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The Theophilus Manuscript Tradition Reconsidered in the Light of New Manuscript Discoveries*

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The ‘*Schedula diversarum artium*’, written at the very beginning of the twelfth century in Germany by an anonymous monk known to us only as Theophilus, is probably the most famous medieval treatise dealing with technological recipes. The history of research on this text spans more than two hundred years, since the time Gotthold Ephraim Lessing discovered the earliest surviving manuscript of this work in the Library of Wolfenbüttel in the early 1770s to the present day. From this point forward there is almost no book or article on medieval art which does not mention Theophilus’s text. Historical justice, though, requires noting that, contrary to widely held opinion, Lessing was not the first scholar to realize the great importance of Theophilus’s text. Forty years before Lessing, the famous Benedictine monk, scholar, and librarian Bernard Pez (1683–1735) discovered an eighteenth-century copy of the treatise in the Melk library and as far as we can judge, based on the notes he left in the margins of the manuscript, he had planned an edition (Fig. 1, bottom). It is not known what prevented Pez from proceeding with his planned edition, and unfortunately it has been impossible to establish whether or not there were any connections between Pez and Lessing. The rest of the story is well known: the text published by Lessing¹ became famous and within less than a hundred years several other editions and translations were made. As a result, currently the ‘*Schedula*’ is one of the most published, translated, and discussed medieval treatises.

* It is appropriate that I begin my paper by acknowledging the assistance and support I received from Prof. Dr. Andreas Speer, Dr. Doris Oltrogge and Dr. Mark Clarke, who, on several occasions, generously shared with me their books and articles prior to their publication. I thank many librarians throughout Europe and America who provided valuable notes and sometimes even sent me microfilms free of charge. I am also indebted to Wolfram Klatt, librarian of the Thomas Institute, thanks to whom I have been spared all problems in accessing necessary books and articles. I thank the Thyssen Foundation which facilitated the two years of research. Without that support, this paper would not be possible.

¹ Cf. G. E. Lessing, *Theophilus Presbyter, Diversarum artium schedula* (editio princeps), in: id. (ed.), *Zur Geschichte und Literatur aus den Schätzen der herzoglichen Bibliothek zu Wolfenbüttel*, Sechster Beitrag, Braunschweig 1781, 291–424.

The most important editions of the Latin text were all made using various manuscripts, but only those of Ilg and Dodwell² can pretend to be called critical ones, as they at least were based on several manuscript witnesses. So far the list of manuscripts which were used for the editions mentioned reads as follows: Cambridge, University Library, MS 1131 (Ee 6 39); Leipzig, Universitätsbibliothek, Ms. 1157; London, British Library, MS Egerton 840 A; London, British Library, MS Harley 3915; Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Ms. lat. 6741; Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod. 2527; Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod. 11236; Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek, Cod. Guelf. Gudianus lat. 2° 69.

So far, those are, eight manuscripts, some used only partially, for instance the Leipzig manuscript, and Harley 3915, where a considerable portion of the folios is damaged so that even the use of an ultraviolet lamp did not enable reconstruction of more than just thirty percent of the text. The following manuscripts – some of them containing very important variant readings – have never been used for any edition: Amiens, Bibliothèque municipale, Fonds l'Escalopier, Ms. 46 A; Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Ms. Palat. 951; Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Ms. lat. nouv. acq. 1422; and Wrocław, Biblioteka Uniwersytecka, Ms. IV 8° 9.

The only place where a reader for whom it is not possible to consult manuscripts can obtain some basic knowledge about their contents is an article by Rozelle Parker Johnson published in the scientific revue 'Speculum' in 1938³. Johnson was the first to try to establish what might be called the 'corpus of Theophilus manuscripts'. So far, his article remains the starting and ending point for most researchers. I commenced my research by verifying the data which is included in that article. Johnson mentioned twenty-seven manuscripts which contain in full or in excerpts the text of the 'Schedula', together with very brief notices about their date (usually with the accuracy of a century) and an approximate table of contents for the included chapters. In addition, he noticed several manuscripts which probably included Theophilus's text. These manuscripts are:

- Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Cod. Reg. lat. 2079;
- Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vatican, Cod. Urbin. lat. 293;
- Dresden, Sächsische Landesbibliothek, Ms. B 183;
- Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod. 5512;
- Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek, Ms. 4436.

Since the time of Johnson the list was never reviewed or revised. These manuscripts are still listed as manuscripts of Theophilus in many books and

² Cf. A. Ilg, (ed.), *Theophilus Presbyter. Schedula diversarum artium. Revidierter Text, Übersetzung und Appendix*, vol. 1 (Quellenschriften zur Kunstgeschichte und Kunsttechnik des Mittelalters und der Renaissance 7), Wien 1874; Ch. R. Dodwell (ed.), *Theophilus, De diversis artibus – The Various Arts*, London 1961 [Reprint Oxford 1986, 1998].

³ Cf. R. P. Johnson, *The Manuscripts of the Schedula of Theophilus Presbyter*, in: *Speculum* 13 (1938), 86–103.

articles. Johnson also noticed that there are many fragments of the work in other manuscripts throughout Europe. This observation is often repeated in scientific papers, despite the fact that the scholarly community has never been provided with precise manuscript shelf marks. In the appendix, I have presented what I believe might be called a proper corpus of Theophilus manuscripts upon which I shall now elucidate. All of the information I present is based on my own consultation of manuscripts during the last two years.

First of all, the manuscripts which were mentioned by Johnson as probably of Theophilus contain very interesting and important collections of medical and alchemical materials and various color and technological recipes, but none of them includes a single line of the 'Schedula'. Further, from the canonical list of Theophilus manuscripts the following should be excluded: Edinburgh, University Library, MS 123; London, British Library, MS Harley 273; Oxford, Corpus Christi College, MS 125. These manuscripts contain short sections of the chapters which appear in the Third Book of 'De coloribus et artibus Romanorum' of the fictitious author Heraclius, written, as I would suggest, not earlier than 1150 and most probably in Eastern France. The only reason Johnson and subsequent scholars included these manuscripts in the list of those of Theophilus is the fact that these chapters appear at the very end of the MS Harley 3915, on which Hendrie based his edition⁴, but there is absolutely no reason to suggest that these chapters were present in the lost archetype of the 'Schedula'⁵. There are two other manuscripts which are included in some catalogues of alchemical manuscripts⁶ as containing Theophilus, namely in Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Ms. lat. 11212 and Ms. lat. 6830 F, both produced at the very end of the twelfth or beginning of the thirteenth century in France, where the same Heraclius interpolations are to be had. These manuscripts also have to be excluded from the list of those of Theophilus.

There is a further group of manuscripts, namely Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale de Belgique, Ms. 10147–58; London, British Library, MS Sloane 1754; Montpellier, Bibliothèque interuniversitaire, Section médecine, Fonds anciens, Ms. H 277; Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 444, which features a much more complicated situation. The first three manuscripts represent a more or less homogeneous group that has recently been studied by Dr. Mark Clarke, who generously provided me with drafts of his still unpublished papers about these manuscripts, which certainly will clarify the subject more precisely than I can do here. The texts of the chapters as they appear in the just mentioned manuscripts are indeed sometimes essentially similar to what we have in the best books of the 'Schedula'; the paraphrasing is so sophisticated that from the philological point of view it is impossible to prove that they were derived from it, even if in fact they were. The

⁴ Cf. R. Hendrie, *Theophili, qui et Rugerus, presbyteri et monachi libri III de diversis artibus seu diversarum artium schedula*, London 1847, 392 sqq.

⁵ I also do not think that Book I, chapters 33–37 published by Ilg were present in the archetype.

⁶ Cf. J. Corbett, *Catalogue des manuscrits alchimiques latins*, vol. 1, Bruxelles 1939, 53.

similarity here can be seen not at the level of chapters or sentences, but at the level of words and tropes. Because of that, I dare to suggest that – as to the best of my knowledge has not been suggested before – these thirteenth- and fourteenth-century manuscripts represent an independent branch of a lost text which they and Theophilus shared. This is probably the first practical explanation why, despite two centuries of research on the ‘Schedula’, we still do not possess any substantial material with which one can indisputably argue that Theophilus used the lost text as a source. Of course, another explanation might be that Theophilus did not use other sources at all, but this suggestion does not seem particularly plausible to me.

Eight manuscripts have been added to Johnson’s list, of which the most important is firstly – a late fifteenth century German manuscript – Fulda, Hessische Landesbibliothek, Ms. C 9. It contains only several chapters from Theophilus, incorporated in folios that address various alchemical issues (Fig. 2). Another important newly discovered manuscript is a late sixteenth century book, which I assume was produced in Southern Germany and is now kept at Uppsala, Universitetsbibliotek, Cod. D 1600 (Fig. 3). Despite its relatively late date of production, the manuscript contains several important textual witnesses. As a result of the efforts undertaken during the last two years, the corpus of Theophilus manuscripts now includes twenty-seven manuscripts, an increase of about forty percent⁷.

The next subjects to be dealt with are the date and authorship of the text of the ‘Schedula’. Various periods have been postulated, for instance, the ninth, tenth, and eleventh centuries. The most recent, and now commonly accepted theory is that proposed by Dodwell, arguing for the first quarter of the twelfth century. It seems that in this point Dodwell was correct, as passages from the Prologue resemble passages of Hugh of Saint Victor⁸. Nothing more concrete can be said regarding the date, since as yet neither linguistic analysis nor analysis of the technological recipes has yielded any significant results. The only conclusion which might be derived from a reading of two of the best manuscripts is that they rather represent the third generation of copies. Since all three Prologues are grouped together at the beginning of the Vienna manuscript (Cod. 2527) it might also well be argued that this is strong proof that the tradition of the ‘Schedula’ was not yet stable at that time. Dodwell cautiously suggested⁹ that the unusual expression “*armariolum cordis*” (the casket of the heart), which appears in Prologue I and II of the ‘Schedula’ might have been adopted from the ‘Disciplina Clericalis’ of Petrus Alfonsus, written not earlier than 1106. This way, ostensibly, a *terminus ante quem* for the treatise has been established which until now has been commonly accepted. As a matter of fact the expression “*armarium cordis*” already

⁷ I did not have an opportunity to study in detail the contents of Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Ms. lat. 7161 (late fifteenth century, Southern Italy), which probably contains some Theophilus material.

⁸ Cf. Dodwell (ed.), Theophilus (nt. 2), xxii.

⁹ Cf. op. cit., xix.

occurs in the writings of Saint Augustine¹⁰ and it is surely obvious that the author of the ‘Schedula’ would not have had a problem deriving the diminutive “*armarium*” from the word “*armarium*”.

In other words we do not have proper criteria with which to determine the date of the ‘Schedula’s composition.¹¹ But we might have a better chance of doing so by approaching this problem through an analysis of its authorship, which is my last issue here. As is well known, the theory dominating Theophilus scholarship ascribes the authorship of the ‘Schedula’ to the famous twelfth-century German craftsman, Roger of Helmarshausen. This attribution was originally made by Ilg¹² on the basis of the following rubric at the beginning of the first Vienna manuscript: “*Incipit prologus libri primi Theophili, qui et Rugerus, de diversis artibus*” (Fig. 4). This attribution has been sharply – and I think absolutely rightly – attacked by Degering¹³, but it has nevertheless been widely repeated. Despite the fact that there is absolutely no reason to link Rugerus and Roger of Helmarshausen, it is of course tempting to investigate the personality of Rugerus. I assume that this Rugerus is a real figure; I also assume there is no basis to reject the importance of another rubric, which appears in the thirteenth-century London, British Library, MS Egerton 840 A, and reads: “*Sic incipit tractatus Lombardicus. Qualiter temperantur colores ad depingendum*” (Fig. 5, top); and finally, it would be more than logical to connect these two rubrics and conclude that this Rugerus was the compiler of the First Book and that he had a connection with Lombardy or at least with Italy. Indeed, according to my analysis, the text of the ‘Schedula’ is not homogeneous; the language of the First Book is quite different from the language of the Prologues, the Second, and especially the Third Book. The recipes at the beginning of the First Book of the ‘Schedula’ seem to represent Byzantine sources, and at the beginning of the twelfth century, Lombardy and Salerno would probably have been the two most plausible places from which the texts might have come. Currently, this might be all that can be said about the personality of the first redactor of the ‘Schedula’.

The irony of the matter is that the real identity of the author has actually always been very accessible to researchers, starting with Lessing. The second Wol-

¹⁰ Cf. F. Dolbeau (ed.), *Augustin d’Hippone, Vingt-six sermons au peuple d’Afrique, retrouvés à Mayence (Études Augustiniennes. Série Antiquité 147)*, Paris 1996, 55 (l. 341).

¹¹ Ostensibly the text on bells from Book III, chapters 86–87 might be used as a *terminus ante quem* but nothing more precise about the text can be argued than that it was written not later than in the middle of the eleventh century. Moreover, even if such an imprecise date would be accepted, it would be useful only for the dating of the third book of the ‘Schedula’, which, as I shall mention below, was written separately from Book I. For the manuscript tradition of the text on bells cf. J. S. Van Waesberghe, *Cymbala: Bells in the Middle Ages (Studies and Documents 1)*, Rome 1951, 49–55.

¹² Cf. Ilg (ed.), *Theophilus (nt. 2)*, xliii.

¹³ Cf. H. Degering, *Theophilus Presbiter, qui et Rugerus*, in: id./W. Menn (eds.), *Westfälische Studien. Beiträge zur Geschichte der Wissenschaft, Kunst und Literatur in Westfalen*. Alois Bömer zum 60. Geburtstag gewidmet, Leipzig 1928, 248–262.

fenbüttel manuscript (Herzog August Bibliothek, Cod. Guelf. Helmst. 1127), which was produced in the late fifteenth century, begins differently from all others. Instead of “*Theophilus humilis presbyter servus servorum Dei, indignus nomine et professione monachi*”, it commences with the words: “*Northungus humilis Theophilus, nomine et professione monastica indignus, Gersico fratri suo dilecto omnibus mentis [...]*”, and then further, instead of: “*Ego indignus*”, it reads: “*ego Northungus indignus*” (Fig. 6). Dodwell and subsequent researchers neglected these lines. For instance, Dodwell wrote: “[...] there is no reason to suppose that these names have any significance. [...] These names, in fact, can represent nothing more important than a late corruption of the text.”¹⁴

The name of “Northungus” is indeed extremely rare and strange, and it does raise the possibility of considering it as a corruption¹⁵. Nevertheless, the name does exist, despite the fact that it is known only to very narrow circles of historians of medicine. A monk named Northungus flourished in the monastery of Saint Michael in Hildesheim, in the first quarter of the twelfth century¹⁶. He was a famous encyclopaedist and physician, and the head of a school. His primary interests were the medical works of Salerno, for instance those of Constantinus Africanus and Stephen of Antioch, various *antidotarii*, *glossarii*, *herbarii*, and so on, which were copied and revised at his school. Northungus, as we know, was very proud of his works, which he always signed as “*Ego Northungus*”, (not very often typical of medieval practice) adding “the little pauper of Christ” (“*hanc paginam in hunc modum a Northungo Christi pauperculo editam*”)¹⁷.

I do not wish to imply that Northungus wrote all three books of the ‘Schedula’, but prefer to suggest that he wrote the Prologues and the Third Book and then revised the rest of the material which became available to him (from Rugerus and other sources)¹⁸. The fact that the name of “Northungus” occurs only in one late manuscript can not be of crucial importance. The name, as has been noted, is extremely rare, and even if some other Northungus had lived in the fifteenth century, all we know about the original meaning of the word *plagiat* assures us that he would never have ascribed to himself the work of another;

¹⁴ Cf. Dodwell (ed.), *Theophilus* (nt. 2), lxix.

¹⁵ The name “Gersicus” mentioned above represents a problem, as I was not able to find such a name before the fifteenth century. Recently Dr. Bertram Lesser has suggested reading “Gersicus” as “Bersicus” and he identified a person with this name in twelfth-century Salzburg, which gives an additional support to my identification of Northungus. I thank Dr. Patrizia Carmassi and Dr. Bertram Lesser for generously sending me copies of their relevant conference papers; cf. the contribution of P. Carmassi/B. Lesser in this volume, 22–51.

¹⁶ The only manuscript in which the works of Northungus have been preserved is the thirteenth-century Bamberg, Staatsbibliothek, Msc. med. 6.

¹⁷ Quoted from M. Wack, ‘Alī Ibn Al-‘Abbās Al-Mağūsī and Constantine on Love, and the Evolution of the Practica Pantegni, in: Ch. Burnett/D. Jacquart (eds.), *Constantine the African and ‘Alī Ibn Al-‘Abbās Al-Mağūsī: The Pantegni and Related Texts* (Studies in Ancient Medicine 10), Leiden 1994, 161–202, 192 and 198.

¹⁸ Cf. for example the contribution of Chet Van Duzer in this volume, 369–378.

rather the opposite. In fact, the Wolfenbüttel manuscript represents a quite corrupted text of the ‘Schedula’, even from the linguistic point of view (in this point Dodwell was absolutely correct), and this precludes the possibility that it might be an autograph of an important fifteenth-century author (bearing in mind that other monks simply did not write).

Of course my whole argument would be undermined if it were to be discovered that another Northungus existed in the fifteenth century. To my great dismay, I did in fact discover that the name “Northungus” (Nudo de Fulda) appears in Leipzig, Universitätsbibliothek, Ms. 104, fol. 197v, but upon investigation I found the script of this colophon to be completely different from the script of the Wolfenbüttel manuscript. Thus, to disprove my theory, a third Northungus had to be discovered, and in the absence of such an elusive figure my theory must stand.

So, in the absence of any other serious contra arguments I believe it is most logical to assume Northungus of Hildesheim to be, if not the author, then at the very least the last redactor of what we now possess as a text of the ‘Schedula’.

Appendix of Theophilus Manuscripts

Previously Known Manuscripts:

1. Am1 Amiens, Bibliothèque municipale, Fonds l’Escalopier, Ms. 46 A
2. Am2 Amiens, Bibliothèque municipale, Fonds l’Escalopier, Ms. 47 D
3. Am3 Amiens, Bibliothèque municipale, Ms. 117
4. Ca Cambridge, University Library, MS 1131 (Ee 6 39)
5. Fl Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Ms. Palat. 951
6. Kl Klosterneuburg, Stiftsbibliothek, CCI 331
7. Le Leipzig, Universitätsbibliothek, Ms 1157
8. Lo1 London, British Library, MS Egerton 840 A
9. Lo2 London, British Library, MS Harley 3915
10. Lo3 London, British Library, MS Sloane 781
11. Ox Oxford, Magdalen College Library, MS 173
12. Pa1 Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Ms. lat. 6741
13. Pa2 Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Ms. nouv. acq. 1422
14. Ve Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Ms. lat. 3597
15. Wi1 Wien, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod. 2527
16. Wi2 Wien, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod. 11236
17. Wo1 Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek, Cod. Guelf. Gudianus lat. 2° 69
18. Wo2 Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek, Cod. Guelf. Helmst. 1127
19. Wr Wrocław, Biblioteka Uniwersytecka, Ms. IV 8° 9

New Manuscripts:

1. Be Berlin, Staatsbibliothek Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Ms. lat. fol. 45 (late 18th century, Austria).
2. Dr Dresden, Sächsische Landesbibliothek, Ms. J 43 (ca. 1200, Germany).
3. Fu Fulda, Hessische Landesbibliothek, Ms. C 9, foll. 43v–44r (fragment) (late 15th century, Germany).
4. Lo4 London, British Library, MS Add. 27459 (middle of the 19th century, France).
5. Lo5 London, British Library, MS Add. 41486, fol. 125v (fragment) (late 13th century, Italy?)
6. Me Melk, Bibliothek des Benediktinerstifts, Ms. 768 (late 18th century, Austria).
7. Mr Münster, Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek, Ms. Nk 90 (middle of the 17th century, Germany).
8. Up Uppsala, Universitetsbibliotek, Cod. D 1600 (late 16th century, Germany).

Excluded Manuscripts:

First Group: Edinburgh, University Library, MS 123; London, British Library, MS Harley 273; Oxford, Corpus Christi College, MS 125; Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Ms. lat. 6830 F; Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Ms. lat. 11212.

Second Group: Bruxelles, Bibliothèque Royale de Belgique, Ms. 10147–58; London, British Library, MS Sloane 1754; Montpellier, Bibliothèque interuniversitaire, Section médecine, Fonds anciens, Ms. H 277; München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 444.

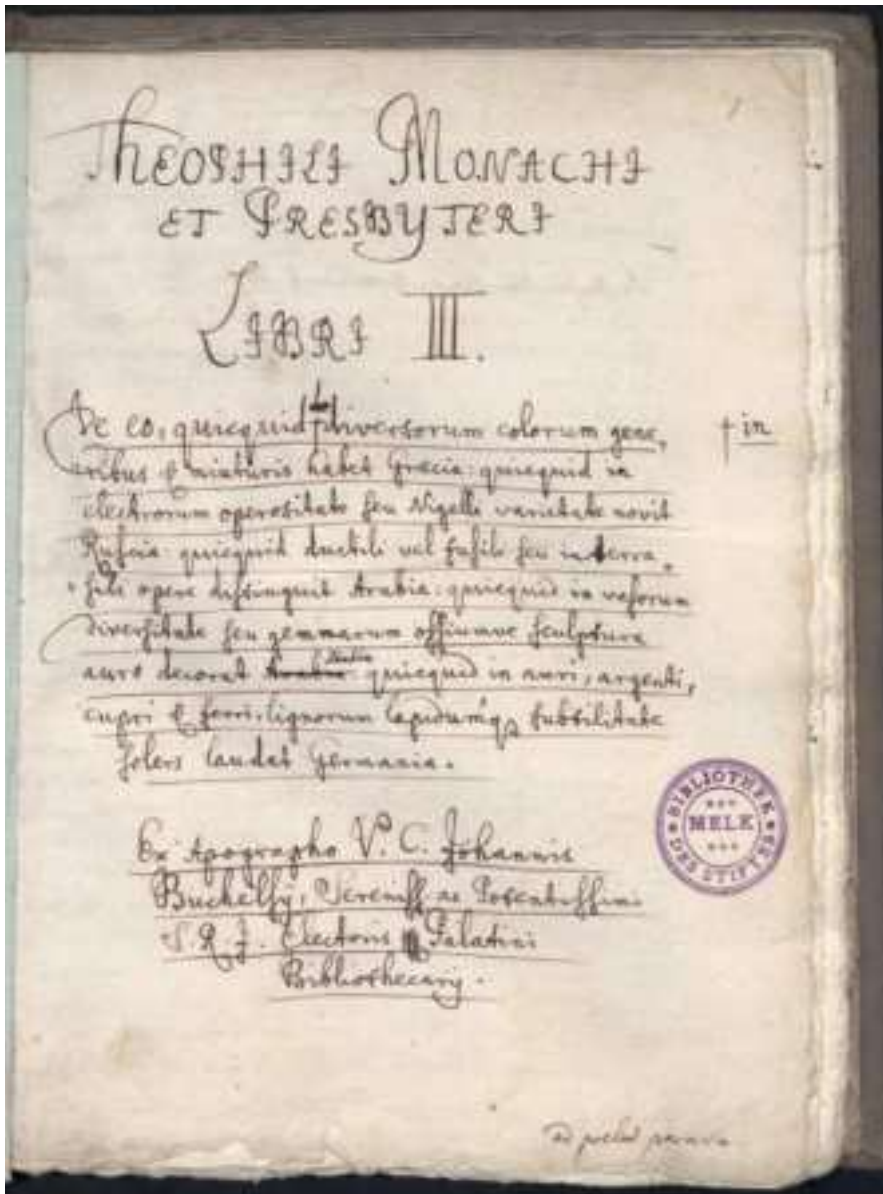


Fig. 1. Melk, Bibliothek des Benediktinerstifts, Ms. 768, fol. 1r



Fig. 2. Fulda, Hessische Landesbibliothek, Ms. C 9, foll. 43v-44r



Fig. 4. Wien, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod. 2527, fol. 1r

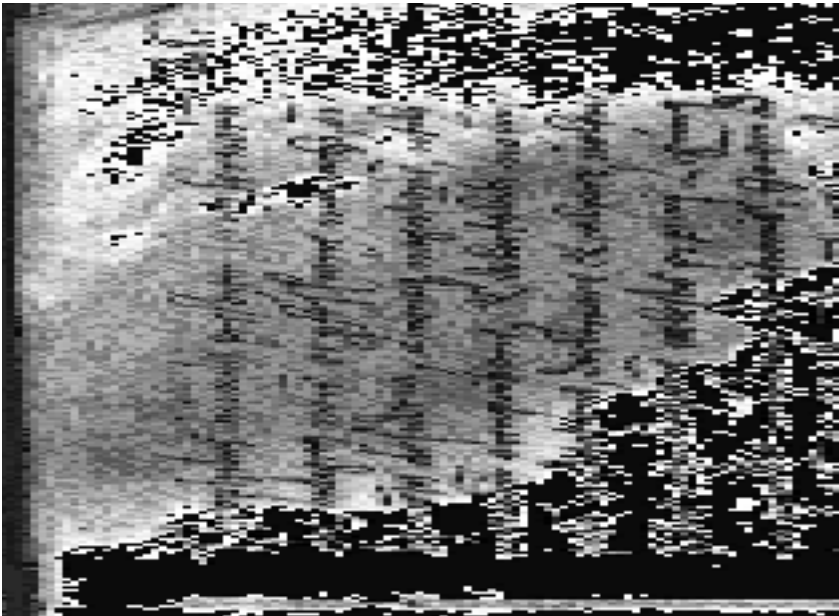


Fig. 3. Uppsala, Universitetsbibliotek, Cod. D 1600, fol. 1r



Fig. 6. Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek, Cod. Gudf. 1127 Helmst., fol. 102r

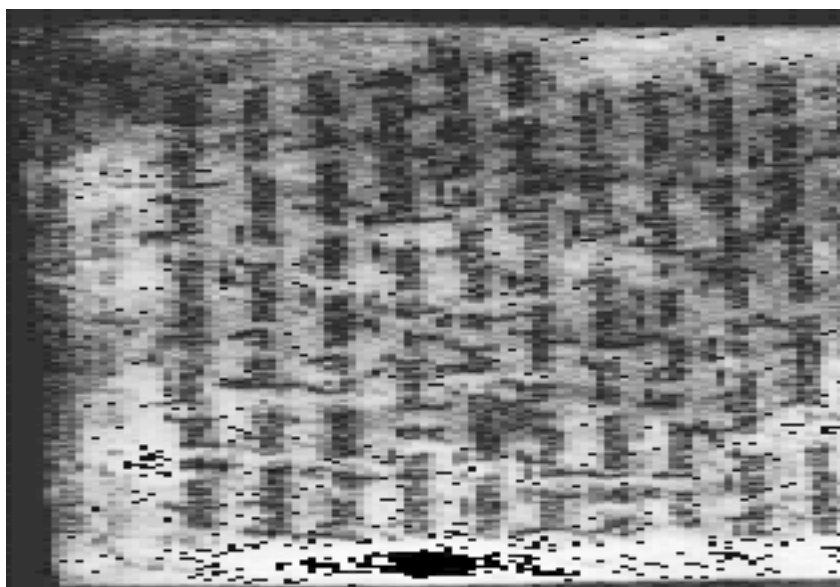


Fig. 5. London, British Library, MS Egerton 840 A, fol. 6r