

The image of women in Old Polish popular medical handbooks*

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The history of medicine written so far has been lacking the feminine element. I am not referring to the suddenly discovered writings of prominent female physicians – although we did have an ophthalmologist in the 18th century, Salomea Rusiecka, who served as court physician of the Sultan’s harem for several years and successfully performed cataract operations – but rather to the legions of ‘medicine women’ whom cultural history studies have so far largely overlooked. They were the primary target of medical handbooks. These, in turn, present an image of a woman that is quite different from the commonly known one.

The three sections of this article focus on the realms of mind, body and home. Each outlines works that aided women’s development in the aforementioned respects and responded to their needs. We will take a look at how women were able to take care of themselves and of others. The sphere of spirituality was omitted, since handbooks, as practical books, generally did not deal with this issue. At most their authors indulged in comments of a moral nature at times, embellishing them with few examples or stories.¹

We will deal with works written in the 16th and 17th centuries and in the first half of the 18th century, in the Polish language, as they represent a certain way of thinking that will change quite radically during the Enlightenment; therefore, we

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1 For more on this topic see: A. Zdziechiewicz, *Książka użytkowa w kulturze staropolskiej. Poradniki medyczne* [Practical books in the Old Polish culture. Medical handbooks] – unpublished doctoral thesis, written under the supervision of Prof. Dionizjusz Czubała and defended at the University of Silesia (Katowice) in June 2004.

will end our considerations with a work that was released in 1715. In the Old Polish period, medical handbooks were often the only source of knowledge about health. Admittedly, there were medical works, in the Renaissance mainly editions of ancient authors in Latin, intended for practising doctors and for the needs of universities. By the 16th century, however, it was already recognized that there were not enough doctors and pharmacies. This awareness coincided with Renaissance humanism, which advocated kindly care for the human body, enrichment of the cities and a concern for popularising knowledge related to earthly matters.

This begs the question: why were the popular medical handbooks of the 16th century not written in Latin, the language of scholars? It can be assumed that the Renaissance favoured the development of national languages, but there are, after all, works written in Latin by Polish doctors. Were they written in Latin in order to protect knowledge from the profaners? Medical handbooks, therefore, must have been intended for a different kind of audience than medical practitioners, that is for people without higher education. At the same time, we should also look for other reasons why these handbooks were written in Polish, because, after all, their future readers – sons of nobility – studied Latin at school.

We will be interested here in the most popular works of Old Polish medical literature: herbals,² as well as compendia of medical knowledge.³

2 S. Falimirz, *O ziołach i o mocy ich. O paleniu wódek z ziół. O olejkoch przyprawianiu. O rzeczach zamorskich. O zwierzętach, o ptaszczach i o rybach. O kamieniu drogim. O urynie, o pulsie i o innych znamionach. O rodzeniu dzieci. O nauce gwiazdecznej. O stawianiu baniek i o puszczeniu krwi. O rządzeniu czasu powietrza morowego. O lekarstwach doświadczonych na wiele niemocy. O nauce barwierskiej* [On herbs and their power. On distilling herbal waters. On seasoning oils. On things from overseas. On animals, birds and fish. On precious stones. On urine, pulse and other signs. On bearing children. On stellar science. On cupping therapy and blood letting. On living in times of morose air. On tested cures for many ailments. On the art of dyeing] (Cracow: 1534); H. Spiczynski, *O ziołach tutecznych i zamorskich... i o mocy ich, a k temu księgi lekarskie... wszem wielmi użyteczne* [On local and overseas herbs... on their power... useful to all] (Cracow: 1542); M. Siennik, *Herbarz, to jest ziół tutecznych, postronnych i zamorskich opisanie: co za moc mają, a jako ich używać ku przestrzeżeniu zdrowia ludzkiego, jako ku uzdrowieniu rozmaitych chorób: Teraz na nowo, wedle herbarzów dzisiejszego wieku i innych zacnych medyków poprawiony. Przydano Aleksego Pedemontana księgi siedmiory o tajemnych a skrytych lekarstwach, przyczym dosyć misternych a trafnych rzeczy doświadczonych mieć będziesz* [The herbal, or description of local, foreign and overseas herbs: Their potency, how to use them to preserve human health and to cure various diseases: Now newly revised according to herbals of the present age and other noble physicians. With an addition of the seven books by Alessio Piemontese on secret and hidden medications, providing mysterious and accurate knowledge] (Cracow: 1568); S. Syrenius, *Zielnik herbarzem z języka łacińskiego zowią, to jest opisanie własne imion, kształtu, przyrodzenia, skutków i mocy ziół, wszelakich drzew, krzewin i korzenia ich, kwiatu, owoców, soków, miazg, żywic i korzenia do potraw zaprawowania. Także trunków, syropów, wódek, lekiwarzów, konfektów, win rozmaitych, prochów, soli z ziół czynionej, maści, plasterów. Przy tym o ziemiach i glinkach różnych. O kruszaczach, perłach i drogich kamieniach. Też o zwierzętach czworonogich, czółgających, ptactwie, rybach i tych wszystkich rzeczach, które od nich pochodzą; od Dioskoridesa z przydaniem i dostatecznym dokładali z wielu innych te materyje piszących, z położeniem własnych figur dla snadniejszego ich poznania i używania ku zachowaniu zdrowia tak ludzkiego, jako bydłecgo i chorób przypadłych odpedzenia – wielkim uważaniem i porządkiem, polskim językiem zebrany i na osmioro ksiąg rozłożony. Księga lekarzom, aptekarzom, cyrulikom, barbirzom, roztrucharzom, końskim lekarzom, mastalerzom, ogrodnikom, kuchmistrzom, kucha-*

These works were dedicated to doctors, apothecaries, barbers, veterinarians of the time, landlords, and finally ladies. The word ‘lady’ was a courtesy title, and it was not applied to every woman. It was used to refer to noblewomen, aristocrats, sometimes to the wives of wealthy townsfolk who entered into family ties with impoverished nobility to move one rung up on the social ladder. We will focus on this particular type of woman.

The mistress of the house was responsible for many things related to the household; she was the one who managed it and took care of the family. If she enjoyed the trust of her husband, she had considerable power at home over the servants and the rest of the household. Although she was traditionally denied a school education, she could supplement it on her own. Most women interested in furthering their knowledge did so, whether through their choice of social position (a convent made education possible) or through reading. Girls ‘from good homes’ received an education that was supposed to make them good wives and, at the same time,

rzom, synkarzom, gospodarzom, mamkom, paniom, pannom i tym wszystkim, którzy się kochają i obzierają w lekarstwach... [An herbal, as known in Latin, that is a description of the names, shapes, nature, effects and power of herbs, trees, shrubs and their roots, flowers, fruit, sap, pulp, resin and roots for seasoning dishes. Also on liquors, syrups, waters, spirits, confections, various wines, powders, herbal salts, ointments, patches. Also on various soils and clays. On ores, pearls and precious stones. Also on four-legged animals, crawling animals, birds, fish, and all things that come from them; From Dioscorides with addition of many details from others who wrote about these matters, with own examples helpful in understanding and using them to preserve the health of humans and cattle and to cure diseases, collected with great care in the Polish language and divided into eight books. A book for medics, apothecaries, barbers, horse traders, horse doctors, stable masters, gardeners, cooks, alewives, bar keepers, wet nurses, ladies, maidens and all those who love and dabble in medications...] (Cracow: 1613). Unless otherwise indicated, quotations in English translated from Polish editions.

- 3 A. Glaber, *Problemata Aristotelis. Gadki z pisma wielkiego filozofa Aristotela i też inszych mędrców tak przyrodzonej, jako i lekarskich nauk z pilnością wybrane, pytanie rozmaite o składnościach człowieczych członków rozwiązujące, ku biełości rozmowy tak rozkoszne jako i pożyteczne* [Problemata Aristotelis. Considerations duly selected from the writings of the great philosopher Aristotle, as well as other wise men, both of natural and medical science, providing answers to various questions about the dispositions of the human body, both pleasant to converse about and useful] (Cracow: 1535); M. Siennik, *Lekarstwa doświadczone, które zebrał uczony lekarz pana Jana Pileckiego, któremu są przydane lekarstwa końskie z ćwiczeniami tego lekarza. Przydaliśmy i figury ziół rozmaitych ku lekarstwu z ziółkami dostatecznymi sprawione. Teraz znowu na światło wydane* [Tested medications collected by the experienced physician Jan Pilecki, with an addition of medications for horses and exercises of the said physician. We have added drawings of various medicinal herbs] (Cracow: 1564); *Compendium medicum auctum, to jest krótkie zebranie i opisanie chorób, ich różności, przyczyn, znaków i sposobów do leczenia* [Compendium medicum auctum, or a short collection and description of diseases, their causes, symptoms and cures] (Częstochowa: 1715); A. Piemontese, foreword to: *Tajemnice wszystkim obojga płci nie tylko ku leczeniu rozmaitych chorób, począwszy od głowy aż do stóp, bardzo potrzebne, ale i gospodarzom, rzemieślnikom zwłaszcza przedniejszych i subtelniejszych robót do ich rzemioł należących i innym wielce pożyteczne, z łacińskiego języka na polski przełożone i w porządek dolny teraz wprawione, do których przydane są Lekarstwa wyborne i doświadczone na rozmaite choroby i inszych rzeczy wiele* [The secrets for both sexes, not only very necessary for the cure of various diseases from head to toe, but also very useful to farmers and craftsmen, especially for the finer and more subtle works belonging to their trades, and others, translated from the Latin into Polish and now put in the lower order, to which are added excellent and practised Cures for various diseases and other many things], transl. S. Śleszkowski (Supraśl: 1732).

stewards of the household. This included, as we are about to see, keeping its members in good health.

I. THE MIND

Works written specifically for women in the period of interest to us were few and far between. This is also true of medical handbooks. Most likely there was only one treatise published in the 16th century with the intention of popularising medical and paramedical knowledge among women. It was entitled *Problemata Arystotelis. Gadki z pisma wielkiego filozofa Aristotela i też inszych mędrców tak przyrodzonej, jako i lekarskich nauk z pilnością wybrane, pytanie rozmaite o składnościach człowieczych członków rozwiązujące, ku biegłości rozmowy tak rozkoszne, jako i pożyteczne* [*Problemata Aristotelis. Considerations duly selected from the writings of the great philosopher Aristotle, as well as other wise men, both of natural and medical science, providing answers to various questions about the dispositions of the human body, both pleasant to converse about and useful*], also known as *Gadki o składności członków człowieczych* [*Considerations about disposition of the human body*] and published in Cracow in 1535.

Master Andrzej Glaber of Kobylin taught Aristotle's philosophy, astronomy, astrology and planetary theory at the Academy of Cracow.⁴ He was able to do so after graduating from the Faculty of Liberal Arts, as did Marcin of Urzędów, who lectured even before he went to Italy for his doctorate. This is evidenced, among other things, by the script Glaber edited and published in 1539 in Latin for *trivium* students, combining compendia on grammar, rhetoric and dialectics.⁵ Thus, teaching 'stellar science' and elements of Aristotle's philosophy, he had access to Aristotle's Latin *Problematas*, which was very popular at universities at the time. However, *Problemata* was not an original work of this philosopher. Both the Latin and Polish editions are a compilation of elements of Aristotle's physiognomy, the views of Hippocrates, Galen, Pliny, Seneca, Avicenna, Constantine, Isidore, Albert the Great, Eberhardus and other medieval thinkers.⁶

4 I quote from: W. Wąsik, *Andrzej Glaber z Kobylina problematysta polski* [Andrzej Glaber of Kobylin, a Polish problematist] (Warsaw: 1916), p. 19.

5 See: A. Glaber, *Compendiosa totius logicae, alias sermotionalis philosophiae, quam alii trivium vocant, encyclopaedia, in medium Enchiridii apposite redacta* (Cracoviae: 1539). Noteworthy is the fact that this booklet was printed in Ungler's printing house, which published the first two herbals of Falimirz and Spiczynski.

6 It was allegedly a collection of 'forgeries of forgeries, abbreviations of abbreviations; by a circular route through the medium of Syrian, Arabic and Hebrew languages, [...] the other end of an already twisted thread is given to medieval authors, who conceived to twist and untwist it in their own fashion, according to the ecclesiastical and moralistic tendencies of their era' (W. Wąsik, *Andrzej Glaber z Kobylina...*, p. 45; see also: pp. 36–77).

Glaber removed all scholarly elements of the Latin version, making the Polish *Problemata* a popular science work, making it accessible to the simple, uneducated female reader, as he stated, in order to enrich their art of conversation. The translator localized the *Problemata* to such an extent that he supported certain arguments with evidence from Polish history, wrote about our climate, the Tatars, Lithuanians and Poles, adapting his version for the Polish audience. This was basically our first popular discourse on physiology, hygiene and physiognomy, which could fulfil the role of the *Salerno Schools*⁷ in our country. Moreover, it addressed causes of diseases and physiological processes, and not merely in the form of a rhymed recipe for a healthy lifestyle. In my opinion, Glaber makes greater demands on his audience than the authors from the Salerno School – he requires thinking and not just memorisation of the text.

The reader is already surprised by the foreword. Considering how much women were condemned by the clergy for their nature, character, carnality, as evidenced by *Hammer of Witches*, perhaps the most misogynistic Christian text, and by selected thoughts of the Church Fathers,⁸ Glaber's words about men's jealousy toward women are impressive even today.

7 *Regimen Sautitatis Salernitanum*. They originated from the famous medical school in Salerno, where the principles of prevention and health care were written down as rhymes. This didactic poem, dedicated to Robert Curthose, son of William the Conqueror, likely one of the first books of its type in the Christian culture, was translated into Polish relatively late, in 1640, by Hieronim Olszowski, and published by the Jesuits in a pocket format as *Apteka dla tych, co jej ani lekarza nie mają, albo sposób konserwowania zdrowia, mianowicie dla tych spisana, co lekarza nie mają, apteki nie znają, to jest Szkoła Salernitańska z łacińskiego wiersza metrem ojczystym przetłozona w podróży z nienawiści próżnowania, a z miłości ku ubogim chorym po wsiach mieszkającym do druku podana przez tego, który jest ziemianom rodaków kochający, który oprócz dyskursu o dawności, znacności, autorach i edycjach Szkoły Salernitańskiej dołożył kilka ciekawych do konserwacji zdrowia ludzkiego i gospodarstwa należących informacji [Pharmacy for those who have neither it nor a doctor, that is, the Salerno School from a Latin poem in the native meter translated during a journey out of hatred of idleness, and out of love for the poor sick living in rural areas, submitted to print by one who is a landowner and who loves His Fellow Countrymen, Who in addition to a discourse on the antiquity, nobility, authors and editions of the Salerno School added some interesting information on the conservation of human health and homestead] (Warsaw: 1640).*

8 Andreas Capellanus, a German theologian from the 11th century: 'According to the nature of [her] sex... every woman is by nature a miser [...], she is also envious and a slanderer of other women, greedy, a slave to her belly, inconstant, fickle in her speech, disobedient and impatient of restraint, spotted with the sin of pride [...], a liar, a drunkard, a babbler, no keeper of secrets, too much given to wantonness, prone to every evil, and never loving any man in her heart.' (quote from: F. Beer, *Kobiety i doświadczenie mistyczne w średniowieczu* [*Women and Mystical Experience in the Middle Ages*], transl. into Polish by A. Branny (Cracow: 1996), p. 33). Andreas Capellanus follows the Church Fathers in his description: 'John Chrysostom's view – «the woman taught once, and ruined all... the sex is weak and fickle... The whole female race transgressed», echoes Tertullian's question: «Do you not know that you are Eve? God's sentence still hangs over all your sex and his punishment weighs down upon you.»' (F. Beer, *Kobiety i doświadczenie mistyczne...*, p. 34). Tertullian also wrote: 'Woman, thou shouldst ever be clothed in rags and in mourning, appearing only as a penitent, drowned in tears, and expiating thus the sin of having caused the fall of the human race [...] Woman thou art the gate of the devil. It is thou who hast corrupted those whom Satan dare not attack face to face' (quote after: J. Delumeau, *Strach w kulturze Zachodu* [*La Peur en Occident*], transl. into Polish by

Andrzej of Kobylin, following Aristotle's idea that the more subtle the body, the more outstanding the mind, admits that girls have a greater propensity to learn than boys:

Bacząc tedy mężowie składność pici panińskiej, iż jest bardzo subtylna, a rozum ich ku nauce i wyrozumieniu wszelkiej rzeczy ostry a prędki, więcej niż otroczy (jakoż się to jawno ukazuje w działkach z młodu, gdyż dziewczeczki rychlej się imują mówić: niżli chłopczkowie, to wszystko sprawuje przyczyną przyrzeczona), przeto oni, bojąc się swojej sławy utracić, aby białe głowy rozumem ich nie przechodziły, chcąc wiele umieć, bronią im czytania pisma głębokiego, chyba modlitw a paciorków. Wszakóż mądrému rozumowi nie zda się to rzecz słuszna, aby dla jednej niewiasty albo dwu (które mądrości źle pożywając, ku złemu ją obracają) jużby więc wszystkie miały stradać dobra, od Boga człowieka danego. Gdyż Pan Bóg nie chciał tylko samych otroków na świecie mieć, ale jak skoro Adama stworzył, tudzież dał mu towarzyszkę, we wszystkim temu podobną, i owszem, z rzeczy subtylniejszej stworzoną, bowiem z kości białej, gdyż mógł ulepion jest z ziemi grubej. Przeczże one niebogi mają być tak wżardzone, a podlejsze niżli mężowie?

Considering then, gentlemen, the composure of the feminine sex, which is very subtle, and their understanding and sharpness in learning and comprehending all things, more so than boys' (as is clearly shown in children from a young age, since girls learn to speak sooner than boys, which is caused by the aforementioned reason), therefore, they, fearing to lose their reputation, lest women surpass them in intellect, desiring to know much, prevent them from reading profound writings, except for prayers and rosaries. Nevertheless, to the wise reason it does not seem right that at the fault of one woman or two (who misuse wisdom and turn it to evil) all should lose the goods given to man by God. For the Lord God didn't want to have only boys in the world, because as soon as He created Adam, He immediately gave him a female companion, similar in everything, and indeed, made of a finer thing, for she is made of white bone, and the husband is made of coarse earth. Why should they be so despised and inferior to husbands?⁹

A. Szymanowski (Warsaw: 1986), p. 292). Clement of Alexandria (who died before 215 AD), wrote: '[For women] the very consciousness of their own nature must evoke feelings of shame. [...] Let her be entirely covered, unless she happen to be at home. [...] nor will she invite another to fall into sin by uncovering her face' (quote after: U. Ranke-Heineman, *Eunuchy do raju* [*Eunuchen für das Himmelreich*], transl. into Polish by M. Zeller (Gdynia: 1995), p. 131). One of the greatest Church Fathers, St. Augustine, wrote in his *De Genesi ad litteram* (401–415): 'If the woman was not made for the man to be his helper in begetting children, in what was she to help him? She was not to till the earth with him, for there was not yet any toil to make help necessary. If there were any such need, a male helper would be better, and the same could be said of the comfort of another's presence if Adam were perhaps weary of solitude. How much more agreeable could two male friends, rather than a man and a woman, enjoy companionship and conversation in a life shared together.' (Quoted from: Ibidem, p. 91). *Decretum Gratiani* (ca. 1140–1150), according to Delumeau still the main source of canon law in the early 20th century, contains the following passage: 'The image of God is in man [Adam] in such a way that there be only one lord, the origin of all others, having the power of God as God's vicar, for every king is in God's image; and thus woman is not made in God's image' (J. Delumeau, *Strach w kulturze Zachodu*, p. 293). Later, when Christians discovered Aristotle for themselves, they also assimilated his views on women. This philosopher believed that it was the man who was the giver of life during fertilisation, and the woman was just a sort of clay vessel, a secondary matter in the process of reproduction; the man's role was to provide the priceless form, the element of movement. Thus, the role of the giver of life was taken away from the woman; her role was reduced to the function of the belly that carries and feeds the foetus during pregnancy. Delumeau interprets this as the existence of only one sex: the male, while the woman thus becomes an incomplete man. The woman, by virtue of her handicap, has no right to decide for herself. Saint Thomas Aquinas wrote: 'A female needs a male, not only for reproduction, as is the case with other animals, but also for governance, for the male is more perfect by his reason and stronger in virtue' (Ibidem, p. 294).

9 A. Glaber, *Gadki o składnościach członków człowieczych...* [Considerations about disposition of the human body...], publ. J. Rostafiński (Cracow: 1893), p. 4.

Glaber proves his claim by citing the examples of Roman ladies, who were wise because they were allowed to learn, as well as the Polish princess, Wanda, who was chosen by Polish lords to be queen because of her steadiness and wisdom. His ardent defence of women in the patriarchal world is puzzling. One might think that the translator resorted to subterfuge in an effort to win patronage for his work from the castellan of Żarnów, Hedwig of Kościelec, mistress of Oświęcim, Czechowice and Zator, to whom he dedicated his work.

Which educated and wealthy woman, seeing such words on paper, would not be tempted to spread them? The work is dedicated directly to women, so Glaber probably expected it to be purchased by ladies who cared about their education. He mentions in the preface, however, that he is seeking to publish a book on the lives of great Polish women:

za łaską Bożą, [...] ku pociesze i ku pobudzeniu na cnoty dobre paniom, które swą sprawą chcą po sobie dobrą sławę zostawić.

by the grace of God, [...] for the comfort and encouragement of the good virtues of ladies, who by their cause want to leave behind a good reputation.¹⁰

A laudable intention, but apparently unsuccessful, as Glaber did not publish such a work. He did, however, publish *Gadki o składnościach członków człowieczych* the very first Polish medical and philosophical handbook, and most likely the first popular science text aimed at women in our history.

The first part of *Problemata Aristotelis* is constructed like a catechism: questions and answers to help the reader understand the complex structure of the world and the purposefulness of God's actions. One example is the question about the reason for the upright posture of humans and their upward-facing head. The answer is simple – first: by God's design (this is how most of the questionable issues are explained), and second, so that, looking up to heaven, humans would disdain earthly things.¹¹

The theory of the four elements and 'humors' (fluids) in the human body, ubiquitous in handbooks, also appears here. The author explains many physiological phenomena and processes occurring in human bodies, and clarifies their causes according to the principles of mythology. The spleen is black because it is made of 'earthy matter', which is of this color.¹² Black eyes see better during the day than at night –

10 Ibidem.

11 See: Ibidem, p. 16.

12 Ibidem, p. 54.

To bywa dla niedostatku ognia, któryby mógł mocniej wilgość lodowatą oświecać, jako bywa w oczu kotowych abo inszej zwierzyny.

This is due to the lack of fire, which could more strongly illuminate the icy dampness, as is sometimes the case in the eyes of cats or other animals.¹³

On most issues he gives arguments derived from empirics. For example: women have longer hair than men, because they are moister, and hair needs phlegm to grow; besides, women don't grow beards, because everything [hair] multiplies on their heads.¹⁴ Long, loose hair was often associated with the devil in it. This originated from the old belief that water demons wore their hair like this.¹⁵ Later, such properties were attributed in Christian culture to the hair of women, especially witches. Thus, the author's attempt to explain the abundance of hair in women with natural causes demonstrates a rational approach to the issue. Glaber also manages to explain the problem of facial hair in menopausal women by reason (even before the discovery of hormones), justifying it by changes in the body after the disappearance of menstruation.

This work, which follows through with the concept of explaining the world from the beginning to the end, is characterized by rationality and common sense. None of the questions are left unanswered, proving that both Glaber and those who composed *Problemata* over the centuries had great confidence in human reason.

The author tries to find the cause and purpose of each thing, for example: women have 'tits on their breasts' and not on their bellies like other females, because they would interfere with their ability to walk;¹⁶ a bird has no ears, because they would interfere with its ability to fly, but then again a man has two ears and one mouth, because he should listen twice as much as he speaks.¹⁷ What is striking here is the coexistence of a moralistic tone as regards humans and the simple thinking as regards the animal world, which – according to the author's understanding– reflects the superiority of the former over the latter.

There is also no shortage of theological arguments that make *Problemata* resemble a scholastic treatise at times. On the other hand, there are also echoes of the Renaissance conception of nature in the statement that 'God and nature do nothing in vain'.¹⁸

13 Ibidem, p. 19.

14 See: Ibidem, p. 11.

15 See: P. Kowalski, *Znaki świata. Omen, przesąd, znaczenie* [Signs of the world. Omens, superstition, meaning] (Warsaw–Wrocław: 1998), p. 607.

16 See: A. Glaber, *Gadki...*, p. 43.

17 See: Ibidem, p. 24.

18 Ibidem, p. 124.

Problemata are comprised of three parts:

- I. *O przyczynach rzeczy, które przyrodzenie dało człowiekowi albo i drugim zwierzętom;*
 II. *O pokarmach, które są człowiekowi przyrodzone albo nie, i też co się z ich pożywienia człowieku przydawa;*
 III. *Co który sposób albo postawa członków człowieka znamionuje, jestli dobroć albo źółć przyrodzona.*

- I. *On the causes of things that nature has given to man and other animals;*
 II. *About the foods that are natural to man or not, and also on what is caused by their ingestion;*
 III. *On the meaning of human features, whether they signify inherent goodness or bile.¹⁹*

The first part is a course in human anatomy, starting with the head, followed by the breasts, nails, lungs and liver, and ending with the legs. The anatomy seems to be a mere pretext for considering the nature of each thing. The chapter on the head, for example, raises questions about the nature of hair, why women have more of it and of a finer texture than men, the causes of men's baldness (they have too much heat in them, which causes their hair to fall out), why bald men are greedy (because they are choleric), why women in general don't grow beards and moustache, while 'old wives' do.²⁰

Problemata also contain many superstitions about women, widely believed in the 17th century and before. One belief that had persisted in the culture since ancient times is that women break new mirrors during menstruation 'because their venom escapes through their eyes'.²¹ A mirror, which, according to the tradition of magical thinking, is the gateway to the hereafter because the world seen in it is the opposite of the earthly one,²² becomes cloudy under the gaze of a woman also during her death phase – before she is reborn at the time of ovulation, the restoration of vital powers and fertility. Mirrors break as a woman's eyes change with her status. Influenced by the moon, the female body goes through phases just like it. Ovulation is fullness, menstruation is absence, a cyclical death. A woman's eyes during this time have destructive power, as she is a being in a transitional state – between life and death.²³ The 'unclean nature' of a menstruating woman was already written about by biblical authors, commanding a menstruating woman to live outside the camp.²⁴ To this day, the belief in its destructive power has survived in European tradition, and monthly blood, as being closely related to the body, having the power to bind, was for a very long time considered one of the most power-

19 Ibidem, p. 6.

20 Ibidem, pp. 11–13.

21 Ibidem, p. 19.

22 See: P. Kowalski, *Znaki świata*, p. 289.

23 See: Ibidem, p. 314.

24 Leviticus 15:19 'Niewiasta, która co miesiąc cierpi płynienie krwi, przez siedm dni będzie odłączona' ['When a woman has the monthly bloody discharge, she shall be separated for seven days'] (transl. into Polish: J. Wujek).

ful magical means, used especially in love spells.²⁵ A number of superstitions about menstruation still holds strong today: women on their period should not get a perm at this time, because the hair will curl badly or not at all; they shouldn't bake cakes because they will end up slack-baked; it is not possible for them to properly whip egg white foam.²⁶

Elements of Aristotle's physiognomy were not placed in *Problemata* by accident, for entertainment or knowledge for its own sake. Glaber suggests the practical use of the advice contained in his work: 'so that everyone can know with whom to keep company or from whom to protect oneself.'²⁷

A person's character can be read from the face like a horoscope from the stars. This association is not accidental. People of that time believed that with the help of astrological knowledge one could foretell the character and future path of life, with its joys and dangers. At the time, the Church did not consider such attempts to enquire about the future to be a sin, since it was believed that this is why God endowed man with reason, so that he could read the divine warnings in his creations. Taking this idea further, since nature does nothing in vain, human physiognomy must have yet another purpose than simply distinguishing the individual from the crowd and resembling his or her parents. A person's character can be told from the features such as height, colour and density of hair and eyebrows, physique, size and shape of the head, facial expression, forehead, colour and setting of the eyes, size of the nose, lips, teeth and even the tongue.

And thus, a large and round head

znamionuje człowieka rozumnego, dowcipnego i w sprawach wszystkich dobrze bacznego, robotnego też, stałego i pobożnego. Nie wierzyszli, oglądaj.

marks a person who is intelligent, with a good sense of humour, careful in all matters, hardworking, constant and God-fearing. If you do not believe it, observe for yourself.²⁸

A small head, with a soft throat and sloping neck, indicates a man who is calm, quiet, secretive and scant of action. A long head with a long face is indicative of a simpleton, one who is foolish, malicious, envious, vain and gossipy. He who moves

25 Zob. E. Karwot, *Katalog magii Rudolfa. Źródło etnograficzne z XIII wieku* [Rudolf's Catalogue of Magic. An ethnographic source from the 13th century] (Wrocław: 1955); added as an annex to: B. Levack, *Polowanie na czarownice w Europie wczesnonowoczesnej* [*The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe*], transl. into Polish by E. Rutkowski (Wrocław: 1991), pp. 285–290.

26 Heard (2001).

27 A. Glaber, *Gadki...*, p. 126. This argument was still invoked in the first half of the 20th century in marketplace guides for men on the art of reading character from appearance, with titles such as *Kobiety, które za żony brać się nie powinno* [Women who shouldn't be taken as wives], from where it follows that half the women are unsuitable for marriage, but it's not worth crying over, since there are too many of them in the world anyway.

28 Ibidem, p. 133.

his head quickly is himself a gossip, an unstable liar. On the other hand, a person with

mięszsa a strojna z mięszszą a krótką szyją ukazuje człowieka dobrze bacznego, mądrego, rozumu dobrego, tajemnice chowającego, wiernego, prawdziwego i bardzo powolnego.

a fleshy head and short fleshy neck is careful, wise, of good reason, who can keep secrets, is faithful, true and very slow.²⁹

Glaber lists the physical features of people to be wary of due to their character flaws:

Twarz, która się zda jakoby pijana, ukazuje mocnego, próżnomówcę, psotliwego, który się też rad napija, wszakoż nikomu nie zaszkodzi, tylko gębą.

A face that seems to be drunk shows a strong, talkative, mischievous man, who also likes to drink, but he is harmless other than for his verbosity.³⁰

A smooth, wrinkle-free forehead means an angry man, a forger and a gossip;³¹ sparse eyebrows characterize a credulous simpleton;³² deep-set eyes belong to a person of sharp eyesight and good memory, but perverse, malicious, fierce, suspicious, who leads others to evil and is prideful;³³ pale lips signify simple manners, 'fleshy teeth' and wide teeth indicate a bold, deceitful, hypocritical, strong and foolish character.³⁴

What was the use of Glaber's handbook? I believe that parts one and two helped in learning about the functioning of the human body and were a simplified version of a scientific textbook. Women familiar with anatomy, physiology and dietetics, at a level that Glaber thought was certainly sufficient for them, had basic knowledge to use in home practice. Physiognomy, on the other hand, provided knowledge that was not only practical, as it offered conversation topics, so that women could try to match the mental level of educated interlocutors. The handbook elevates a woman's status in company, showing that she can be an interesting conversation partner and that conversation beyond the realm of prayers and domestic problems traditionally assigned to women is possible.

29 Loc. cit.

30 Ibidem, p. 137.

31 See: Ibidem, p. 140.

32 See: Ibidem, p. 142.

33 See: Ibidem, p. 147.

34 See: Ibidem, p. 149.

2. THE BODY

Handbook prescriptions for cosmetics, which tell us quite a bit about the canons of female beauty at the time, and how this beauty was taken care of, are particularly interesting and provide much insight into the everyday life of women in the olden days.

Tellingly, there were more handbooks dealing with the body than with the mind, which might mean that women were more concerned with this aspect.

The handbooks paint a portrait of a sweet-smelling woman with abundant, long hair, small breasts, a delicate, flawless white complexion, but with flushed cheeks, as well as a very high forehead, without eyelashes and with white teeth. This is the image depicted in Alessio Piemontese's *Secrets*, an immensely popular Italian work that also took Polish readers by a storm.³⁵

Interestingly, it portrays the ideal of a woman more of the 'Age of the Cathedrals' than of the late Italian Renaissance, as evidenced by its praise of eyelids without eyelashes, a very high forehead requiring epilation, and perhaps small breasts. Thus, the cosmetic recipes found in the recipe book of Alessio Piemontese were probably created a little earlier than is commonly thought... Lush hair has always been a sign of femininity, so it is difficult to interpret it as a temporal affiliation of the canon; after all, the same was true of white skin until the 20th century.

It took a lot of effort to strive for the ideal, so a considerable amount of space in handbooks is taken up by cosmetic prescriptions. Piemontese's book, like Siennik's *Lekarstwa doświadczone* [Tested cures], begins not with addressing remedies for head diseases (unlike one might assume, knowing how all the medical

35 Piemontese's curious book, first published in Poland as one of the books of Marcin Siennik's *Herbarz* [Herbal, 1568], was retranslated in 1620 by physician Sebastian Śleszkowski (see footnote 3), and it was still popular in the 18th century. The work was first published in Basel in 1563, and was written, according to the author's preface to the reader, as a result of remorse following the death of a certain patient who had been improperly treated by a barber. Piemontese, as an experienced medic, and as he said of himself, a keeper of many secrets, was asked by this barber for free advice. He did not want to give it to him, because he feared that the dishonest man would treat the patient and take undeserved money for it. The patient, who suffered from gallstones, died, and the poorly educated barber threw his hands up. Piemontese felt ashamed of how he had acted and decided to share his medical 'secrets' with all those in need. According to Zbigniew Bela, this preface was likely added later for commercial reasons, in order to boost demand for *Secrets*. The author himself – Alessio Piemontese (c. 1470–1550) – was said to have been a monk, alchemist and medic, probably serving as the personal physician of Joanna of Castile, known as Joanna the Mad. He is also the author of an alchemical treatise on sublimation (cited in: Z. Bela, *Aleksego Pedemontana „Tajemnice”* [The *Secrets* of Alessio Piemontese] (Cracow: 1990), p. 116). The work was reprinted 170 times and it was translated into 8 languages. In Polish it had 8 editions in the years 1568, 1620 (twice), 1737, 1750, 1758, 1786 and 1788. Such a great publishing success can be explained by the fact that Piemontese titled himself a Father, and it was widely believed at the time that monks had a lot of experience in medicine, hence the popularity and high price of their prescription books. Besides, the book contained as many as thirty recipes for cures against the bubonic plague, was written in an elegant style, and did not contain primitive prescriptions at first (cited from: Z. Bela, *Aleksego Pedemontana „Tajemnice”*, p. 348).

compendia were arranged), but with recipes for dyeing and styling hair, which, it seems to me, is an argument supporting the thesis that these recipes were created for women. Hair was dyed three colours: black, blond (yellow) and red. For example, to dye hair black:

węźmi zielonych jaszczurek a oberźnij im ogony i głowy, warz je w oliwie, a tym olejkiem włosy pomazuj, będą się czerniały i długie rosły.

take green lizards and cut their tails and heads, brew them in oil, and with this oil anoint their hair, it will blacken and grow long.³⁶

Siennik, also at the beginning of the chapter on head diseases in his *Lekarstwa doświadczone*, gives a recipe for black hair dye:

węźmi jaje kruce a utłucz je na miednicy mosiędzowej, a ogoliwszy miejsce, gdzie włosy czarne mają być, tedy pomazuj, ale póki nie uschnie, poty miej oliwę w uściech: abowiem by żeby poczerniały, a czyni to w cieniu dnia trzeciego. [...] a jeśli bielić chcesz, łajna jaskółcze z wołową żółcią zetrzy a pomazuj.

take a raven's egg, and crack it into a brass basin, and having shaved the place where the hair should be black, then anoint it, but as long as it is not dried, keep the oil in your mouth in order for it to turn black, and do it in the shadow of the third day. [...] and if you want to whiten it, then grind swallow's dung with ox's gall, and anoint it.³⁷

The logic of this prescription, which refers to sympathetic magic, seems simple: to get black hair colour, one takes the nucleus of the deepest blackness: a raven's egg. The same should be done for bleaching hair. Most of these recipes, except perhaps for some recipes for creams, are devoid of empirical logic, so the belief in their effectiveness probably mattered, especially since most of them were given psychologically suggestive names: 'peculiar cure'; 'tested cure'; '...infallible'; '...effective'; 'uncommon secret', which were to encourage people to buy and use the book.

Women's breasts, according to the ideal of beauty of the time, were supposed to be small, so it was quite a concern for the girls and their mothers to stop their growth. Piemontese therefore provides a method for 'how to guard against the excessive growth of tits':

tlucz weszķę ziele z liściami, w occie roztwarzając, przykładając to plasterm na cycki panieńskie, a to je powściągnie od dalekiego rościenia, tak że skromne będą, tylko że czasu potrzeby nie będzie w nich mleko.

crush hemlock with leaves, add vinegar, apply it with a patch to the maiden's tits, and this will restrain them from growing too much, so that they will be modest, only that in time of need there will be no milk in them.³⁸

Lack of milk, however, was not a problem for noblewomen and aristocrats, since children were generally fed by wet-nurses anyway, and mothers often did what

36 A. Piemontese, *Tajemnice...*, p. 6.

37 M. Siennik, *Lekarstwa doświadczone...*, p. 46.

38 A. Piemontese, *Tajemnice...*, p. 77.

they could to stop lactation. Venetian women covered their breasts with saffron and honey, Dutch ladies – with a handkerchief soaked in canola oil. They also wrapped their breasts with a cloth, ‘pushing them upward so they wouldn’t sag down’³⁹. Here, however, Piemontese’s translator, Sebastian Śleszkowski, appealed to Polish women to feed their children by themselves, especially of the male sex,

zgoła trudno o zdrowego syna; rzadki, który by nie chorował, jeśli nie na ciele, tedy na umyśle.

for it is difficult to find a healthy son; a rare one who would not be ill, if not in body, then in mind.⁴⁰

This comment might seem exaggerated if it were not for the fact that aristocrats were marrying into the same family (in order to avoid the fragmentation of fortunes), which resulted in the birth of handicapped children. In the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, this was especially true of magnate families that were dying out in the 17th century, such as the Ostrogski family.⁴¹

Hair, whether of men or women, was to be lush. Bald spots were unsightly; they were treated by rubbing in pig’s bile, almond oil, mole blood or dog fat⁴², which were all believed to promote hair growth. On the other hand, the forehead, especially for women, was supposed to be very high. The following remedy was recommended:

wyrwawszy włosy, namazuj czoło krwią z zielonych żabek, albo rdzą żelazną z moczem rozpuszczoną albo krwią nietoperzową, a nie wyrosną więcej.

having plucked out the hair, anoint the forehead with blood of green frogs, or iron rust dissolved in urine, or with bat blood, and it will not grow back.⁴³

Similarly, fashionable ladies were to pluck out their eyelashes, so as to make their eyelids resemble nut shells. Piemontese cites ten epilation remedies, one of which

39 Ibidem, p. 83.

40 Loc. cit.

41 Historian Zbigniew Kuchowicz wrote of this fading family that they bore signs of degeneration ‘It is known that they were devastated primarily by mental illness and various abuses. Konstanty Wasyl was a psychopath, megalomaniac, epileptic, prone to fits of rage. Aleksander was famous for his hubris, impulsiveness, he was killed by poison mixed with aphrodisiac, his sons struggled with mental disorders, they died at the age of 20–21’, while his daughter Anna Alojza Chodkiewicz, née Ostrogska, ‘unlike her male ancestors, who were erotomaniacs, felt repugnance to sex, succumbed to hallucinations’, was a religious fanatic, going so far as to cause violent acts and religious turmoil, and, as a devout Catholic, stripped the Orthodox of what her grandfather Konstantyn Wasyl had bequeathed to them. She even dared, under the influence of Jesuits, to move the body of Aleksander, who had died thirty years earlier, from an Orthodox church to a Uniate one, claiming that her father had converted to Catholicism before his death. This caused religious riots and resulted in the forced union of Orthodox Christians with Catholics. ‘Offenders’ were given the choice of accepting the union or a particularly cruel death penalty (Z. Kuchowicz, *Wizerunki niepospolitych niewiast staropolskich XVI–XVII wieku* [Images of outstanding women of the 16th–18th century Old Poland] (Łódź: 1974), p. 185).

42 See: A. Piemontese, *Tajemnice...*, p. 11.

43 Ibidem, p. 15.

is quite similar to modern-day wax strips.⁴⁴ The oldest one of Falimirz herbals also contains a method for hair removal:

Weźmi wapna niegaszonego ośm uncyj, korzenia fiołkowego startego jedną uncycję, auripigmentu z apteki pół uncycję. Ty wszystkie rzeczy, starszy na proch, zmieszaj spolem, a gdyć potrzeba, weźmi część tych prochów, rozpuśćże czystą wodą, tak by było jako ciasto albo maść, a tego przykładaj z plastrzem na miestcze, gdzie włosy są, a chcesz, żeby nie były, daj na włosach leżeć, aż uschnie, a potem wcieraj drewnianym albo czym ostrym onę maść, potem umywaj to miestce wódką różaną.

Take eight ounces of unquenched lime, one ounce of grated violet root, half an ounce of orpiment from the pharmacy. Grind all these things to powder, mix together, and when necessary take some of these powders, dissolve them in pure water, so that it is as a batter or ointment, apply with a patch to the place where the hair is, and you want it not to be, let it stay on the hair until it dries, and then rub off with a wooden or sharp object and then wash the place with rose water.⁴⁵

As for the eyes, Piemontese's handbook offers not only methods of applying makeup to the eyelids, but also ways of changing the colour of the iris from yellow to black:

łuszczyny zielone włoskich orzechów miałko uwierć, a jeśli trzeba, wody przylej, aby gęstym ciastem było, które na placki rozgniotszy, na oczy przykładaj, a szernieją od tego wnet.

grind the hulls of green walnuts finely, and if necessary, add water to make a thick dough, form small portions, apply them on your eyelids, and they will soon turn black from it.⁴⁶

One can imagine what the eyelids of a fashionable lady looked like after such a treatment, given the staining properties of green walnut hulls.

The body, smooth, white and without freckles, was supposed to give off a subtle fragrance. Recipes for perfumes and eau de toilette have been known for hundreds of years. Our handbooks contain them, too. And so, Falimirz's herbal cites a recipe for perfume made of rose water and musk, as well as for aftershave. Alessio Piemontese provides a number of recipes for waters, scented balls to be carried on one's person, fragrant tallow for rubbing into gloves, clothes perfume, powders for scenting clothes, scented body oils. Yet these fragrant substances were not a mere way of masking unpleasant body odours, caused by the fact that frequency of baths decreased in the 17th century. Perfume was primarily used to ward off the bubonic plague, as it was believed that the disease could be avoided by wearing scented objects and inhaling good – fragrant – air, uncontaminated by disease and the stench of decay. This, however, does not change the fact that people used perfume abundantly, also when there were no epidemics, hoping to attract the opposite sex.

A woman's face was to be delicate and without blemish, hence Piemontese's prescriptions for whitening the complexion (6 recipes), getting rid of freckles, of

44 See: Ibidem, p. 14.

45 S. Falimirz, *O ziołach i o mocy ich*, p. 21.

46 A. Piemontese, *Tajemnice...*, p. 25.

pimples (9), of wrinkles (15), and for blushing the cheeks (11). One of the recurring recipes is water made with young pigeons or chickens fed with hard-boiled eggs, with an addition of flower oils. The recipe for ‘water for rejuvenation of old women’s faces, so that they look twenty or twenty five’, sounds like a joke:

weźmi 2 nogi cielęce a warz je w 18 funtów wody rzecznej, aż 9 funtów wywrze, włóż w onę juchę ryżu funt jeden, ośrodkki chlebowej w mleku moczony od jednego chleba, masła świeżego niesolonego dwa funty, białków z skorupkami od 10 jaj świeżych. To wszystko, zmieszawszy, warz, potem wypal, aby wszystka wódka wyszła, w tę wódkę potym włóż po trosze kamfory, hałunu cukrowatego, a będzie na to wyborna.

take 2 calf’s legs and boil them in 18 pounds of river water, until 9 pounds evaporate, put in it a pound of rice, one bread without crust soaked in milk, two pounds of fresh unsalted butter, whites with shells from 10 fresh eggs. Having mixed all this, brew it, evaporate all water, then put into this a little camphor, sugar alum, and it will work wonderfully.⁴⁷

Just the form in which the name of the recipe is given renders its efficiency questionable, even in the eyes of a person from a few centuries ago, but apparently the author hoped for its psychological effect. Moreover, Piemontese’s *Secrets* are often striking for the lack of precision in the measurements of ingredients. The recipe referenced above is one of the few where the measure of each element is given. More often, however, he gives recipes such as the one for a face dye.

Weźmi prochu czerwonego zandału, octu mocnego dwakroć palonego, każdego z tych, co chcesz, zmieszawszy, warz w ogniu, lekkię przyłożywszy trochę hałunu.

Take some red sandalwood powder, strong vinegar, burnt twice, and having mixed them, boil over fire, with the addition of some mild alum.⁴⁸

This is how we know this book was not intended for pharmacists and that people must have believed that the ‘secrets’ should not harm anyone.

Femininity is strongly linked to eroticism and motherhood. One could think that the two spheres would have been considered synonymous, but in the handbooks they are discussed in separate places. Besides, women, as we know from other sources, tried to separate sex from procreation.⁴⁹ The handbooks also provide in-

47 Ibidem, p. 50. As a side note, this cream contains collagen, nowadays widely used in anti-wrinkle cosmetics.

48 Ibidem, p. 47.

49 The most interesting and, at the same time, the oldest example of magical formulas is, coming from the Cistercian monastery in Rudy Raciborskie, *Rudolf’s Catalogue of Magic* from the 13th century, in which a meticulous monk, wanting to warn his fellow confessors of devilish activity, created a work unique in the Polish lands of that period: he wrote down the incantations and magical procedures that women performed to ensure good luck, health and love for themselves and their children. This is an example of so-called white magic, that is magic that brings good and is harmless. The catalogue of magic is divided into three parts: 1. *O bałwochwalstwie, które uprawiają kobiety przy czarodziejskich praktykach z dziećmi*; 2. *O czarodziejskich praktykach dziewcząt i złych kobiet*; 3. *O czarodziejskich praktykach do osiągnięcia szczęścia*. [1. On idolatry practised by women in witchcraft with children; 2. On the sorcerous practices of girls and evil women; 3. On sorcerous practices to achieve happiness]. Part one deals with magical practices to ensure newborn children’s health, prosperity and paternal love: ‘Dzieci jeszcze bardzo delikatne wsadzają do worka, aby spały. [...] Uszy zajęcy, nóżki kretów i wiele

formation on contraception and abortifacients, but not collected in one place. Simon Syrenius and Marcin of Urzędów, when discussing the effects of herbs, address also this use, but they do not comment on it. The lack of moralistic comments is in fact typical of Renaissance herbals. Many of them provide herbal remedies and other methods for terminating pregnancy, and the authors do not seem to be concerned with the aftermath. This is perhaps due to the fact that in old Poland, although the law was severe in this respect, and mothers who caused their own miscarriages were penalized with death, the society did not consider this deed a crime, as long as it was done discreetly. Besides, the authors apparently counted on the intelligence of the readers, who, aware of such an effect of the herb, would avoid it. One of the few warnings regard fern, which

nie ma być dawana paniam, bo brzemienniej kazi
płod w żywocie, a insze czyni niepłodne wiecznie.

should not be given to women, as it not only affects
the foetus of a pregnant one, but also makes others
barren forever.⁵⁰

Unlike the Renaissance ones, Baroque handbooks emphasise healthy offspring. Their authors devote entire paragraphs to the immorality of women using means to induce miscarriage, as well as those who, due to fear of deformed bodies, do not want to bear children at all.

Solutions were also sought to increase men's sexual activity by giving them sage mixed with wine,⁵¹ lovage or a drink made from gladiolus.⁵² However, it was necessary to know which one to use, as it was possible to unintentionally cause the opposite effect: while tall gladiolus was said to be an aphrodisiac and stimulant of

innych rzeczy kładą do kołyski, a czynią to, aby dzieci nie płakały. [...] Układają kupki mąki i soli, które liżą, aby miały obficie mleka. Ojcu pokazują najpierw wielki palec nóżki dziecka, a nie twarz. Z błony porodowej dziecka odgryzają trzy kawałki, które zamieniwszy w proch, dają ojcu do pozbywania, aby kochał dziecko, jeszcze inne odrażające praktyki wykonują z tą błoną porodową. [...] Podobnie po chrzcie dziecka nóżkami jego dotykają gołego ołtarza, sznur dzwonu kładą mu na usta, rączkę kładą na księgę, aby się dobrze uczyło, a prześcierałem z ołtarza głaszczą jego twarz, aby było piękne. [...] Z koszulką dziecka robią czary, aby wszystko, co zgubi, znalazło' ['Children, who are still very fragile, are put into a sack to sleep. [...] They put hare ears, mole legs and many other things into the cradle, and they do this so that the children do not cry. [...] They make mounds of flour and salt, which they lick in order to have abundant milk. They first show the big toe of the baby's feet, not the face, to the father. They bite off three pieces of the fetal membranes and, having turned it into a powder, they feed it to the father to ensure that he loves the baby. They also engage in many other disgusting practices with the membrane. [...] Likewise, after a child is baptized, with its feet they touch the bare altar, they put the string of the bell on its mouth, they put its hand on a book so that it grows up to be studious, and with the sheet from the altar they stroke its face so that it is beautiful. [...] They make magic with the child's dress, so that it can find whatever it loses'] (E. Karwot, *Katalog magii Rudolfa*, pp. 285–290).

50 Marcin z Urzędowa, *Herbarz polski, to jest o przyrodzeniu ziół i drzew rozmaitych, i innych rzeczy do lekarstw należących księgi dwie* [The Polish herbal, or on the nature of herbs and various trees, and other things belonging to medicines, two books] (Cracow: 1595), p. 140.

51 See: *Ibidem*, p. 153.

52 See: *Ibidem*, p. 159.

male semen, dwarf gladiolus was believed to lower desire and bring infertility. Carrying the herb heliotrope on one's person was also said to have a contraceptive effect.⁵³ Of course, there were also magic formulas to ensure the absence of offspring, but the handbooks provide no information on this.

Interesting is a prescription for a medicine for men 'for weakness of strength from too much coupling',⁵⁴ a cup of which the 'sick man' was to drink every morning, the composition of which, in addition to bishop's wart, includes women's milk, capon's lard, stone pine cones, sweet almonds and honey.⁵⁵ This recipe is puzzling, but if one takes into account the sometimes large age difference between spouses, then its usefulness to women becomes obvious.

Obstetric treatises offer quite interesting, and still known today, beliefs about pregnancy, mother and child. A special place in these works is given to the issue of stillbirth and postpartum fever, which must have been a frequent occurrence, as evidenced by the plethora of advice on the subject. Finally, some treatises include information on caring for infants and their illnesses. In this respect, the book on obstetrics, included in the herbals of Falimirz, Spiczyński and Siennik, is the most interesting and comprehensive.

Magic and superstitions regarding pregnancy and childbirth survived for a very long time in European culture. They evolved over time and depended on the place and regional culture, but the fact that many magical elements, written down in medical manuals, which were often translations of foreign works, took root in our culture, means they fell on fertile ground. It also means that these beliefs were quite universally held in communities of women, as we can probably call the world associated with giving birth. This world was rather closed off from men, who rarely assisted in childbirth. Sometimes they offered some support to women if the process was complicated and lengthy.⁵⁶ Pregnancy and childbirth were surrounded by a series of beliefs and practices, the effect of which an uninformed man could only spoil.

Some of these beliefs still persist in our culture nowadays. The first three Polish herbals which include a treatise on obstetrics, translated by Andrzej Glaber, provide abundant information on bearing male versus female children. One of them is the superstition, still known today, that a daughter takes away from the mother's beauty, while a son adds to it:

53 See: Ibidem, p. 163.

54 A. Piemontese, *Tajemnice...*, p. 196.

55 One may venture to ask just how much exertion a man would endure in a single night if a strengthening agent was recommended to him every morning, and who prepared it for him? Probably his loving wife, especially in the situation of a significant age gap...

56 See: H. Biegeleisen, *Matka i dziecko w obrzędach, wierzeniach i zwyczajach ludu polskiego* [Mother and child in the rituals, beliefs and customs of the Polish people] (Lviv: 1927).

A przed to jest pierwsza nauka: jestże ona niewiasta przed poczęciem była blada, a po poczęciu rumiana na licu, znak jest, że z synem chodzi. Drugi znak: jeżeli niewiasta, zastąpiwszy, nie ma wielkiego obciążenia w sobie we wszystkich członkach, znak jest, że syna w żywocie nosi, a jeśli zasię bardzo mdłą, leniwa, obciążała, znamię, iż dziewczka będzie.

This is the first sign: if the woman was pale prior to conception, and after the conception she is of a blushed complexion, it means she carries a son. The second sign: if a woman who has fallen pregnant is not feeling too heavy in her limbs, it means she will bear a son; and if she is very nauseous, lazy, burdened, it means she will have a daughter.⁵⁷

Another belief still held today has to do with the side of the belly on which the foetus is located. Right side means a son, and left side means a daughter.⁵⁸ This view still derives, I believe, from Aristotle's teachings on the two-pronged construction of the uterus. The right side, affording better conditions, warmer and drier, is where the more valuable male foetus develops; while the left side, moist and cooler, and therefore inferior in nature, develops the girl.

In addition to clues on how to tell the child's sex, which must have been quite important since they have been preserved in culture for so long, this treatise also offers advice for the midwives: they are to be sensible and, in the event of a protracted and painful labour, should console the mother, saying that she will certainly give birth to a son, for pregnant women are very eager to hear this.⁵⁹ Glaber's *O sprawach brzemiennych* [On matters of pregnancy] also features some beliefs and divinations about the future pregnancies of the woman giving birth. The firstborn's navel had to be scrutinized and the umbilical cord tied three fingers away from the belly. If there were nodules on this section of the umbilical cord, their number indicated the number of future offspring. If the umbilical cord was smooth, it meant that this was the last pregnancy. Yellow nodules augured sons, and white ones – daughters.⁶⁰ However, the handbook lacks information on how to dispose of the placenta, as well as on what to do with the umbilical cord stump once it falls off.⁶¹ These issues were of importance in folk medicine, since bodily secretions had magical significance: unprotected, they could work to the detriment of the child's mother if someone cast a spell on it. Glaber, however, drew attention to the choice of the wet nurse, since, it was believed that the child takes on her character with the milk. He strongly advised against seamstresses and embroiderers, due to their loose morals.⁶²

57 M. Siennik, *Herbarz...*, p. 441.

58 See: *Ibidem*, p. 442.

59 See: *Ibidem*, p. 447.

60 See: *Ibidem*, p. 463.

61 As late as a few decades ago, the custom of keeping the umbilical cord stub until the child begins school was still alive. If the child managed to untie the knot, it meant that he or she would have a good memory and an ease for learning.

62 M. Siennik, *Herbarz...*, p. 465.

Many elements of magical and empirical thinking and scientific knowledge of that era survived in the form of prescriptions for ailments during pregnancy, difficult childbirth and infant care. It should be noted here that infertility, miscarriages, foetal death in utero, difficult labour with complications in foetal positioning, and placenta delivery, which often ended in postpartum fever and death of the mother, were frequent problems at the time. Yet, due to the abundance of material on these issues, they deserve a separate article.

Thus, the handbooks depict the image of a woman who takes care of her body, trying to keep up with the ideal of female beauty of the time. Her fears of growing old and being disfigured by pregnancies are apparent, manifested in the number of prescriptions for creams, 'waters' (water-based plant medicines), and ways to counteract breast deformities. This tells us that women did not at all willingly embrace the ideal of a mother who devotes herself unreservedly to her children: the noblewoman leaves the feeding of the infant to the wet nurse in order to preserve her beauty for as long as possible. This desire is sometimes exploited by the authors of handbooks, who (just like today) offer them miraculous remedies that have the power to improve nature and undo the damage caused by the passing of time. The image of a woman of those times who gives pleasure to her own body, ignoring the calls for mortification of the flesh, brings her closer to her modern-day peers.

3. THE HOME

Right from the beginning, the handbooks present an array of topics that they cover. The book on head ailments combines prescriptions for real health issues, such as headaches, fungal infections of the scalp, lice, scabs, epilepsy, deafness, with advice on what to do 'when something gets into the ear' or falls into the eye, how to treat a black eye, advice on 'stench from the nose and mouth', on pimples, wrinkles, freckles, excessive blushing; bleaching, blackening, curling, yellowing and reddening of hair, for baldness, hair growth⁶³ and much more. It is characteristic of medical handbooks in general that they contained advice only loosely connected to the health. Along with recipes for herbal waters, tinctures, ointments and patches, there are also recipes for gingerbread, confections, candied fruits, inks, stain removers, paints, gilders, insecticides, and finally alcohol – mainly wine and beer.

As for alcohol, there are a few interesting recipes that show the immutability of human nature when it comes to using and abusing it.

63 See: A. Piemontese, *Tajemnice...*, pp. 6–50; M. Siennik, *Lekarstwa doświadczone...*, pp. 37–51.

If someone wanted to have a ‘strong head’, they were advised to follow these steps:

przed piciem ze ćwierć godziny trzeba, by zjadł trzy albo cztery jądra brzoskwińowe albo tyle jąder gorzkich migdałów, a na to wypił oliwy, albo z migdałów słodkich łyżkę. To uczyniwszy, może pić co chce.

about a quarter of an hour prior to drinking, eat three or four peach kernels, or the same number of bitter almond kernels, then drink some olive oil or eat a spoonful of sweet almonds. Having done this, one can drink whatever their heart desires.⁶⁴

There is also a method for getting drunk without any harm, as well as for ‘sobering up a drunk person’ – he or she must drink a large amount of vinegar.⁶⁵ If someone has drunk too much, the following remedy could help:

Jeśliś sobie pozwolił i pił co wieczór siła,
Zażyj sierści bestyi, co cię ukąsiła,
To jest popraw nazajutrz, uczujesz ulżenie,
Byle tylko recepta nie szła w zwyczajenie.

If you’ve indulged yourself and drank too much each night,
Take the hair of the beast that bit you, to feel right,
That is, repeat it the next day, and relief you’ll gain,
Just make sure this remedy doesn’t become your bane.⁶⁶

Benedykt Chmielowski wrote thus in *Nowe Ateny* [New Athens]:

Kto się upije winem,
niech klin wybije klinem.

Who gets drunk on wine,
should cure like with like, in time.⁶⁷

If someone has grown tired of a drunk under their roof, they might try the following method to cure them of this rotten habit, like so:

Jeśli chcesz komu wino obrzydzić, aby go nigdy nie pijał, włóż w nie trzy albo cztery węgorzów, a gdy pozdychają, wyjmij je, a wino przecedź, dajże je pić pijanicy opilemu, od tego czasu mu obmierźnie.

If you wish to turn someone off wine, so that they never drink it again, put two or three eels in it, and when they die, take them out, strain the wine and give it to the drunkard; from then on he will be disgusted by wine.⁶⁸

The viability of this method was apparently high, its echoes surviving to this day, since anecdotes about similar curing of drunks, in a slightly modified version, still circulate today.⁶⁹

64 A. Piemontese, *Tajemnice...*, p. 21.

65 See: *Ibidem*, p. 22.

66 *Apteka...*, p. 20.

67 B. Chmielowski, *Nowe Ateny...*, eds. J. and J.J. Lipski (Cracow: 1966), p. 530.

68 A. Piemontese, *Tajemnice...*, p. 22.

69 Here is an example: ‘A drunk’s wife complains to her neighbour about how she can’t stand him anymore. The neighbour responds with a tested method for putting him off vodka: «Pour vodka into the bathtub and drop a dead cat in it. Once your husband sees it, he will never want to have another drink». The wife did as recommended, and when her husband locked himself up in the bathroom and wouldn’t leave for a long time, she peaked through the keyhole and saw an empty bathtub and her husband, wringing out the cat and begging: «Come on, kitty, just one more drop!».’ (As heard).

Popular medical handbooks thus include advice on diseases, health, cosmetics, cooking, confectionery, various crafts and even magic tricks. In our handbooks, the confectionery chapters are dominated by recipes especially for those sweets that could be bought at the drugstore: liqueurs, preserves, vinegars, poppy seed cakes, gingerbread, sugar-coated nuts, candied fruits, figurines made of sugar dough, and confections with rosehip in various forms, as heart-pleasers. Gingerbread was popular in Old Polish cuisine, especially of the Toruń variety. *Compendium medicum* provides the most recipes for baking gingerbread. Here is an example:

Pierniki osobliwe

Weź mąki pszennej łotów 3, cukru utłuczonego i przesianego funtów 2, migdałów na masę utłuczonych funt, cynamonu łotów 4, imbiru 1 i pół łota, gałek muszkatowych 3, żółtków jajowych 10, wina ile potrzeba, zagnieć ciasto, formuj pierniki, pozynuj lukrem i piecz.

Extraordinary gingerbread

Take 3 lots of wheat flour, 2 pounds of crushed and sifted sugar, a pound of ground almonds, 4 lots of cinnamon, one and a half lot of ginger, 3 nutmegs, 10 egg yolks, as much wine as is needed, kneed the dough, form gingerbreads, coat with icing and bake.⁷⁰

Based on recipes for meat dishes, we can reproduce a picture of the purely utilitarian approach of people of that time to animals and of disregard for their suffering. The following recipe for goose may have been added later, as purported by Zbigniew Bela, who wrote a monograph on Alessio Piemontese. It is shocking for its cruelty and, on the other side, for its desire to surprise, amaze and dazzle the feasters.

In order to roast a live goose, pluck its feathers and roast it over a low fire, making sure it does not die. Cool its head with water, feed it apples and baste with fat frequently. The water will cool the insides, the apples will cause the intestines to empty, and the meat will roast:

Wyjmuj ją z ognia i nieśże przed goście. Za każdym razem, gdy jej kto sztukę ukroi, będzie wrzeszczała, gęgała, tak że ją niemal pierwej zjedzą, niżli żywą przestanie być.

Take it off the fire and bring it to the table. Every time someone cuts off a piece of it, it will shriek and squawk, but it will almost be eaten before it is dead.⁷¹

The host can surprise guests not only with impressively prepared food. Also his house, thanks to the tricks provided in the handbooks, can take on a new look and tantalise onlookers with illusions of wealth and mirages. Piemontese offers a number of ways to make a house look as if it is made of gold: how to dye or gild flowers growing in the garden, what to do in order for candles not to blow out, and for fire to keep on burning under water.⁷² Guests should never be bored, and one way to prevent it is to entertain them with tricks, natural wonders (the author rejects

70 *Compendium medicum*, p. 630.

71 A. Piemontese, *Tajemnice...*, p. 340.

72 See: *Ibidem*, p. 344.

magic). Examples of this could be handling molten lead with bare hands, ‘making eggs larger than a man’s head’ or ‘making eggs float in the air’.⁷³ In this last case, the translator allowed himself some scepticism and added a note:

Zostawmy ten sekret tamtym krajom, w którym go doświadczono: bo u nas, kędy nie tak bardzo słońce grzeje, żadne jaje ku górze nie polecą, chociażby mu skrzydła przyprawił.

Let’s leave this secret to those countries where it has been experienced: for here, where the sun doesn’t heat so much, no egg will fly upward, even if we stick wings on it.⁷⁴

And so, handbooks are compendia of not only medical knowledge, but also of tips helpful around the household. This begs the question of who the readers were. We assumed at the beginning that printers intended these books to be read by rich burghers, clergymen and nobility, as they could afford such costly publications. We also know who the authors had in mind, as this is revealed in the dedications. Let us take a closer look at who was, or could have been, the actual reader.

Firstly, whoever perused these handbooks did not have to read in Latin, as they were released in Polish. He or she had to have some basic knowledge and skills in cooking, making tinctures, herbal waters,⁷⁵ oils, at least some grasp of astrology, although the basics of this particular science were included in the very first herbals, written by people without any higher education, and thus intended for people of similar status. Syrenius’ herbal is thus the most ambitious work, which poses the biggest challenge to the readers in terms of what they are expected to know. Syrenius requires an understanding of astrology, of some alchemy, the skill of making oils, herbal waters, ointments and patches, as well as knowledge of anatomy, as he does not cover this topic in his work, even though he provides recipes for ‘tested medicines’.

Marcin of Urzędów, whose purpose was to correct Falimirz’s errors, dedicates his work to the simple man. He addresses his readers as if a doctor would address a patient, which is meant to inspire trust. In imparting knowledge, Marcin of Urzędów adjusts his style to the intellectual capacities of the intended reader, which

73 Later repeated in Chmielowski’s *Nowe Ateny*.

74 A. Piemontese, *Tajemnice...*, p. 339. There is no such comment accompanying descriptions of diseases, even though Śleszkowski was a doctor.

75 ‘Aczkołwiekem nadmienię o sprawowaniu wódek, o paleniu, a wszakże nieraz dostatecznie nie potrzeba, a to zwłaszcza nie wypisałem, jako alembik przyprawować i wszystko naczynie ku paleniu, albowiem by było przedłużenie i próżne pisanie, ale gdy kto będzie chciał wódkę palić, musi się oczywiście nauczyć od tych, którzy pierwsi umieją, albowiem jedni palą w alembikach, a drudzy po prostu. Już tedy będę pisał o mocy wódek i ziół rozmaitych’ [‘Although I have mentioned the preparation of waters and distillation, it will often not be enough. In particular, I have not described how to prepare the alembic and all the vessels for distillation, because that would be too long and unnecessary to write. But when someone wants to distill waters, he must, of course, learn it from those who already know how to do it, because some distill in alembics and others in a simpler way. Thus, I will now move on to writing about the power of waters and various herbs’] (S. Falimirz, *O ziołach i o mocy ich*, p. 3).

can be clearly seen when, discussing one of the herbs, he gives a lecture on intestines.⁷⁶ This author also dispels superstitions and beliefs about diseases, writing thus to the ‘simple man’:

bo częstokroć zwracają młodzieńcy abo dziewki takowe robaki, i powiedają niewiasty, że to z zadanego jadu, z którego się zamnożyły jaszczurki; i mówią, że gniazda jaszczurek wyrzucił wracając.

for often young men or maidens expel such worms, and the women say it is the effect of venom, from which lizard multiply; and they say that it is the nests of the lizards that they expel.⁷⁷

Thus, the reader is a person devoid of any broader medical knowledge, but at least with some common sense and access to a kitchen. The handbooks also address problems such as roasting old meat, fixing soured wine or rancid oil, baking gingerbread and making preserves, vinegar, perfume, creams and depilatory preparations. It is unlikely that men did any of the foregoing. In order to make medicines, one needs a laboratory, and in homes the kitchen served this purpose well enough, so making remedies and other things needed in the household was handled by women.

There are comments in the handbooks about the healing of the sick by women. For example, Marcin of Urzędów mentions that ladies in Cracow bought their herbs from peasant women and made their own remedies at homes. He advises them to buy from trusted sellers, or they might get poisoned.⁷⁸ There are more such comments from this author, who was a doctor in Cracow.

Also, when woodcuts adorning Polish herbals depict people, they mostly show women making herbal preparations, collecting herbs, trading them, making oils, waters, nursing the sick – as in the herbals of Falimirz and Siennik. One of the more interesting woodcuts depicts two doctors with halos around their heads and a woman reaching into a cloth with collected plants. Since the engravings are not captioned, one can only infer whom they depict. As the two doctors are repre-

76 ‘Przy tym masz wiedzieć, prostaku, że [...] w człowiecze sześcióraki jest jelito, miejscem i sposobem naznaczone, aczkolwiek nierozdzielnie. Pierwsze, które od żołądka idzie na dwanaście palców, zową *duodenum*; po niej drugie dwie cienkie, jedno zową *icanum*, jakoby rzekł: «zawždy próżne» drugie *illeos* zową, po polsku kielbaśnice oboje, a w tych bywa boleść, którą zową *illiacca*: bywa to ciężkie gryzienie koło pępka. Czwarte jelito jest *colon*, które zową jątznica i w którym bywa kolika. Piąte [...] kątnica, szóste *rectum*, to jest proste, które idzie aż do samej dziury w stolcu’ [‘Moreover, you should know, simpleton, that [...] there are six types of intestines in a human, designated by location and function, although inseparable. The first, which goes from the stomach for twelve fingers, is called the *duodenum*; after it, the second are two thin ones, one called *icanum*, meaning «always empty», and the other called *illeos*, in Polish both referred to with a term implying resemblance to sausages, and in these occurs the pain known as *illiacca*: it is a severe gnawing around the navel. The fourth intestine is the *colon*, in which colic occurs. The fifth [...] is the cecum, the sixth is the rectum, which is straight, extending to the very opening of the anus’] (Marcin of Urzędów, *Herbarz Polski*, p. 30).

77 Ibidem, p. 5.

78 See: Ibidem, p. 86.

sented with halos, they are probably Saints Cosmas and Damian, the patron saints of medicine. The woman bending down, on the other hand, is an herbalist, carrying her harvest, perhaps selling herbs to the doctor on the right. This woodcut would therefore place the woman alongside the patrons of medicine as the one who helps them heal.

In the works of Spiczyński and Marcin of Urzędów (as some of the engravings from Spiczyński's herbal were included in his *Herbarz Polski*) women, old and young, appear alongside herbs, which are sometimes their size, but there are no such woodcuts showing men in a similar situation. Men generally appear in the role of medics, barbers, surgeons, astronomers and apothecaries, who were turned to for help when illness could not be dealt with by home means. Although the authors of medical handbooks dedicated them to people of different estates and genders, I believe that most readers were women. This was, after all, the only way for them to get the education they needed. Only some books were intended exclusively for women; this was probably the case with the Piemontese's *Secrets*, as Zbigniew Bela suggests.⁷⁹

What did it look like in Poland? Syrenius dedicated his work to

lekarzom, aptekarzom, cyrulikom, barbirzom, roztrucharzom, końskim lekarzom, mastalerzom, ogrodnikom, kuchmistrzom, kucharzom, synkarzom, gospodarzom, mamkom, paniom, panom i tym wszystkim, którzy się kochają i obzie-rajają w lekarstwach.

medics, apothecaries, barbers, horse traders, horse doctors, stable masters, gardeners, cooks, alewives, bar keepers, wet nurses, ladies, maidens and all those who love and dabble in medications.

Women, as we can see, were listed at the very end of this lengthy list of potential readers. Yet we know that over many centuries, women were traditionally expected to have medical knowledge, which was passed on within the family:

Matka uczyła córki, uczono się z książek, od sąsiadek, już umiejąca szła dopiero za mąż, przyzywała wreszcie zdolną osobę, ceniąc ją i nagradzając.

Mothers taught daughters, they read books, swapped information with neighbours; a woman who tied the knot already knew all this, or called upon a more knowledgeable person, who was appreciated and rewarded.⁸⁰

And so, even if the author did not intend their handbooks to be read exclusively by women, they were still probably their largest audience. After all, in these books we find a description of what women dealt with on a daily basis: kitchen and household management. Noticeable in Piemontese's work are imprecise meas-

79 'Ladies of the upper classes usually had in those days recipe books similar to Piemontese's *Secrets*, and with their help they made, or oversaw the making of medications for the home, cosmetics, confections and so on. These skills, by the way, were one of the elements of the upbringing of girls from so-called 'good homes' at the time.' (Z. Bela, *Aleksego Pedemontana „Tajemnice”*, p. 109).

80 Ł. Gołębiowski, *Domy i dwory polskie* [Polish homes and manor houses] (Warsaw: 1830), p. 26.

urements, sensational names and mysterious recipes, acting psychologically on the reader as a form of advertising gimmick, as well as recipes for cosmetics, dishes and... curing drunks.

Interestingly, the author takes into account the financial resources of the potential patient. His *Secrets* offer recipes for the wealthy and for the poor, which is often signalled in the title of the recipe:

Wódka wypalona z dębowego liścia, bardzo wielką moc ma przeciw bieguncce, dla ubogich.

Water distilled from oak leaves, very efficient against diarrhoea, for the poor.⁸¹

For example, when discussing syphilis, Piemontese includes a prescription in Latin to be filled by the rich at the pharmacy,⁸² while for the poor he provides home remedies.⁸³ He takes a similar approach with other diseases.

Thus, women, who for centuries had been in charge of treating the ailments of household members, only called on the assistance of the more learned when they could not cope on their own.

They generally sent a servant to the doctor if they didn't want to spend too much money on bringing a medic to the bedside of a sick person. In *Problemata*, Glaber even explains why doctors make conclusions about the patient's state based on the urine alone,⁸⁴ without seeing the sick person. Urine,

gdy jest wilgotny, z pokarmu, idąc ku dołu, począwszy od ust, wiele członków przemija, od których bierze farbę taką i owaką, jako od krwi czerwoność, od flegmy białość etc. A zwłaszcza więcej bierze od tej wilgoty, która w człowiecze najwięcej panuje. Takież męcherz, gdyż jest rzecz ciężka a subtylna, łatwiej się wpuszcza i przyjmuje farbę wilgoty w ciele panującej.

since it is moist, deriving from food, descending downwards starting from the mouth, passes through many members, from which it takes on various colours, such as redness from blood, whiteness from phlegm, etc. And especially, it takes more from that moisture which predominates most in the human body. Likewise, the bladder, being a heavy and subtle thing, more easily absorbs and assumes the colour of the prevailing moisture in the body.⁸⁵

Explaining it in this way, it is easier to reach the reader, who is probably supposed to decide whether to send for a medic during an illness, or just send him the patient's urine, without worrying about the effectiveness of the treatment.

Sometimes, comical situations arose from the inability of a scholar to communicate with a simple man, as evidenced by the crude rhyme in Falimirz's herbal:

81 A. Piemontese, *Tajemnice...*, p. 176.

82 See: *Ibidem*, p. 116.

83 See: *Ibidem*, pp. 117–120.

84 Handbooks also contain chapters or separate treatises on how to carry out such an examination without the help of a doctor.

85 A. Glaber, *Gadki...*, p. 60.

Przyszedł prostak do doktora,
Przyniósł mu w garnku znamion:
„Oglądaj, panie miły doktorze,
Boć mój pan schorzał jako gorźe”.
Po tym onego doktor zapytał,
Jestli pan stolce albo wiatry miewał.
Rzekł chłop, iż wiatru dosyć będzie,
Bo drzwi, okna otworzą wszędzie.
„Bździ, sra, pierdzi?” – doktor rzecze k niemu,
Dopiero chłopek wyrozumiał onemu.
Ta cię z tego wystrzec może figura,
Że cię nie będą mieć za prostego gbura.

A simpleton came to the doctor,
Brought a jar with signs to ponder⁸⁶:
‘Examine, dear doctor, please,
For my master is as ill as can be.’
Then the doctor asked him straight,
If the man had stools or passed wind of late.
The peasant said, ‘There’s wind aplenty,
For doors and windows open freely.’
‘Does he poop, does he fart?’ – the doctor asked in part,
Only then did the peasant understand his heart.
Let this figure caution you with care,
So you won’t be seen as an uncouth bear.⁸⁷

Sometimes, misunderstanding resulted from the fact that patients misdiagnosed themselves:

W jelicie *colon* bywa kolika, ciężka niemoc, którą tak zową od jelita *colon*, nie jako mówią prości, iż gdy czują na którymkolwiek miejscu przypierającą niemoc albo ból, tedy wnet zowią koliką, więc poszlą sługę do doktora, prosząc porady na kolikę, ano będzie pleura albo boleść w nerkach, abo co inszego: doktor mniema według powieści być kolikę; daje lekarstwa gorące, ano więcej zepsuje; potym winują doktora, ano każdy ma winować swe głupstwo i swą skąpość.

In the *colon* intestine, there is colic, a severe ailment so named from the *colon* intestine, not as the common folk say, who, when they feel any pressing ailment or pain in any place, immediately call it colic. Thus, they send a servant to the doctor, seeking advice for colic, whereas it may be pleurisy or kidney pain, or something else. The doctor, believing it to be colic according to their words, prescribes hot remedies, which may worsen the condition; thereafter, they blame the doctor, whereas each should blame his own foolishness and stinginess.⁸⁸

Here, too, we can see that treatment progress often depended on the patient’s affluence. Thrifty housewives probably begrudged the money to bring in a doctor when they could get a diagnosis from a doctor’s visual inspection of urine, which they followed up with home therapy they learned about from the handbooks. In most cases, as the authors of herbals tell us, there was no access to medics or pharmacies, especially in the provinces, so each manor house had its own home dispensary and a person in charge of it. The nobility usually had two types of these dispensaries: for the health and for the pleasure (the pantry). The housekeeper, wife or daughter of a landowner,

Syreniusza, Marcina z Urzędowa lub inny zielnik przed sobą mając, przewertowawszy go nieraz, umiejąc go prawie na pamięć, gdzie go nie było, z przepisów lub z głowy bieglejsza, od wiosny do późnej jesieni to na alembiku pędziła wody, wódki, smażyła sadła, zbierała tłustości, robiła dryjakwie, octy, suszyła kwiaty, liście, owoce, korzenie. Z królestwa zwierzę-

with the help of the Syrenius’ or Marcin of Urzędów’s herbal, or another such book before her, having often leafed through it and knowing it nearly by heart, if it was not at hand, adeptly followed its recipes or her own memory. From spring until late autumn, she distilled waters and spirits in the alembic, rendered fats, collected greases, made concoctions, vinegars, dried flowers, leaves, fruits, and roots. From the animal kingdom, there were

86 A sick man’s urine.

87 S. Falimirz, *O ziołach i o mocy ich*, p. 2.

88 Ibidem, p. 30.

cego bywały wody i wódki: z pieszków młodych, zajączków, królików, bocianów itd., w alembik włożonych i wodą lub wódką nalanych; z roślin, od naszej konwalii zaczawszy i róży, dzięglu, ruty, piołunu, ile ich tylko znać która mogła, lub wyczytać albo zasłyszeć od kogo. Nie zapomniano tu wody marcowej, z śniegu topionej, płeć piękną utrzymującej lub chroniącej od piegów; pierwszej wody deszczowej, albo w czasie grzmotów i piorunów zebranej. Sadła i tłustości, poczynając od ludzkiego, były psie, ze świń, gęsi, niedźwiedzi, borsuków, zające, wilków i lisów. Dyrjakwie z wszelkich gadów: żab, węży, jaszczurek, śmielsze robiły w domu, albo sprowadzano weneckie. Octy nade wszystko [...] i zioła wszelkiego rodzaju.

waters and spirits: from young dogs, hares, rabbits, storks, etc., placed in the alembic and soaked in water or spirits. From plants, starting with our lily of the valley and rose, angelica, rue, wormwood, as many as she could recognize, read about, or hear from someone. March water, melted from snow, preserving or protecting the fair complexion from freckles, was not forgotten here, nor the first rainwater collected during thunderstorms. The fats and greases, beginning with human, included those from dogs, pigs, geese, bears, badgers, hares, wolves, and foxes. Concoctions from all manner of reptiles: frogs, snakes, lizards, were made at home by the bolder ones or imported from Venice. Vinegars above all [...], and herbs of every kind.⁸⁹

Depending on their social status, women collected herbs in addition to dealing with medical treatment, traded them, competing with apothecaries, and brought help where pharmacies and doctors did not exist. In general, the trade in herbs was carried out by peasant women as mentioned by Marcin of Urzędów, who accuses them of fraud. The author of *Compendium medicum* also addresses them, but his attitude to female herbalists is inconsistent. On the one hand, he suggests to readers that they have proven remedies against illnesses that are unavailable to ordinary people, while on the other hand he indulges in derision, even in the form of a rhyming satire:

Mają baby leki przedziwne,
Różnym chorobom bardzo przeciwnie:
Dziegiecie, smalce, woski topione
I różne chwasty z nimi smażone,
Korzenia, zioła, kwiecica prażone,
Kąpieli, plastry, trunki warzone
I konfekciki, soki smażone:
Wódki, krystery im doświadczone,
Którymi leczą tak doskonale
Lekarki baby, bardzo zuchwałe.
Gdzie się uczyły nauk lekarskich,
Kto ich wyćwiczył sztuk aptekarskich?
Co baba, doktor; skąd promocyja?
Czy od kądzieli, gdy prządzion zwija?
Nie zna natury ani choroby,
Daje na domysł, doznaje próby.
Wszędy się wrazi, jakby co złęgo
Uczyć medyka, choćby bieglego.
Racyja za nic medyka stoi,
Baba uporna androny stroi;
Gdy się przylepi szeptem do ucha.
Zwiedziony radą chory jej słucha.
Chociaż przemawia, kryśli i chucha,

Women have remedies most rare,
For many ailments they prepare:
Tar, lard, waxes melted fine
With various weeds in fat they combine,
Roots, herbs, flowers scorched in line,
Baths, plasters, brews of different kind,
And confections, juices stewed in brine:
Spirits, enemas their skill enshrined,
With which they heal so excellently,
These bold women healers, ever so deftly.
Where have they studied the medical arts,
Who has taught them apothecary parts?
Every woman, a doctor; whence promotion?
From the distaff, when spinning in motion?
They know not nature nor disease's way,
They guess, they test, come what may.
Everywhere they intrude, as if to claim
To teach the physician, no matter his fame.
The doctor's reason they hold in disdain,
The stubborn woman spreads nonsense plain;
When she whispers close to the ear,
The patient misled holds her counsel dear.
Though she speaks, mutters, and blows,

89 Ł. Gołębiowski, *Domy i dwory polskie*, pp. 25–26.

Mruczy i żegna, nad głową dmucha,
 Nie dba na gusła człek omamiony,
 Ze ciężko grzeszy od bab zwiedziony.
 Wmawiają w chorych dziwne choroby:
 Suchoty, uraz, wzdęcia wątroby.
 Czary, kołtony i podwionienia,
 I inne różne do podziwienia.
 Kry jakieś w bokach, które smarują,
 Trą, rozcierają, one sznurują.
 I utrząśnieni zawsze wmawiają
 W białą pleć, czym ją oszukiwają,
 Na które patrzą, kurzą, smarują
 I różne plastry jej wynajdują,
 Ściągają boki i one prażą,
 Aż drugiej oczy na wierzch wylażą.
 Uroki, glisty w dzieci wmawiają.
 Na nie przemierzle mikstury dają.
 Gdzie bies nie może, tam babę wrazi,
 Na każdą sprawę ona narazi.
 Jak starym wiechciem dziury zatyka
 Babami, gdy ich w każdą rzecz wtyka.
 Więc się ich chronić jak ode złego.
 Jak bazyliuszka jadowitego.
 Abyś' dostąpił zdrowia miłego,
 Zażyj medyka rady biegłego.
 Nie daj się zwodzić babskiej chytrości,
 Przez które szatan wypełnia złości.
 Oczyść swe serce grzechem zmazane,
 Miej ufność w Bogu, że pożądane
 Otrzymasz zdrowie, w pomocy Jego,
 Gdy serce swoje skłonisz do Niego.

Mumbles, blesses, over the head she bows,
 Heedless of charms, the man ensnared,
 Gravely sins, by the woman's guile impaired.
 They impose on the sick strange maladies:
 Consumption, injury, liver's swelling unease.
 Spells, tangles, and bodily distress,
 And other wonders they profess.
 They smear the sides with some potion,
 Rub and massage with great devotion,
 Always suggesting a shaking affliction
 To the fair sex, their deceitful conviction.
 On which they gaze, they smoke, they smear,
 And find various plasters near,
 They bind the sides and roast them tight,
 Until the eyes of another pop with fright.
 They tell of charms and worms in children dear,
 And give vile mixtures without a peer.
 Where the devil cannot go, he sends a woman,
 She risks every task, with no forewoman.
 Like an old rag stuffing every hole,
 The woman interferes in every role.
 Therefore, avoid them as something dire,
 Like the venomous basilisk's fire.
 To gain the pleasant health you seek,
 Take the advice of a skilled medic quick.
 Do not be deceived by women's craft,
 Through which Satan's mischief is oft draft.
 Cleanse your heart from sinful stain,
 Trust in God, that health you'll gain,
 In His help your heart must confide,
 And you'll receive health, with Him as your guide.⁹⁰

What the state of the art of these female healers without education looked like can be inferred from works devoted strictly to female problems and books written specifically for them, as well as surviving period sources and memoirs. As Łukasz Gołębiowski wrote:

Czy każda rzecz z tych leków pomogła zawsze, nie do nas śledzić należy; wszakże troskliwość ta o zdrowie poddanych i domowników zaszczyt przynosiła sercu.

Whether each of these remedies always proved efficacious, it is not our place to investigate; however, this concern for the health of one's dependents and household brought honour to the heart.⁹¹

What emerges from the handbooks is a picture of a woman in *orbe interiori*, struggling with everyday life, the weakness of her own and her loved ones' bodies, following the customs, beliefs and fashion of her time. These books give us one of the more interesting images of women at the time, because they were treated here as legitimate recipients of the text, and as a result, there is very rarely the negative emotional tone (as in the rhyme cited above) that prevails in many writings, espe-

90 *Compendium medicum*, p. 247.

91 Ł. Gołębiowski, *Domy i dwory polskie*, p. 26.

cially didactic ones, directed to women or written about them. This time women are treated seriously, as are their problems with their own bodies, the home and the health of others.

These handbooks paint a portrait of a 'lady' (of course this is only true of the higher social strata – the nobility and rich burghers) who manages the house, is a fully-fledged member of the family, with her own area of responsibility and often a major influence on the health of household members. The role of a healer and apothecary creates an aura of mystery around her that surrounds wise women – 'wiedźmy', thus earning her the respect due to the original Polish meaning of the word: 'she who knows'.

*Translated by Maja Jaros
verified by Maria Helena Bryś*

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Apteka dla tych, co jej ani lekarza nie mają, albo sposób konserwowania zdrowia, mianowicie dla tych spisana, co lekarza nie mają, apteki nie znają, to jest Szkoła Salernitańska z łacińskiego wiersza metrem ojczystym przełożona w podróży z nienawiści próżnowania, a z miłości ku ubogim chorym po wsiach mieszkającym do druku podana przez tego, który jest ziemianom rodaków kochający, który oprócz dyskursu o dawności, zacności, autorach i edycjach Szkoły Salernitańskiej dołożył kilka ciekawych do konserwacji zdrowia ludzkiego i gospodarstwa należących informacji, tłum. H. Olszowski, Warszawa 1640.

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ABSTRACT

The subject of the article is an analysis of the image of a woman taking care of her mind, body and home contained in medical advice books (herbariums, e.g. Stefan Falimirz, Szymon Syreniusz, Marcin Siennik, Hieronim Spiczyński, Marcin from Urzędów, encyclopaedic compendia – Benedykt Chmielowski's *Nowe Ateny* [New Athens]), created in Polish in the 16th–18th centuries for a wide audience. There were also works addressed primarily to female readers (e.g. Andrzej Glaber's Aristotle-inspired *Gadki o składności członków człowieczych* [Considerations about disposition of the human body] of 1535; medical and cosmetic advice in Siennik and Sebastian Śleszkowski's translations of Aleksei Pedemontan's Italian *Tajemnice*

[Secrets] of 1563; treatises on midwifery). In these, women are treated as full recipients of the text, so there is rarely an emotional or moralising tone towards them.

KEYWORDS: woman, medicine, Old Polish literature, handbooks
