Austria - Vienna Dioscurides

PART A - ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

Abstract:
Vienna Dioscurides can be considered as the most important pharmaceutical source of the Ancient World and was used throughout the Middle Age, Renaissance and in later centuries as a dictionary for medical practitioners. It forms the basis of medical herbal therapeutic knowledge. The manuscript rates as a masterpiece of the book art from later Classical Antiquity.

1. Identity and Location:

Name of the Documentary Heritage: Vienna Dioscurides

Country: Austria

State, Province or Region: Vienna

Address: A-1010 Wien, Josefsplatz 1

Name of Institution: Austrian National Library / Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Handschriften-, Autographen- und Nachlass-Sammlung

2. Legal information:

Owner: Federal Republic of Austria

Custodian: Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Handschriften-, Autographen- und Nachlass-Sammlung

Legal Status:
- Category of ownership: public
- Accessibility: no access to the original, due to the existence of the facsimile edition (Graz 1970)
- Copyright status: copyright with the owner resp. Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Handschriften-, Autographen- und Nachlass-Sammlung

3. Identification:

Description: Parchment, 491 folios with more than 400 images of plants and animals. White binding from the year 1677 with the initials of the librarian Peter Lambeck. 37 x 30 cm

Bibliographic details: Wien, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod. med. gr. 1


History: See facsimile edition


4. Management plan:

Statement of the significance of the documentary heritage: The Vienna Dioscurides rates as a remarkable example of the Codices Vindobonenses Graeci and a masterpiece of the book art from later Classical Antiquity.

The Greek texts contained in this group of more than 1.000 manuscripts represent a major part of the international cultural heritage of the western world. Handing down the works of those great philosophers, Plato and Aristoteles, to posterity by means of manuscript copies is documented among the holdings at the Austrian National Library in impressive textual evidence: Cod. Phil.gr. 314 is one of the earliest known copies of commentaries to Plato's works, thereby demonstrating the reactions to his philosophy in the Byzantine world. One of the oldest copies of Aristotles's Physics and Metaphysics (Cod. Phil.gr.100) is also to be found at the Austrian National Library. The amazing wealth of Greek literary sources from the Middle Ages and Antiquity, the numerous documents demonstrating the development of Greek handwriting and the history of the book in late classical antiquity and the middle ages justify the inclusion of this collection in the Memory of the World.

For textual history and the development of the book, this collection of codices is of central importance to the period of late Classical Antiquity and the Renaissance. Among the codices stored in the Manuscript, Autograph and Closed
Collections Department can be found luxury copies from late Classical Antiquity which document various methods of passing on tradition: The Vienna Genesis (Cod. Theol.gr. 31), for instance, rates as one of these extremely rare examples of biblical purple manuscripts. Its picture strips document an illustration programme also found in mosaics (such as those in St. Mark's Cathedral, Venice). The Vienna source Cod.Hist.gr.1 can be cited as an example in connection with Ptolemaios. This manuscript was copied by Johannes Skutariotes in Florence and includes a double-paged map in Italian humanist script.

Access policy and procedures: Access restricted to minimize risks of handling

Preservation and managerial policies to control the physical environment of the manuscripts: Control of temperature and humidity according to the required levels

Preservation facilities: Restoration workshop equipped with the usual necessary equipment

5. Assessment against the Selection Criteria:

- **Influence:** The Vienna Dioscurides can be considered as the most important pharmaceutical source of the Ancient World and was used throughout the Middle Ages, Renaissance and in later centuries as a dictionary for medical practitioners. It forms the basis of medical herbal therapeutic knowledge. The manuscript documents the indispensable function of illustrations in botanical and pharmaceutical works. The importance attached to a book over a period of approximately 1,000 years can be traced in the dedication illustration to Princess Juliana Anicia and the notes on the restoration of the codex at the beginning of the 15th. century: from the luxury manuscript commissioned by a member of high society to a text book in a Constantinople hospital. Numerous copies demonstrate its influence over the centuries.

- **Time:** The beginning of the 6th century is an epoch to mark the subsequent cultural development of the Mediterranean area (during the reign of Emperor Justinian I). The period during which the manuscript was written and the later hand-written addenda document the influence of the Latin conquest after the 4th, crusade in Constantinople as well as the cultural history of late Byzance. The new binding, ordered by the notary Johannes Chortasmenos in 1406, shows the care taken of a book in daily use during a period of material need in the Bosphorus' capital.

- **Place:** The origin and history of the manuscript run parallel to that of Constantinople itself, since its foundation in the 4th century. Even in times of political weakness in the Byzantine kingdom, the cultural influence of the imperial city remained: its wealth enticed the crusaders in 1204 to its conquest and looting. After the conquest of Constantinople by the Turks in 1453, copies of works by Greek authors made by emigrants from the Byzantine kingdom were largely responsible for humanistic studies characteristic of the Renaissance: the fame of the imperial city is well documented in reports by western travellers who were captivated by the city's splendour. Contemporary editions and textual commentaries of the works of classical Greek authors by philologists and writers at the turn of the 14th century make a major contribution to the world's cultural history. Maximos Planudes, a learned monk and skilled translator, offers one example, whose work on Plato can be authorised by holograph extracts of texts in Cod. Phil.gr. 21. Theodoros Metochites, a politician and writer from this period, left to posterity a collected edition of his works in Cod. Phil.gr.95.

- **People:** Juliana Anicia, who commissioned the codex, belonged to one of the most influential houses of the 6th. century. On account of the church buildings she commissioned (The Church of Polyeuktos), she rates as a main rival to Justinian I.

- **Subject/Theme:** The topic is of fundamental importance for the history of the book and the role played by illustrations in manuscripts. The book is decorated with pictures by the authors. The first pages of the Vienna Dioscurides present the complete programme of book illustration and provide important information concerning how books were made at the time, also about the lady who commissioned the work.

- **Social value:** Indications that the manuscript was first regarded as a luxury copy and later as a hospital text book in daily use, throw light on social and cultural history.

6. Consultation:

Consultation of the facsimile with the institution in charge of custody (Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Handschriften-, Autographen- und Nachlass-Sammlung)

7. Nominator:

Name: Dr Hans Marte

PART B - SUBSIDIARY INFORMATION

8. Assessment of risk:

- **Nature and scope of threats:**

  Because of its outstanding value, the document itself has not been handled. Due to the existence of the facsimile and its availability to the public, the Vienna Dioscurides is not endangered.