

International Memory of the World Register

THE LORSCH PHARMACOPOEIA

(The Bamberg State Library, Msc.Med.1)
(Germany)

2012-35

1.0 Summary

The *Lorsch Pharmacopoeia* (Msc.Med.1) in the Bamberg State Library is the earliest, reliably datable compendium of classical remedies in the Greco-Roman tradition from the (Latin) Early Middle Ages in Europe. This medical-pharmaceutical manuscript, compiled around the year

795 during the reign of Charlemagne in Lorsch Abbey, is of unique significance for global intellectual and cultural history. The entire work can be regarded as a key witness for the reappraisal of medicine over the course of the Carolingian educational reform in the late eighth century.

Furthermore, the *Lorsch Pharmacopoeia* documents the first post-antique impulse of the immense transformative process that resulted in the acceptance of the classical inheritance under Christian auspices. Its foreword provides the earliest and most comprehensive surviving intellectual discussion from the Carolingian age that seeks to justify systematically a positive reception of classical learning. The manuscript undertakes an innovative scientific approach to medicine, put forward under the premise of a positive and theologically based evaluation of humankind's physical environment. (For further details, see "Appendix I: An Overview of Essential Information on the *Lorsch Pharmacopoeia*".)

The present nomination proposal builds on the suggestion to unite singular, outstanding medical and pharmaceutical documents from different cultures and epochs in a virtual ensemble, which together bear exemplary testimony to significant achievements of civil society. In this context the *Lorsch Pharmacopoeia* holds a prominent position. (For further details, see "Appendix II: Conclusion".)

2.1 Name of nominator (person or organization)

The Bamberg State Library / Staatsbibliothek Bamberg

2.2 Relationship to the nominated documentary heritage

Owner of the manuscript

2.3 Contact person

Prof. Dr. Werner Taegert
Library Director of the Bamberg State Library

2.4 Contact details

Name

The Bamberg State Library / Staatsbibliothek Bamberg

Address

Staatsbibliothek Bamberg
Neue Residenz
Domplatz 8
96049 Bamberg
Germany

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Telephone: 0049 951 / 95503-112

Facsimile: 0049 951 / 95503-145

Email: info@staatsbibliothek-bamberg.de

3.0 Identity and description of the documentary heritage

3.1 Name and identification details of the items being nominated

The Lorsch Pharmacopoeia

German designation:
Das Lorsch Arzneibuch

The Bamberg State Library / Staatsbibliothek Bamberg, Msc.Med.1

3.2 Catalogue or registration details

The Lorsch Pharmacopoeia

Shelf mark: Msc.Med.1

Manuscript, late 8th century, 75 folios, parchment.

Baroque cover, dated 1611, pigskin with blind and gold embossing over a wooden board. Format: 31,5 x 22,5 cm.

Foliation: IV¹⁻⁸ + (II-2)⁹⁻¹⁰ + II¹¹⁻¹⁴ + IV¹⁵⁻²² + III²³⁻²⁸ + III²⁹⁻³⁴ + IV³⁵⁻⁴² + IV⁴³⁻⁵⁰ + V⁵¹⁻⁶⁰ + IV⁶¹⁻⁶⁸
+ (IV-1)⁶⁹⁻⁷⁵.

The manuscript was written in the Benedictine Abbey of Lorsch around the year 795 by several scribes in Carolingian minuscule, with additions and corrections from the ninth and tenth centuries.

Languages: Latin with Old High German glosses.

At an unknown and early point in time thirty-two pages of the manuscript were lost (about a third of the original extent of the book).

Table of Contents:

Foreword	fol. 1 ^r -5 ^r
Carmen (Cosmas Damianus Ippocratis Galienus)	fol. 5 ^r Initia
medicinae (Fragment)	fol. 6 ^r
Problema Aristotilis philosophi	fol. 6 ^v -7 ^v
Dies Aegyptiaci	fol. 8 ^r Dies
incerti	fol. 8 ^r
Hippocras	fol. 8 ^r
Anteballomena	fol. 8 ^v
Capitula	fol. 9 ^r -15 ^v
Hermeneumata	fol. 15 ^v -17 ^r
Excerpts from Vindicianus	fol. 17 ^r
Compendium of remedies (the actual "Lorsch Pharmacopoeia")	fol. 17 ^v -52 ^v , 57 ^r -71 ^r
Origo pimentorum	fol. 53 ^v -55 ^r
De ponderibus et mensuris	fol. 55 ^v
Confectio diversarum specierum	fol. 56 ^r -56 ^v
Epistula Anthimi	fol. 72 ^r -75 ^r
Antidotum anacardium	fol. 75 ^v

Partial catalogue of the library of Emperor Otto III (980–1002), inserted by his teacher and advisor, Leo of Vercelli fol. 42^v

3.4 History / provenance

The manuscript was compiled in the Benedictine Abbey of Lorsch around the year 795. Textual corrections and additions date from the ninth and tenth centuries. Later on, the manuscript passed into the possession of Otto III (German king 983–

1002, Emperor 996–1002), as is evidenced by an explicit entry in the manuscript itself (fol. 42^V). It was passed on by him to his successor Henry II (German king 1002–1024, Emperor 1014–1024). Henry II in turn donated it to the cathedral library of the bishopric of Bamberg, which he founded in the year 1007.

In the course of the secularisation of church property in 1802/03 the manuscript was transferred from the cathedral library to the then newly established Electoral (since 1806 Royal) Library of Bamberg, the present Bamberg State Library.

4.0 Legal information

4.1 Owner of the documentary heritage (name and contact details)

Name

The Bamberg State Library / Staatsbibliothek Bamberg

Address

Staatsbibliothek Bamberg

Neue Residenz

Domplatz 8

96049 Bamberg

Germany

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Telephone ++49 951 / 95503-112

Facsimile ++49 951 / 95503-145

Email: info@staatsbibliothek-bamberg.de

4.2 Custodian of the documentary heritage

(name and contact details if different from the owner)

Name

Prof. Dr. Werner Taegert Library Director of the Bamberg State Library

Address (see above)

4.3 Legal status

Provide details of legal and administrative responsibility for the preservation of the documentary heritage

The manuscript is the property of the Free State of Bavaria, represented by the Bamberg State Library, which is in turn represented by its director, Prof. Dr. Werner Taegert, simultaneously curator in charge of the manuscript collection.

4.4 Accessibility

Describe how the item(s) / collection may be accessed

To ensure optimal preservation, access to the original manuscript of the *Lorsch Pharmacopoeia* is consistently restricted to scholars with a justified research interest. On rare occasions, the manuscript is displayed in exhibitions to the general public. For further details, see below.

A digital version of the entire *Lorsch Pharmacopoeia* provides convenient access to its textual content and is available free of charge on the internet:

<http://bsbsbb.bsb.lrz.de/~db/0000/sbb00000137/images/index.html>

Additional value for research is given to the manuscript through the enrichment of the digital images with structural data, catalogue descriptions and up to date bibliographic information from the Bamberg State Library's on-going research documentation. The high-resolution images, on which this internet presentation is based, can be supplied by the Bamberg State Library on request.

A printed reproduction of the manuscript, accompanied by an additional commentary volume, presents a close-to original impression of the manuscript (1989).

For academic work with the text of the manuscript a critical edition is available. It includes a German translation (1992).

All access restrictions should be explicitly stated below:

The original manuscript of the *Lorsch Pharmacopoeia* may only be used in exceptional situations that are objectively justified. Principally it is expected that these justifications are based on substantiated, academic research questions which can only be answered by studying the original. Its use is restricted to the manuscript reading room at the Bamberg State Library, where it is under the constant supervision of qualified staff.

The manuscript will only be presented to the public on rare occasions, including exhibitions that are thematically relevant or events of outstanding historical prominence.

4.5 Copyright status

Describe the copyright status of the item(s) / collection

The publication of photographic or digital images from the manuscript is subject to the permission of the Bamberg State Library.

5.0 Assessment against the selection criteria

5.1 Authenticity

Identity and provenance of the manuscript of the *Lorsch Pharmacopoeia* are established and proven beyond reasonable doubt.

See above 3.4 ("History / provenance").

5.2 World significance / Uniqueness / Irreplaceability

5.2.1 World Significance

The *Lorsch Pharmacopoeia* is the first post-antique pharmacopoeia in the European Occident from the Early Middle Ages. It is the immediate response to the re-evaluation of pagan traditions from antiquity, which was taking place at that time at the court of Charlemagne, and it puts forward a form of phytotherapeutically oriented medicine for monks.

The foreword of the *Lorsch Pharmacopoeia* holds special significance. It provides the first and most comprehensive text passed on to us that legitimizes *in extenso* the Carolingian reception of antiquity under a Christian premise. Furthermore, the re-assessment, adaptation and adoption of the classical heritage, of which the *Lorsch Pharmacopoeia* is an outstanding exemplar, became the dominant approach to the classical inheritance and remains to this day among the most influential contributions made by the Carolingian Renaissance to European intellectual history.

The *Lorsch Pharmacopoeia* can be placed at the beginning of post-antique medicine as a scientific discipline. It upholds the same scientific principles as Arabic medicine, which developed simultaneously. It is founded on the holistic idea of the macro- and microcosmic interconnections of human existence. This idea both links medieval monastic medicine with classical theory, and connects with medicine of the Arabic-Muslim tradition and with related phenomena in South and East Asia.

5.2.2 Uniqueness

Regarded as a pure compendium of remedies, the *Lorsch Pharmacopoeia* could be considered as a very early evidence indeed, although it certainly is not singular in this respect. The pharmacopoeia's unique character derives from its foreword because it connects this work to the Carolingian reception of antiquity, which is of exceeding importance to the development of European intellectual history; and because it offers the first and most extensive intellectual arguments for the Carolingian reception of classical antiquity now in existence.

Moreover, it hands down the only known catalogue from an imperial library in the Early Middle Ages, and with it an autograph by Leo of Vercelli, the teacher and advisor of Emperor Otto III. (980–1002).

5.2.3 Irreplaceability

The *Lorsch Pharmacopoeia* is the only surviving text of its kind dating from this era. It was compiled at precisely the same time as a re-appraisal of the pagan traditions of antiquity was taking place at the court of Charlemagne. Therefore, it also provides significant evidence for the immediate propagation of this novel re-evaluation through important monasteries of the Frankish Empire

5.3 Comparative criteria

5.3.1 Time

The *Lorsch Pharmacopoeia* bears witness to the continuity of medical knowledge in the West in the centuries following Greco-Roman antiquity. It is noteworthy because it uniquely documents this cultural transmission in the Carolingian epoch, and because it explicitly sets out to counteract the disruption of continuity between the classical tradition and its own time. Today the *Lorsch Pharmacopoeia* is one of the main sources for research on both medieval monastic medicine and on the actual effective properties of plants.

5.3.2 Place

The document, as the earliest representative of its genre, stands for the re-evaluation of medicine as a science that was taking place in the Carolingian age. This historic development was of immense importance both scientifically and culturally, and occurred two centuries before the medical faculty of Salerno reached its prime.

The place of origin of the document is the former Benedictine Abbey of Lorsch, a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1991 on account of its intellectual and cultural historic heritage. The religious complex represented by the former Abbey with its 1,200-year-old gatehouse comprises a rare architectural document of the Carolingian era with impressively preserved sculpture and painting of that period. It gives architectural evidence of the awakening of the West to the spirit of the early and high Middle Ages under the first king and emperor, Charlemagne.

See http://whc.unesco.org/pg.cfm?cid=31&id_site=515

5.3.3 People

The *Lorsch Pharmacopoeia* is the earliest medieval document to reflect the professional ethics of physicians from antiquity and to pass on the Hippocratic Oath.

The manuscript was in the possession of two emperors (Otto III and Henry II). The unique (partial) catalogue from the imperial library of the Early Middle Ages (on fol. 42^V) is unambiguously regarded in research as the original autograph of Leo of Vercelli, the teacher and confidant of Otto III.

5.3.4 Subject and theme

The *Lorsch Pharmacopoeia* concentrates on the treatment of illnesses ("from head to toe"), and is written as a fundamental textbook committed exclusively to phytotherapy. It provides discourses on medical history, on medical politics, on dietetics and on materia medica as well as a pharmaceutical substitution list, that is to say, suggestions for substituting ingredients based on similar therapeutic effects that enabled the replacement of exotic, expensive substances with local, inexpensive ones. It also includes astronomical aspects. With around two hundred and fifty individually named pharmaceutical plants it is, moreover, an important botanical compendium.

The foreword of the *Lorsch Pharmacopoeia* attains extraordinary significance for European intellectual and cultural history because it provides the first and most extensive surviving intellectual discussion from the Carolingian age that seeks to systematically justify a positive reception of classical learning.

5.3.5 Form and style

The *Lorsch Pharmacopoeia* is written in Latin. The employed script is an early form of Carolingian minuscule. It is a model

example for the implementation of this writing, whose use was decreed as the standard script outside the imperial court in the scriptoria dependent on the court.

The manuscript displays a level of calligraphic accuracy not typically found in medieval medical and pharmaceutical textbooks, thereby emphasizing the exemplary and enduring significance of the knowledge recorded in it.

The foreword's author must have been schooled in classical literature and must have had an intensive knowledge of theology and especially the Bible. Due to the exceptionally polished Latin of the text it is plausible that its ideas derive from the imperial court itself.

The objective and sober language of the remedies distinguishes itself clearly from the sophisticated style of the foreword. The stylistic peculiarities of the remedies result from the fact that such instructive texts had been passed down over centuries, which also explains the linguistic mistakes, deformations, and misunderstandings.

Other distinctive features of the manuscript are the Old High German glosses from the ninth and tenth centuries next to the Latin text that are scattered throughout the book. These are of immense significance to German linguistics and include (on fol. 16^V) the Rhine-Franconian plant term "uuizebluomon" for the Latin word "petriniola" (literal equivalent in modern German: "Weissblume", in English: "white flower"), probably referring to a variety of camomile (*Chamomilla* S. F. Gray).

5.3.6 Social / spiritual / community significance

The *Lorsch Pharmacopoeia* is distinguished by its unique significance for global intellectual and cultural history.

6.0 Contextual information

6.1 Rarity

The manuscript of the *Lorsch Pharmacopoeia* is unique; no medieval drafts or transcriptions have come down to us. The fact that the codex was selected by Henry II for the basic stock of his newly founded cathedral library in Bamberg reveals the exceptional status attributed to this manuscript around the turn of the first millennium.

The list of books Henry II inherited from his imperial predecessor Otto III and passed on to the church of Bamberg (fol. 42^V) is a unique testimony for the history of early medieval libraries. Moreover, it is also a rare example of the autograph of the teacher and advisor of Emperor Otto III, Leo of Vercelli.

6.2 Integrity

The manuscript is all in all in excellent condition, although not preserved in its entirety. See above 3.2 ("Catalogue or registration details").