still be admired today. He was able to hold on to his collection of books, though. Many of his book acquisitions were a direct result of the many closings of monasteries and convents due to the wave of the Reformation that swept Germany - in most cases these collections were thus saved from destruction. In 1556, he succeeded to the hereditary title of Elector Palatine, thus joining the rather powerful club of princes that elected the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire. Ottheinrich immediately proceeded to remodel Heidelberg Castle in the Renaissance style, and he combined his library with that of the University and placed it into the upper story of the Church of the Holy Ghost, to be made available to scholars and other interested folks who were able to read. He also provided a generous endowment, so that the library could continue to be developed and prosper. Here, the collection served the university, which was reborn as a reformation institution with Philip Melanchthon at the helm.

This state of affairs of the library lasted until the 15th of September in 1622 when, in the 4th year of the terrible conflagration of the 30 years' war, which laid waste to so much of Central Europe, Heidelberg was sacked by Count Tilly who was in command of the Catholic forces. The castle went up in flames, the city was pillaged during three days of

horror and the library, which had been on the Pope's shopping list for quite a few years was packed up, crated in boxes made from the wood ripped from the church pews and sent to the Vatican, where it arrived in early 1623. This involved University books, as well as the Palatina Collection, a total of 3600 manuscripts and more than 12,000 prints. The ruins of the castle above the city are a testimonial to those days of horror.

After much negotiating and bickering, the 900 or so German manuscripts were returned to Heidelberg early in the 19th Century, and with them our manuscript. In the latter part of the 20th century, librarians from Heidelberg gained permission to catalog and describe the remaining Latin manuscripts, so that finally the scholarly world gained access to the most important of the German medieval libraries.

The pages of our manuscript are of paper and it measures 21cm x 15.5cm x 4.5cm (8.25" x 6" x 1.75"). The first 113 pages are written in brown ink without any decorative touches; the rest show some red embellishment. The first pages turn out to consist of three hundred odd patterns for brocaded tabletwoven silk bands, the rest are filled with medical advice, information on falconry, recipes, horse medicine and an oddity which turned out to be a rather important tidbit for those interested in loop manipulation.

Provenance. - This manuscript has always been considered something of an orphan, its provenance unsure. One section on horse medicine was described elsewhere but nobody really dealt with the band section, since the method of notation was rather opaque for a non-weaver. The first few lines indicated that it might have something to do with pearl "embroidery." When Ms v. Wilckens inspected it in the '70s, she came across some typical patrician Nuremberg names - so his pointed to the city of origin. Immediately, of one of the convents of the city, either the Dominicans of St. Catherine or the Poor Clares came to mind. The ladies in both of those institutions would have been able to write, since both convents had well-known scriptoria. Then there is a pattern by the name of "Barfuessermode" or Barefoot Brothers Pattern, and that in turn pointed to the Poor Clares, since their confessors and preachers were, indeed, the Barefoot or Franciscan Brothers, the Clares being the female branch of that order. The two convents in Nuremberg were pretty much dominated by that city's council, who decided as to who was eligible to join. With some rare exceptions only daughters of families of the city were accepted. This was sort of an old maid insurance for Nuremberg's patrician female offspring and an assurance that the great fortunes of the city would remain intact - the dowry to enter the convent amounted to far less than that to be presented to a prospective husband. This is illustrated by the family of the patrician Pirkheimers, one of whose daughters, the celebrated Caritas, was the last abbess of St. Clare's. In the case of this family, there were eight daughters; one married and seven took the veil.

The Convent of the Poor Clares, or Klarissenkloster as it was known in Nuremberg, started out in the early 1200s as a convent of repentants (Reuerinnen) devoted to St. Mary Magdalene. When the Pope abolished some of the mendicant orders, the Magdalenes among them, they had to seek another affiliation. In 1279, they were taken over by the order of the Poor Clares. In time, the convent became rather wealthy, due to some very generous

endowments of many acres of farmland and farms in the area surrounding the city. The convent experienced a rather rocky history, full of internal strife: battles about owning personal property, about whom to revere and there were protracted power struggles among the sisters. Eventually, however, in 1452, the order was reformed and became a model for all other convents of the Poor Clares. They were known as particularly strict in the observation of their rules. They slept in a communal hall, with only a straw mattress, a pillow and one blanket to call their own. Their habit was of gray wool produced on the convent's farms and spun, woven and sewn by the nuns themselves. The talk among each other was restricted to the absolutely necessary. The time not occupied by prayer and devotion was spent in the scriptorium or doing needlework and weaving. It has to be noted here, though, that lay sisters, i.e. sisters recruited from non-patrician families, performed much of the hard work. At the height of the convent's fame, it housed about 60 sisters.

The nuns were also much involved in the education of young girls, this being the only opportunity for these to get an education. They were instructed in writing, Latin and needlework. Such an education was absolutely necessary for entering the convent and would also be welcomed in the female who would join one of the prominent families as wife. The Clares were famous for their embroideries, their weaving and their scriptorium. When the City Council took over the guardianship of the regalia and the coronation robes of the Holy Roman Empire in 1424 at the request of the Emperor Sigismund to protect them from the Hussite incursions, it fell to the Clares to repair the damages - the city being wealthy enough to replace the pearls lost in previous coronations and during the various annual events, during which both, the regalia and the robes were displayed to the public. The guardianship of the Regalia of the Holy Roman Empire rested with three city councilors, each of them being responsible for one key for each of the three different locks to the shrine in the sacristy of the chapel at the Hospice of the Holy Ghost in Nuremberg, where they were kept. The last time the Clares took on the restoration of the Imperial Robes was for the coronation of Charles V in Frankfurt in 1519.

Our manuscript was probably started some time after 1424. The first pages are entirely devoted to bands decorated with freshwater pearls. They may have become plentiful in the convent when the sisters were first asked to restore the imperial robes. The fact that the first pages include many richly decorated items such as hair bands and belts puts it into the time period before 1452, as those fripperies were probably no longer tolerated after the reform, not even for the instruction of girls. Later on in the manuscript, the bands are mostly seam bindings for vestments, with the occasional very modest hair band.

In 1525, all the monastic institutions of Nuremberg were dissolved, as the city had become Protestant. The abbess of the Poor Clares, Caritas Pirckheimer, fought tooth and nail with the city council against the closing. As a result, the library of that convent was dispersed whereas that of St. Catherine was dutifully handed over to the council and can be seen today in the City Library - alas, no pattern books seem to have survived there. The convents were forbidden to accept any more novices and the last nun of the Poor Clares passed in 1596. The convent buildings became property of the city and in 1618, they were turned into the city's pawn house and the convent proper was demolished in 1899. St. Clares church became

a protestant place of worship, and in 1806, it became an armory. In 1857, it was again dedicated as a catholic church. It is still one of the city's landmarks to this day.

The Bands - Our manuscript begins with hair bands and belts that are decorated with pearls, all somewhat typical of a young girl's finery, and indeed, the Clares did give instructions to young girls of the patrician households, as mentioned above. The notation in this first section, by the first hand, is in arabic numerals, indicating in words where the pearls were to be placed. By picking alternating symbols for adjacent numbers in the manuscript, a pattern emerges very quickly. What also became very clear was the fact that these are brocaded tabletwoven silk bands. Contacts at the Germanisches Nationalmuseum in Nuremberg agreed. Also, a search in a Middle High German dictionary revealed that the word "gespellte" means indeed tablet – with x number of "gespellte" precedes many of the bands. The notation in the first section, by the first hand is in arabic numerals, indicating in words where the pearls were to be placed. By picking alternating symbols for the each of the numbers in the manuscript, a pattern emerges very quickly

For displaying the patterns, I chose a lower case l and a full stop because of their good contrast and because of their proximity to the Return key. Then I set the font to Courier. The font size can be adjusted to your preference. It is absolutely necessary to disable the AutoCorrect functions in the toolbox, otherwise Word has too much of a mind of its own and re-interprets what you type. It cannot understand that anyone in their right mind would want to repeat l's and .s endlessly and simply changes it to something that the program finds more suitable, which, however, does not successfully display a pattern.

The first hand, [Fig. 1] pages 1 to the left hand side of page 46, recorded about 107 patterns in arabic numerals, a wonderful variety different ornaments, quite a few decorated with pearls. The second hand [Fig. 2] records entirely in roman numerals, from the right hand side of page 46 the left of page 55. Many of these bands are decorated with graceful leaves winding diagonally the length of the bands, an ornament typical of 15th century Nuremberg. The third hand, pages 55 right hand to 77, goes back to recording in arabic numerals, the ornamentation largely geometric. On page 55, there is a short notation about making bands with [Fig. 3] peacock feathers! Hand 4 also records in arabic numerals from page 78 to page 80 left hand. However, the notation is so abbreviated that it is practically impossible to make any sense of it. The fifth hand, right hand of page 80 to page 93, embarks on a new adventure in notation: instead of indicating alternating background and pattern in alternating numbers, the background thread units are displayed as roman numerals and the individual pattern floats as o's - a method involving some very tedious counting. On page 89, [Fig. 4] the recorder of the barefoot brothers pattern shows her impatience with the new notation by starting out drawing endless little o's and then switching back to the tried and true method of displaying alternating background and pattern as roman numbers. The sixth hand, pages 94 to 113, records in roman numerals, all letters. Pages 114 and 114a seem to be some last somewhat unrelated additions.

In the Germanisches Nationalmuseum in Nuremberg, there is a fragment called the "Leubleinmodel," or leaf pattern [Fig. 5], which was at one point interpreted as an

embroidery pattern by repeating the pattern horizontally, but it turns out to be a tabletwoven band and decidedly a relative of the last pattern notation attempts of the Heidelberg manuscript. It was definitely of a later date, as the notation looks like it had been well accustomed to, rather decorative in appearance, unlike the first tentative attempts in our manuscript.

In 1517, Anna Neuper of the St. Clare's Convent invented yet another notation for tabletwoven bands. [Fig. 6] She uses long and short marks for her sometimes very wide bands. The one illustrated here uses 54 tablets. It appears that in Anna Neuper's time, the earlier pattern book notations had been forgotten.

After weaving all of the varieties, I came to the conclusion that the first and second notations are much more user-friendly for the weaver. The Barfuessermode, for instance took one week's worth of evenings to weave, counting the pattern from the schematic interpretation and then again counting the tablets. Using the original version with the alternating numbers, it took one afternoon.

On Page 113 of the Heidelberg manuscript is another curiosity: A description of something called "Lintwurm poertlein" or dragon braid. Masako Kinoshita of Syracuse and Noémi Speiser of Switzerland puzzled it out. It happens to be a truncated description of loop manipulation - the first one found so far in German literature. A recipe for the very same braid was found in a 17th century English manuscript with samples found in Victoria and Albert Museum, recently published by Noémi Speiser. The fact that the ms description was truncated indicated that it was a very commonplace technique and that only very special features needed to be written down as reminders for an unusual braid. These loop-manipulated braids were very important during the Middle Ages, since they were ideal for lacing. They were not as stiff as woven bands and would therefore move with the wearer.

The remaining pages, 116 to 208, are written by several different hands and contain a compendium of sometimes rather dubious medicines for humans, falcons and horses and eventually recipes. As an example, against tooth ache: "Take celandine, squeeze out the juice and put a drop into the nose and lie on your back, so that it can run up in the interior of your nose and rub the rest on your teeth and gums." Against worms: "Take castor oil and garlic and earth worms and crush these and put the paste into a nutshell and fasten that above the navel and do that three times and at the fourth it will become a worm house and they will go away." Some of the advice for falconry is still valid today, for example: "If the falcon is wild you should carry the bird until it is very tired. You should keep the wings on its back. You should wind the jesses around the fingers in such a way so that when you bate the bird, the tail will not brush over the hand, so that you will not injure the feathers. You should keep the falcon in the dark with the jesses on."

The individual items seem to have been collected over an extended period of time, one of the horse medicine sections being ascribed to the equerry in charge of the horses of Frederick II in Naples in the early 13th century.

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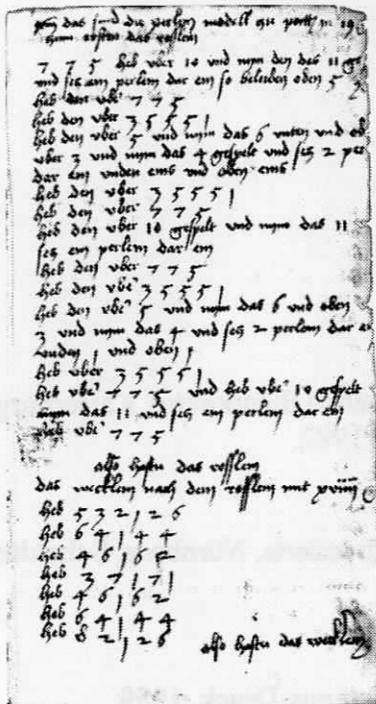
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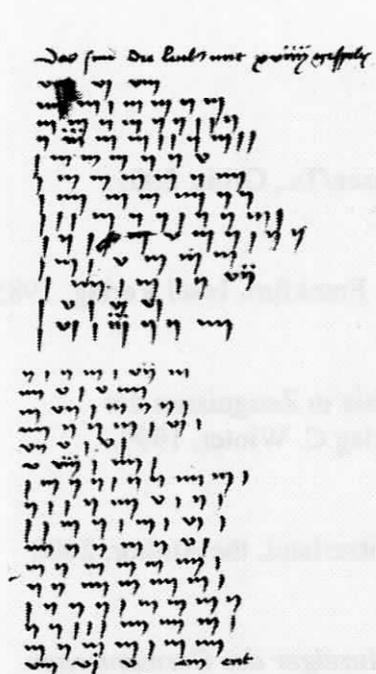


Handschriftenabteilung, Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg

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Fig. 1: Manuscript page 1, schematic sketch and brocaded tabletwoven band, first hand



Handschriftenabteilung, Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg

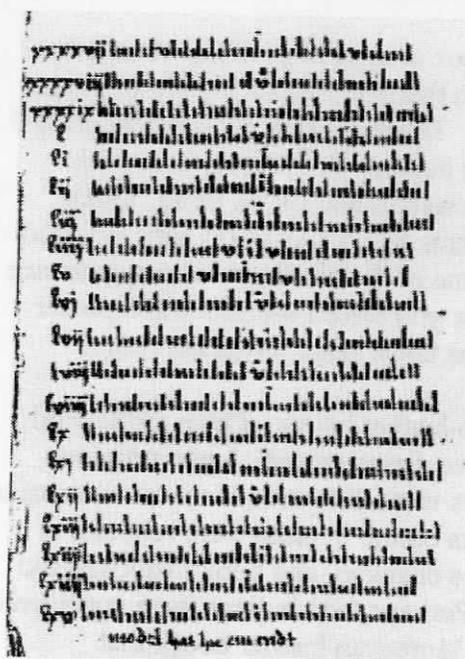
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Fig. 2: Manuscript pages 51-52, schematic sketch and brocaded tabletwoven band, second hand



Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel



Anzeiger des Germanischen Nationalmuseums Nürnberg

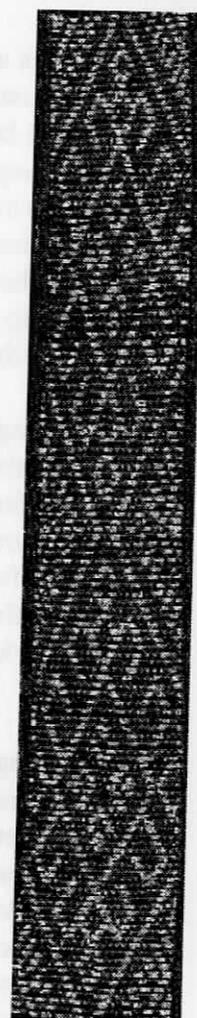


Fig. 6: Modelbuch Anna Neuper, 1517, Herzog-August Bibliothek in Wolfenbüttel, the last 20 pattern lines on p.7 verso, drawdown by Leonie v. Wilckens, Germanisches Nationalmuseum Nürnberg and tabletwoven brocaded band.