

A MANUSCRIPT OF BOTANICAL INTEREST AND ITS CONTEXT (XVI-XVIII C.)

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Originating from Porciorasco in the Alta Val di Vara (La Spezia), this manuscript of botanical depictions (Ms95) was discovered in 1982 during initial investigations of the De Paoli - Gotelli family archive, made by the Museo Contadino di Cassego. This 16th century illustrated herbarium is a collection of 281 drawings and 269 plant names, however during the second half of the 18th century several plant descriptions were added to the manuscript, as were recipes transcribed from the works of late 16th century authors, such as Castor Durante and Leonardo Fioravanti. Ms95 (16x23 cm) is comprised of 68 cartae, some of which feature a watermark originating from the area around Lucca during the 1570s (Briquet, 1923). The manuscript presents us with certain questions and problems:



1. The precise date of its production is debatable owing to the presence of a date (1508 or 1598?).
2. The exact area and workshop where the manuscript was produced is unclear.
3. The manuscript requires contextualisation within its locale as do the various recipes it features.

Date (1): We are currently in the process of dating the manuscript through analysis of the inks and pigmentations (Aceto, pers.comms.). Area of production (2): Evidence suggests and supports the hypothesis that the manuscript was produced in area between the Liguria, Tuscany and Emilia-Romagna. More precisely, through the identification and analysis of the species names, it would appear that a vernacular specific to the area between Liguria and Tuscany was used.

Local context and uses (3): Information regarding the specific locale can be identified through the study of the various visual

representations as well as from the 16th century notes, as will the contextualisation of this information with other, not illustrated recipe and naturalistic documentation found elsewhere in the De Paoli archive dating from the late 18th to the early 18th century (Bertuccelli, 2002). The iconography featured in our examples can be compared with other documents, such as those held in the Biblioteca Statale di Lucca (Ms196), the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris (Ms17844, Ms17848) and the Bibliothèque du Museum National d'Histoire Naturelle, Paris (Ms326), and by doing so, the role and function of Ms95 in terms of wider medieval herbal and recipes books (Ragazzini, 1983; Collins, 2000) will become clearer, whereas contextualisation of the manuscript within the locale of its production aids understanding of local ethnobotanical history.

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