

# TRACTATUS *de* HERBIS

SLOANE MS.4016



LIMITED EDITION

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“A fine example of how the Middle Ages were characterised not by darkness but a remarkable and surprisingly modern mastery of visual communication techniques.”

Alain Touwaide, Institute for the Preservation of Medical Traditions and Smithsonian Institution



# TRACTATUS de HERBIS

SLOANE MS.4016



*“Unique and unrepeatable first edition, strictly limited to 987 numbered and authenticated copies”*

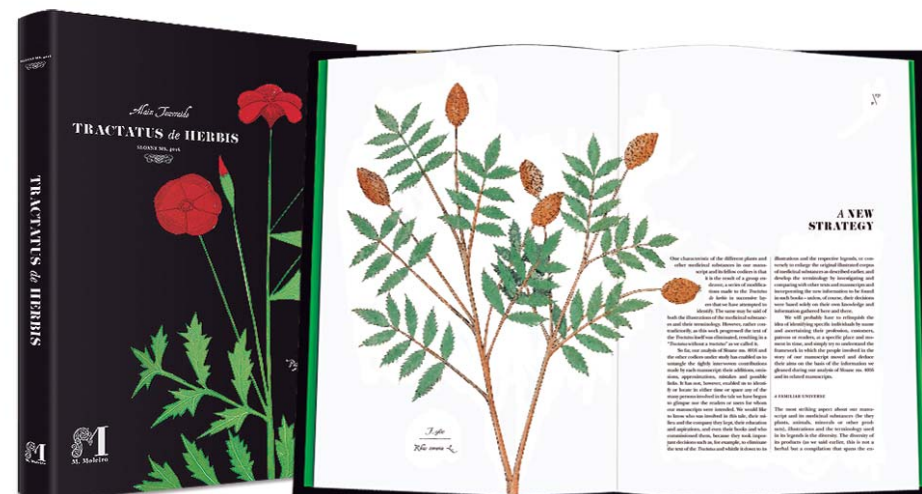
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In the Middle Ages, medicine was undoubtedly the scientific realm influenced most by the many cultural elements that contributed to shaping society. Its Greek foundations were added to by Latin, Byzantine, Arabic and Mozarabic contributions and others from further afield that were transmitted by cultures bordering on the western world. As a result, each medicinal plant had as many names as the cultures using it

to make remedies. But the variety of names used for a single plant in different cultures sometimes led to confusion. To avoid this risk, dictionaries were produced and botanical albums too, featuring pictures of the plants and other simples used in everyday therapeutic practices together with the various names they were called by the different peoples that comprised medieval society. The *Tractatus de Herbis*, codex Sloane 4016, currently in the collections at the British Library is one such book enabling the different names of these plants to be linked to the plants themselves. This helped avoid confusion and the disastrous consequences of giving a patient a simple other than the one prescribed by the physician.

- **Shelf mark:** Sloane Ms. 4016
- **Date:** 1440
- **218 pages**
- **Bound** in embossed, dark green leather



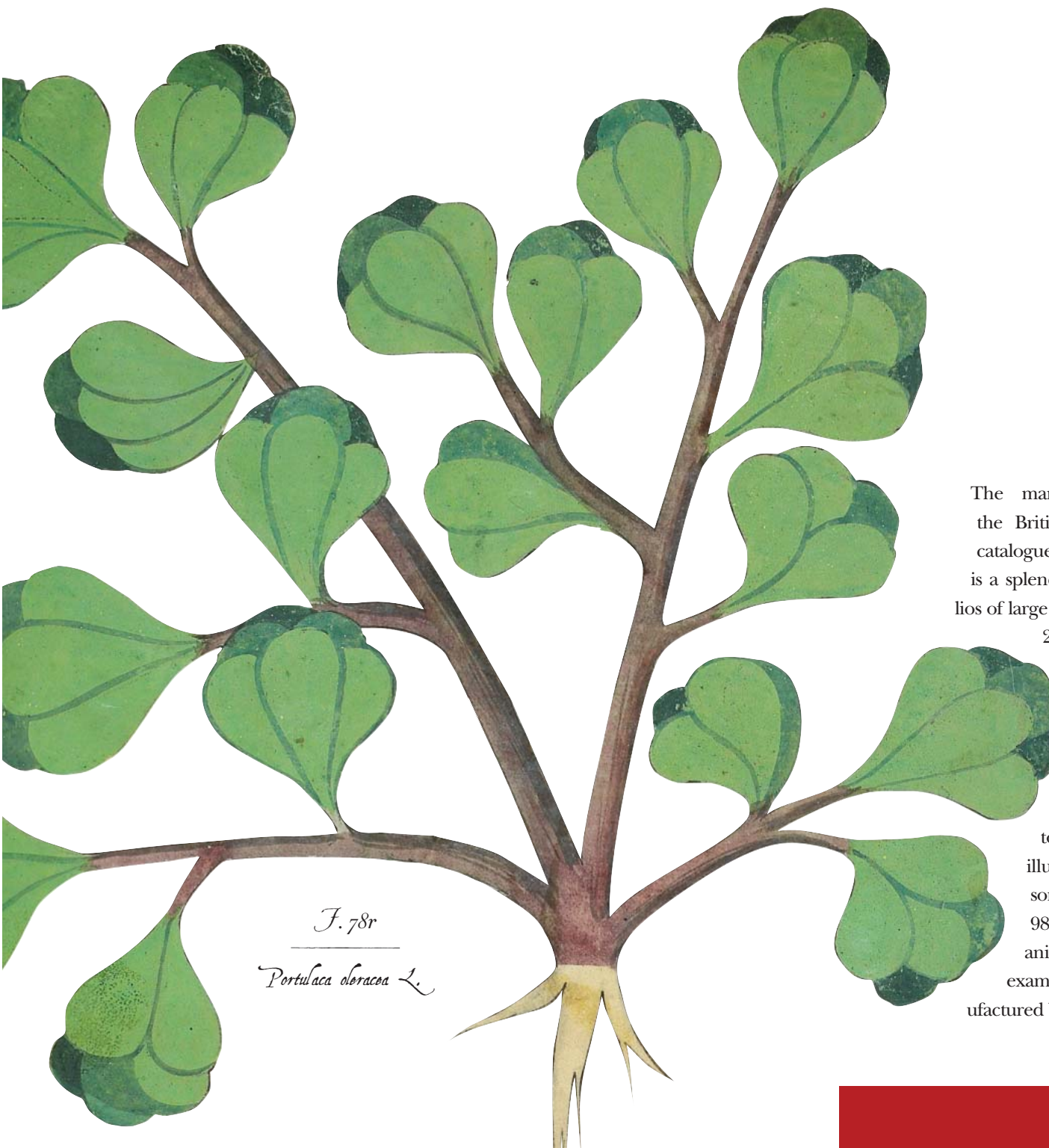
Commentary volume, 2013

— CONTENTS —

*From the editor to the reader / Quid sit nescio / A cabinet of curiosities? / Widening the scope / The story unfolds / Transformations / A new strategy / Of plants, men and books / Translation of legends / Transcription of legends / Nomenclature of medicinal substances / Index of synonyms / Bibliography*

• **Size:** 330 x 230 mm

• Full-colour **commentary volume** (512 p.) written by **Alain Touwaide** (Institute for the Preservation of Medical Traditions and Smithsonian Institution)



*F. 78r*  
*Portulaca oleracea L.*

## A BOOK *under* SCRUTINY

*(extract from the commentary volume)*

The manuscript conserved at the British Library of London catalogued as Sloane ms. 4016 is a splendid volume with 109 folios of large parchment, (365 mm. x 265 mm.) It is illustrated with nearly 500 polychrome representations of plants, animals and minerals, which were all used as primary materials to produce drugs. These illustrations also include some people (ff. 2r, 44v, 98v), a mummy (f. 62r), animals' parts (antlers, for example, on f. 34v), and manufactured by-products (wax, f. 30r).

Though this manuscript lacks a signature, colophon, or any indication of its provenance or date, it has traditionally been considered to be of North Italian origin, most likely from the Lombardy region from about 1440 AD judging from its Gothic style script. Later, it belonged to the Marquis of Magny, Nicolas Joseph Foucault (1643-1721), then to the English collector Hans Sloane (1660-1753), before it became part of the collections of the British Museum founded in 1753.

Most of the plants are represented outside their natural context, more as botanical specimens than as live plants in their natural environments. The several mineral substances and manufactured products – paper, for example, (f. 70r) – are represented in an abstract fashion,





*Tractatus de Herbis*, ff. 30v-31r

more as theoretical notions than as substances sitting on the shelf of an apothecary or in pharmaceutical jars. By contrast, animals are drawn in their entirety and some of them, such as the vulture (f. 108v), are seized on the spot in vivid, naturalistic scenes which open like windows into the world of the past, revealing the substances that once provided the basis for medicines.

These depictions of the outside world are sometimes so developed as to portray scenes from everyday life, as in the case of the cherry tree (f. 30r). It is somewhat reminiscent of medieval calendars with pictorial representations for the months, their chores, their corresponding

constellations and even the seasons and their climate. These scenes also recall the many splendid pictorial exemplars of the works known as *Tacuinum sanitatis*. They appear like a collection of miniatures that stage the medical materials, the foods and other elements which made up diet, and the medicines of the rich and famous in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries.



**Red poppy.** It is also called [rabach, alma, hamen. Oth-Dioscorides, he called

king's rose. In Arabic [it is ers [call it] cichach. As for it anemonis.

**Pellitory-of-the-wall.** Dioscorides [calls it] alsinen. It is also called vitriola or vitriaria and victoriola and muralem and canicularem and aratis arago and ostriago, wind herb or St Lawrence's herb, and sanicla peditialis or peditados or perdition or perithunion and siderictis and eracia and questin agreste and libatia and poliominon.

Sparrow, called *aliartan* in Arabic.



Cetis pisas unde.  
fit ambra.



Amos. dy. qd mlti cum  
num ethiopicar nocant.  
aut basilicem



Sambucus. dy. actus  
ul' actouille die. ar. Jo  
cha diat.

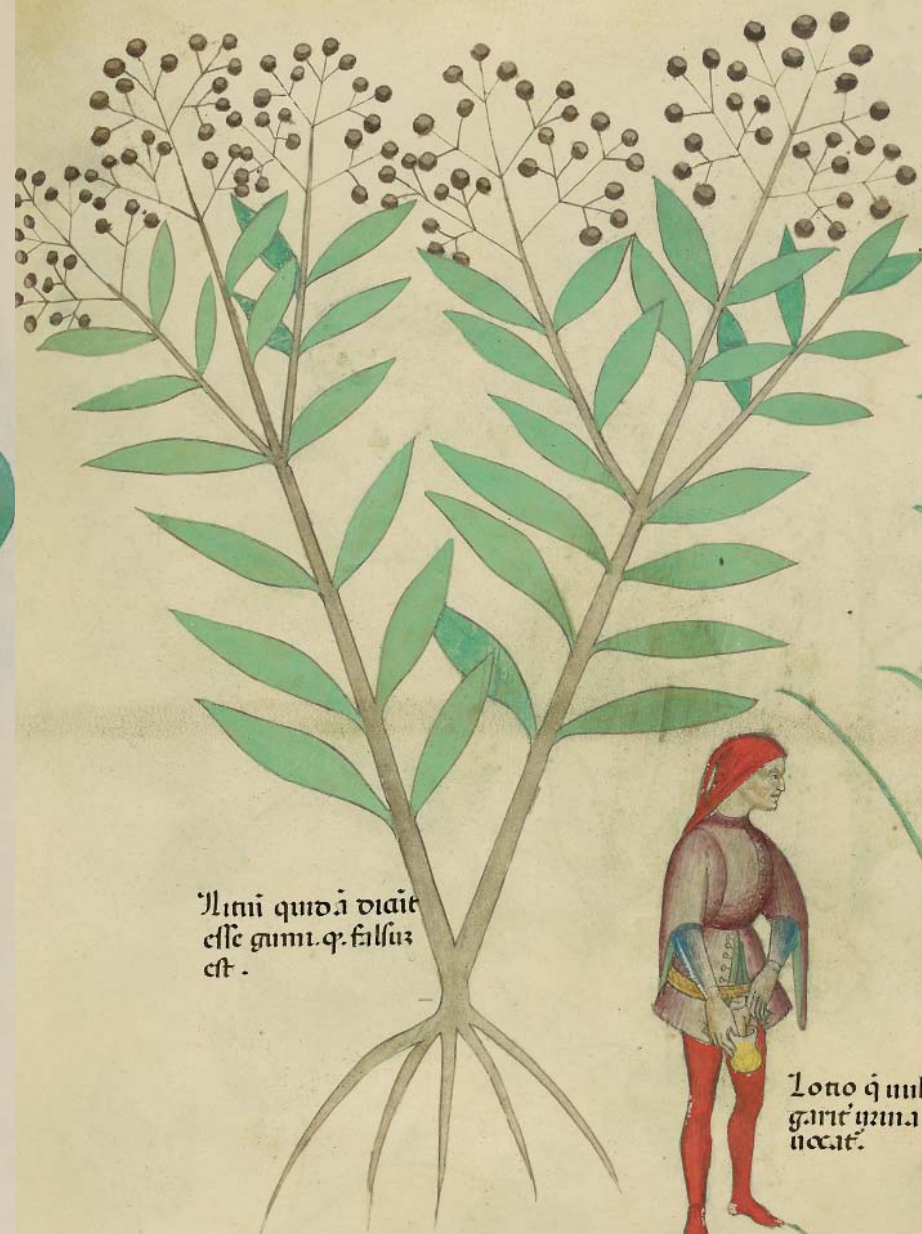
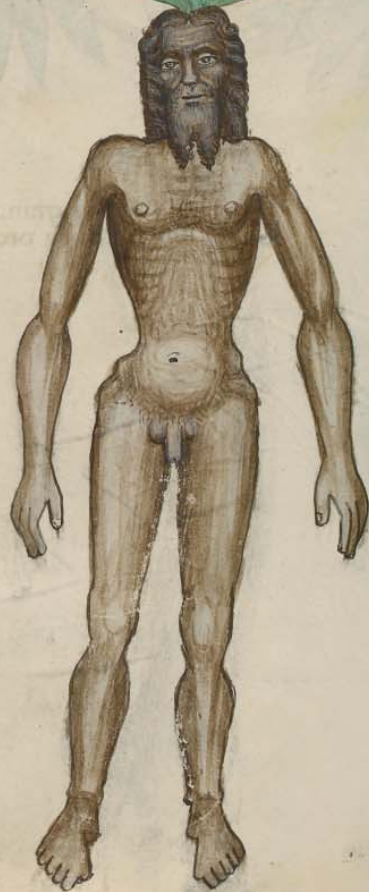
Salvia q' gto noie clifi  
ation. a. leden. aly.  
alespacula.

gus dr. a. aly.  
achifatos a.



mandragora. alio noie. antimi nō nec. it. cā. a.  
bollequinō. a. carcamō. a. abolorosa. a. andro  
pomorees. a. apolea. amē. dic. labiol. i. rōre.  
mandragore. siluestris q. ē similis hōi. q. p. hēc.  
noiat mandragora.

a. dala. alio noie.  
acopa. aut molo  
ebi. a. antoma ul.  
amtea. aut coluris.  
aut diadem. a. lacor ten.  
a. uramoris. aut mal  
ua rustica.



Linu quidā dicit  
esse gum. q. falsus  
est.



Lonu q. nul  
garit gum. a  
necat.

Lonchitis.



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This same edition includes 77 copies in Roman numerals for the British Library, the Editor and the Spanish Book catalogue.

Todo ello según el acta autorizada por mí, el 20 de octubre de dos mil once, número 3156 de mi protocolo.

The foregoing is pursuant to document 3156 in my records which I authenticated on October twentieth of the year two thousand and eleven.

Lugo, 28 de octubre de 2011.

Lugo, October 28<sup>th</sup>, 2011.



M. Moleiro Editor S.A. - Travesera de Gracia 17 - 08021 Barcelona - España  
Tel. (+34) 932 402 091 - Fax (+34) 932 015 062 - www.moleiro.com



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Travesera de Gracia, 17 -21  
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UK +44 (0) 20 7193 4986  
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