

Burchardus de Monte Sion, 13th century.

Descriptio seu declaratio terrae sanctae... (epitome of Burchardus' Descriptio terrae sanctae, author unknown).

MS 707.

France (in Latin)

Fifteenth century

MS 707 is an epitome of the Descriptio terrae sanctae by the Dominican monk, Burchardus (Brocardus, Borcardus, Berghadus) of Mount Zion; the full title of the epitome is Descriptio seu declaratio terrae sanctae et civitatum vicinarum et remotarum et regnorum quasi totius orbis, as given at the beginning of the text. The Descriptio by Burchardus is noted for the accuracy of his descriptions of the monuments and geography of the Holy Land and for the remarkable clarity and tolerance of his statements about the various races and religions inhabiting the area in the thirteenth century. It became the basis of many later works on the same subject, among them the present manuscript. This epitome of Burchardus' work is considerably reorganized with much detail about historical events and description of monuments omitted. The result is clearly intended to be more a geographical than a cultural or historical guide to the Holy Land. Its sumptuousness and size, however, preclude its having been intended for use on a pilgrimage. Burchardus' Descriptio was abridged, rather, for inclusion in a larger geographical compendium. Other portions of this larger work are now in the possession of the Art Institute of Chicago (MS 15.334, entitled De locis ac mirabilis mundi) and the Toledo Museum of Art, Toledo,

Ohio (MS 35, incipit Sequens descriptio orbis tam terrae quam maris sumpta est ex quodam libro de proprietatibus rerum).

The title of the Toledo fragment, which consists of five leaves originally preceding the Burchardus epitome, indicates that the other texts in this compendium were probably also abridgements of geographical works.

Burchardus' original Descriptio is organized on the basis of the division of the Holy Land into several sectors (divisiones) defined by lines radiating from the city of Acre. Following his description of the geographical sectors are three concluding chapters dealing with general subjects concerning the Holy Land: the length and breadth of the area (calculated from the determination of the areas occupied by the twelve Biblical tribes), a description of the flora and fauna of the Holy Land, and a description of the races and religions represented in the Holy Land. The epitome follows Burchardus' organization up to the beginning of his expansive description of Jerusalem (fol. 5v, col. 2, at the illuminated versal I). At this point the Jerusalem description is omitted in order to continue with the description of Jerusalem's wider geographical sector. Only the first nine MS lines after the above mentioned versal I are retained from the Jerusalem description, after which a paragraph mark indicates the resumption of the sectional geography which concludes with the explicit in vermilion ink, hec de terre sancta et locis eius sufficient (fol. 7r, col. 1). The epitome to this point corresponds to chapters 1-8 and 10 (pp. 1-65 and 93-97) in the

edition of the original Descriptio by the Palestine Pilgrims' Text Society (hereafter PPTS; see Bibliographical Note).

The epitomizer now inserts selected discussions from the Jerusalem description previously skipped (folios 7r-8v): the description of the eight gates of Jerusalem beginning with a quote from Jacobus de Vitriacus (cardinal, d. 1240; PPTS pp. 79-82); the description of the mountains around Jerusalem (PPTS pp. 84-93); the description of the pools in Jerusalem concluding with the explicit in vermilion ink at the end of folio 8v, hec de hiis quae extra Iherusalem sunt (PPTS pp. 71-75); and the description of Mount Calvary and its vicinity concluding with a summary of the dimensions of the city (PPTS pp. 76-79). From this point (fol. 8v, col. 2, line 12) the epitomizer resumes following the organization of Burchardus, abbreviating his three concluding chapters (PPTS pp. 99-end). The epitome ends with an abbreviated extract from Burchardus' proem, whose concluding credit to Jacobus de Vitriacus as the source of much of its content gives the misleading impression that most of the content of the entire epitome stems from Jacobus de Vitriacus.

The manuscript is illuminated with seven polychrome and gold versals and six vermilion and blue versals marking major divisions in the text of Burchardus' Descriptio corresponding to divisions in the full, original text. Vermilion and blue foliate and linear designs serve as line fillers. Paragraph marks are alternately blue and vermilion, with yellow wash highlighting the first letters of new paragraphs. The first

folio of the Burchardus text is especially lavishly illuminated with a gold band descending from the illuminated versal to the bottom margin framing the left edge of the first column of text. The bottom margin is filled with a rectangular area of stylized and naturalistic foliage and gold leaf "flowers", framed by a narrow line of vermilion.

Portions of 2 quires: the last three leaves of quire A (fols. 1-3; the previous 5 folios are at the Toledo Museum of Art) and quire B complete (fols. 4-11). Double leaves with signatures B1-B4 marked on the lower right recto of the first four leaves of the quire; catchword on the last folio, verso, bottom margin.

11 folios, 48.7 x 38.0 cm., hinged into the binding (gatherings not intact). Two columns, 41.0 x 12.5 cm., 3.1 cm. between columns.

Modern binding, maroon morocco half panel, stamped in gold on spine: "BROCARDUS - DESCRIPTIO SEU DECLARATIO TERRAE SANCTAE."

Written probably in Paris for the Sorbonne. Sold by G. Libri (London, March 28, 1859) to Sir Thomas Phillipps (Phillipps number unknown; no. 407 in Libri catalogue, but not listed among the Libri acquisitions in Munby's edition of Sir T. Phillipps' catalogue). Sold to Edwards in the Sotheby sale of Phillipps manuscripts (London, 1911, no. 457). Obtained from W. M. Voynich, 1915, gift of F. W. Gunsaulus.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE:

1. Burchard of Mount Sion, A Description of the Holy Land in The Library of the Palestine Pilgrims' Text Society, vol. 12 (London, 1896).
2. Seymour De Ricci & W. J. Wilson, Census of Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts in the United States and Canada (New York, 1935) vol. 1, p. 596 and vol. 2, p. 2281; cf. vol. 1, p. 514 (Art Institute of Chicago MS 15.334) and vol. 2, p. 1977 (Toledo Museum of Art MS 35).
3. "The Voynich Collection," Bulletin of the Art Institute of Chicago, vol. 9 (1915) pp. 97-100.

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