

Notes from the John Martin Rare Book Room February 2013

SAINT HILDEGARD (1098-1179). *Physica*. Strasbourg, 1533.



Hildegard, called Hildegard of Bingen, was eight years old when her family placed her in a nearby Benedictine convent where she subsequently became a nun. She founded and was Abbess of a convent near Bingen, Germany. Hildegard's writings are primarily mystical and theological; however, she also wrote several medical works. Her medical knowledge was acquired by reading, observation, and her duties in the convent which included care and treatment of other nuns as well as travelers and villagers. Hildegard shows how clergy of the time practiced medicine. She included

time-tested formulations, numerous folk remedies, and her observations of diseases and cures. She lists the therapeutic merits of over 200 plants, 50 trees, and 20 precious stones. She includes the medicinal value of varieties of fish, birds, animals, reptiles, and metals. She was aware that lead and brass were poisonous and that iron and copper were valuable constituents of tonics. The wood-block illustrations have little relationship to her textual material. The blocks depict a seated patient surrounded by physicians and an attendant and a traditional wound-man.



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