The Politics and Poetics of *Morbus Gallicus* in the German Lands (1495 - 1520)

by

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INTRODUCTION

Often referred to as a plague and sometimes the plague of the Renaissance, the French pox came into historical focus at the end of the fifteenth century and became immediately known as morbus gallicus (and its synonyms and vernacular equivalents) in the German lands. It was named differently in other countries: “le mal de Naples” in France, the Spanish disease in Holland and Portugal, the German disease in Poland, the Polish disease in Russia and the Portuguese disease in India, earning it the appellation of the “neighbor’s disease.” The very term “syphilis” appeared only in the 1530s when Girolamo Fracastoro used it for the first time in his poem Syphilis sive morbus gallicus. It took a long time, however, for the new name to gain its current prevalence: morbus gallicus and its vernacular equivalents remained much more common in the German lands throughout the sixteenth century. This dissertation argues that the name and phenomenon of morbus gallicus was a composite of interconnected narratives of French-ness and German-ness from across various genres, which in addition to medical treatises included astrological, literary, polemical, and poetical works.

The name, morbus gallicus, was accorded to the disease by the confrontation between the French King Charles VIII and Maximilian I over Naples in 1494-1495. It was readily accepted by chroniclers and even though heated debates broke out in the medical community about the disease’s “correct name,” morbus gallicus and its vernacular variations remained the most popular designations of the disease in the period under study. The Neapolitan expedition of Charles VIII not only bestowed a name upon the disease, but also influenced the medical discussions of its causes. An overwhelming majority of authors dealt with in this dissertation regarded morbus gallicus as the disease of another people, the French, from whom (but –

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importantly – not necessarily by) it spread to the German lands and other countries. They repeatedly presented *morbus gallicus* as God’s punishment for the acts of disobedience of Charles VIII towards Emperor Maximilian I. Explanations of its astrological and humoral causes also pointed to the French as the first targets of the disease. In non-medical texts, *morbus gallicus* was often employed as a topos of French-ness or foreignness, and used to wage attacks on goods and practices that were deemed morally corrupt, as well as to define the normative German-ness.

France, the country after which the disease was named, played the role of one of the most important “archetypical Others” for the formation of German late medieval national identities, comparable only to that of Rome. Having emerged at a time marked by an increase in attempts to define what it meant to be “German,” *morbus gallicus* was soon incorporated into the formation of German identities which were defined in antithesis to the imagined French-ness. The rediscovery of writings of Antiquity and their reintroduction into the learned culture, along with the wars of Emperor Maximilian I abroad and his ambitions as a universal ruler, all framed *morbus gallicus* as a foreign disease, a symbol of all things French and foreign troubling the German lands.

As this dissertation demonstrates, the association between the French and this new disease was maintained in a variety of genres, including medical treatises, literary and poetical works, chronicles, and astrological prognostications and relied upon existing perceptions of

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French-ness and German-ness. Thus, *morbus gallicus* was a palimpsest\(^4\) of intertextual narratives of German-ness and French-ness. The lack of contemporary discussions of the name of the English sweating sickness, yet another "national" illness, a respiratory disease which swept across the German lands in the late 1520s\(^5\) and which, unlike the French pox, was lethal,\(^6\) is another indication that the French pox represents a seminal case.

Despite the importance of *morbus gallicus* for the formation of German national identities, its role in late medieval narratives of French-ness and German-ness has escaped scholarly focus.\(^7\) My dissertation aims to fill this gap by examining how German medical and non-medical writers in the first decades since its outbreak framed the French-ness of *morbus gallicus* with the help of explanations of its origins and causes.

**Review of scholarship**

The first scholarly publications on the history of the French disease appeared in the early twentieth century and were aimed at answering two major questions: where did the disease come from and when did it appear in Europe for the first time.\(^8\) Karl Sudhoff (1876-
1938), the metaphorical “founding father of medical history,” as well as the literal founder of
the Leipzig Institute for the History of Medicine (renamed Karl-Sudhoff-Institut in 1938) and
of the journal Archiv für Geschichte der Medizin (Sudhoff-Archiv since 1922), argued that the
disease had been known in the Old World since Antiquity under various different names, an
opinion shared by Karl Johann Proksch (1840-1923), a specialist in skin diseases from
Vienna. Proksch’s and Sudhoff’s view was contested by a German dermatologist and
theoretician of the new science of sexuality (Sexualwissenschaft) Iwan Bloch (1872-1922). Bloch considered “syphilis” to be unknown prior to the Renaissance and believed that
Columbus had brought it to Europe from the Americas. The next most comprehensive work
on the history of venereal disease did not appear until the 1980s, during the AIDS epidemic.
Claude Quétel’s Le mal de Naples, Histoire du Syphilis offers an overview of the history of
“syphilis” starting from the 1490s to the 1980s, but the period that mostly interests me is
covered only in the first chapter. The Great Pox, an invaluable study by Jon Arrizabalaga, John
Henderson, and Roger French marked a shift from seeing the French pox as part of the long

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11 Johann Karl Proksch in Österreichisches Bibliographisches Lexikon 8 (Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences, 1983), 303-304; Stein, Negotiating the French Pox, 8-10. Proksch’s Die Litteratur über die Venerischen Krankheiten remains the most comprehensive bibliography of writings on the French pox from the fifteenth to the nineteenth centuries. See Johann Karl Proksch, Die Litteratur über die Venerischen Krankheiten (Bonn: Verlag von Peter Hanstein, 1889). Also see Idem, Die Geschichte der Venerischen Krankheiten; eine Studie (Bonn: Hanstein, 1895).
15 Arrizabalaga, Henderson, and French, The Great Pox. The authors focus mostly on the French pox in Italy; only one chapter is dedicated to “the case of Germany.” Also see on the French pox in the German lands by the
history of syphilis to distinguishing between the two. Claudia Stein’s *Negotiating the French Pox* continued the methodological approach of separating the histories of the French pox and syphilis, and was the first book dedicated specifically to German early modern treatises of the French pox. She combined that analysis with the examination of hospital records at Augsburg, defining her goal as the reconstruction of “the negotiated ‘reality’ of the pox.” Stein focuses on ten vernacular treatises on the French disease published in the German lands between 1496 and 1620, including the vernacular treatises by Joseph Grünpeck, Alexander Seitz, and Ulrich von Hutten, analysed in this dissertation. In the German context, the writings on the French disease by Joseph Grünpeck, Ulrich von Hutten, and Dirk van Ulsen, as well as the debate


over the causes of the French pox in Leipzig in late fifteenth century\textsuperscript{20} have received particular attention in the past decades, as have responses of public institutions to the French pox in the early modern German lands.\textsuperscript{21}

The national aspect of the French pox has not gone unnoticed. According to the medical historian Owsei Temkin, “syphilis was not the only disease to be named after neighbouring lands, but with no other did this occur to such a pronounced degree. And this, I think, is no accident. These names express a national hatred unthinkable in a time without national consciousness.”\textsuperscript{22} His thoughts are echoed by Susan Sontag in her seminal essay “AIDS and its Metaphors.” Sontag regards syphilis as one of a whole group of epidemic diseases (along with leprosy and later AIDS), characterized by similar distinct metaphors. According to her, early perceptions of the French pox were similar to those of AIDS, particularly its metaphor of “collectively invasive” and blame for immoral behavior of sufferers from the disease.\textsuperscript{23}

Since Sontag, a number of scholars have studied the French disease in the light of discussions of “self” and “other,” focusing primarily on England, Italy, and Spain. Scholars of Early Modern England have produced the largest amount of works on the subject.\textsuperscript{24} Winfried


\textsuperscript{22} Owsei Temkin, “Syphilis and Morality,” in The Double Face of Janus and Other Essays in the History of Medicine by Owsei Temkin (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1977), 473.


Schleiner, Margaret Healy, Kevin Siena, Christi Sumich, and Louis F. Qualitiere together with William W. E. Slichts have examined medical as well as polemical and literary texts and established that women were often treated as a source of contagion and threat to the body politic in Elizabethan England. Jonathan Gil Harris added Jews, Catholics and “witches” to the list and also examined the use of the French disease in discussions on national trade in early modern England, arguing that the French disease was perceived as “an exotic and dangerous commodity” – an influence of the development of international trade, he believes.

Roze Hentschell, in her analysis of English sixteenth- and early-seventeenth medical texts and satire, concluded that the fear of the French disease “translated into a biting, inflated xenophobic rhetoric intent on vilifying the French, especially, and other Catholic countries, in order to distance the English from associations with the new disease,” and as such “contributed to early modern English nation formation.” The CNRS-funded five-year long research project “Representing France and the French Database Project” produced two articles on “syphilis” in the context of cultural tensions between England and France.


26 Healy, Fictions of Disease.


30 Harris, Foreign Bodies and the Body Politic.

31 Harris, Sick Economies, 17.


33 See Frédérique Fouassier, “The ‘French Disease’ in Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama,” in Representing France and the French in Early Modern English Drama, ed. Jean-Christophe Mayer (Newark: University of
Although Arrizabalaga, French, and Henderson do not specifically focus on the national aspect of the French pox in their monograph, they make some important conclusions, that have influenced my thinking about the French disease. In their words, “…disasters like epidemics always come from somewhere else: from another world, indeed, either the celestial or the New World; more directly from another nation or state, the ‘French’, ‘Neapolitan’ and Ethiopian sources of the disease; from an ethnic group – the Jews – who might be closer to home but who behaved like foreigners; and finally from people who shared everything but gender with the writer.” As they show in their book, Italian and Spanish medical writers often attached the blame for spreading the French pox in local communities to the Jews and Arabs.

Anna Foa highlighted the role of Jews and native Americans in theories of the origins of the pox in Early Modern Italy, stressing its intrinsic foreignness: “one thing is immediately clear: syphilis was always a disease/evil (male) that came from the outside – from a neighboring country or, better yet, from the country of the enemy.” William Eamon examined the treatise on the French pox by an Italian physician Leonardo Fioravanti published in 1561, in which Fioravanti blamed the French pox on the practice of cannibalism among the French and Italian armies during the siege of Naples in 1494. According to Eamon, Fioravanti’s theory should be seen in the context of anxieties about the dangers of the New World. Finally, Laura McGough investigated perceptions of venereal disease in Early Modern Venice that pointed to Jews, foreigners, prostitutes, and non-married women in general as transmitters of the French pox.

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34 Arrizabalaga, Henderson, French, The Great Pox, 52. And on page 12: “As in the outbreak of AIDS... the question of the source of the disease is partly a cultural one, rising almost to xenophobic belief that disease always comes from elsewhere.”


pox. As she demonstrated, the confinement of Venetian women in hospitals was a manifestation of anxieties that these women were putting the body politic of Venice at risk.\(^{38}\)

With the exception of a fascinating chapter in Bethany Wiggin’s *Novel Translations* that explores the metaphors of the French disease in the late seventeenth – early eighteenth century German literature,\(^{39}\) the national component of the French disease in the German lands has remained out of focus from important studies on perceptions of French-ness in the German lands, just as it has received little attention in the works on German nationalistic thought. Thus, Caspar Hirschi mentions the disease only in a footnote,\(^{40}\) and it is given two pages in Münkler’s, Grünberger’s and Mayer’s *Nationenbildung* with recognition, nevertheless, that *morbus gallicus* was a “topoi of national identity.”\(^{41}\)

As a result of a lack of interest in the “neighborly aspect” of the French disease, its nomenclature is often treated merely as an “instinct”\(^{42}\) or a peculiar anecdote of history. When touched upon at all, the French-ness of *morbus gallicus* is often explained through the default stereotype of a sexually corrupt Frenchman. Thus, Ruth Florack writes in her survey of the image of the French: “The repertoire of stereotypes also derives from (or invokes) real historical details which distinguish the one people from the other: from the moment the first case of syphilis crops up in the French army round and about 1500, it is defined as the ‘morbus gallicus’ in Europe; even Luther talks of the ‘French’ when he refers to the dreaded disease. This does not come as a surprise: anything French is often associated with sexual liberty.”\(^{43}\)


\(^{39}\) Bethany Wiggin, *Novel Translations. The European Novel and the German Book, 1680-1730* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011), chapter 2. Wiggin highlights the role of the French disease as integral to the perceptions of the French gallantry which she calls “a foil against which national identities were articulated in strict counterpoint.” Ibid., 63.

\(^{40}\) Hirschi, *Wettkampf der Nationen*, 282, n. 102. Hirschi also has a chapter entitled “Vaterlandsverrätter und Träger ausländischer ‘Krankheiten’”, which focuses on the “diseases” of robbery, foreign trade, and Roman law. See Ibid., 338-347.

\(^{41}\) Münkler, Grünberg, Mayer, *Nationenbildung*, 160-161.


Florack’s sentences are problematic in several respects. First of all, we can hardly claim that the naming of the disease was associated with a factual truth of it being manifested first in the French army. If anything, it is a contested subject and had been a contested subject ever since its first alleged outbreak in Europe at the end of the fifteenth century, as this dissertation demonstrates. Martin Luther referring to the disease as “French” does not necessarily imply that he associated the disease with the “sexual liberty” of the French, but that he used the most popular denomination of the disease at the time. Florack’s conclusion that the French disease received its name in connection with the stereotype of the “sexual liberty” of the French is misleading. As I argue in my dissertation, the framing of the disease as French in the first decades of the outbreak of the disease was much more about politics and broader notions of moral depravity than it was about sexuality.

**Primary sources**

My dissertation focuses on the period starting from the first references to *morbus gallicus* in the German sources in the 1490s and continuing until 1520; however, I also examine materials outside of this temporal framework. Owsei Temkin defined these decades as the first period in the history of “syphilis,” based on the absence of a firm causal connection between the disease and sexual intercourse in the medical writings from that period. Recently, Temkin’s periodization has been re-affirmed by Arrizabalaga, Henderson, and French.

*Morbus gallicus* came to be “French” through a variety of genres, “an eclectic soup of competing and complementary narratives,” to apply Healy’s metaphor. Due to the interconnectedness of these narratives, I examine primary sources of different genres such as

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46 Healy, *Fictions of Disease*, 51.
medical treatises, poems, cosmographies, prognostications, chronicles, and treatises on natural philosophy.

Medical treatises devoted specifically to the French disease, published in the German lands between 1495 and 1520, constitute the core of my medical primary sources. A great part of these writings were edited and published in 1843 by a professor of medicine at the University of Göttingen, Conrad Heinrich Fuchs (1803-1855). I also explore references to the French disease both in other works by the authors of these treatises and in texts written by their contemporaries.

Skilled in the fields besides medicine, physicians framed the French disease not as an isolated medical phenomenon but as part of familiar cultural and political narratives. That is why I believe that medical and non-medical writings complement each other and need to be examined side by side. It is important to remember that in the studied period the line separating the medical profession from the humanities was much more fluid than it is nowadays. In the late fifteenth through the early sixteenth century, medical doctors found themselves increasingly engaged in humanist pursuits. A number of historians came to discount these medical authors who combined several occupations, regarding them medically non-professional. However, in the curriculum of Italian universities, where the majority of the German medical doctors received their education, medical theory was considered a far more

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47 For a chronological list of published sources, see Proksch, *Die Litteratur über die Venerischen Krankheiten*, 6-11.

48 Conrad Fuchs, *Die ältesten Schriftsteller über die Lustseuche in Deutschland, von 1495 bis 1510* (Göttingen: Verlag der Dieterichschen Buchhandlung, 1843). This was the first scholarly edition of German medical writings on the French disease. It was preceded by a number of general collections of medical writings on the French pox, of which the most comprehensive was Christian Gottfried Gruner’s *Aphrodisiacus, sive de Lue Venerea in duas partes divisus quorum altera continet eius vestigia in veterum auctorum monumentis obvia, altera quos Aloysius Lusinmus temere omisit scriptores et medicos et historicos ordine chronologico digestos. Collegit notulis instruxit glossarium indicemque rerum memorabilium subiecit D. C. G. C.* (Jena: Apud Chr. Henr. Cunonis Heredes, 1789), 2 vols. For a discussion of Gruner’s collection and earlier ones, see Arrizabalaga, Henderson, French, *The Great Pox*, 4-8.

49 Charles Singer, for example, called Grünpeck a “layman in Physic.” Karl Sudhoff, *The Earliest Printed Literature on Syphilis: Being Ten Tractates from the Years 1495-1498*, trans. Charles Joseph Singer (Florence: Lier, 1925), xxiv. For the original publication, see Karl Sudhoff, *Zehn Syphilisdrucke aus den Jahren 1495-1498* (Milan: Lier, 1924).
prestigious occupation than medical practice.\textsuperscript{50} To quote Nancy Siraisi, “traditional links between medicine and natural philosophy, the philosophical approach encouraged by medical humanism, emerging connections between medicine and natural history, and the interaction of physicians with political authorities all suggested directions in which intellectually ambitious men might pursue branches of learning that were not strictly medical yet were perceived by themselves and their contemporaries as not just compatible but appropriate for a medical career.”\textsuperscript{51}

Among the German medical writers treated in this dissertation, four were particularly influential in the humanist circles: Martin Pollich of Mellerstadt, Joseph Grünpeck, Theodoricus Ulsenius also known as Dirk van Ulsen, and Ulrich von Hutten. The Leipzig physician Martin Pollich of Mellerstadt (ca. 1450-1513) was not only the dean of the medical faculty at the university of Leipzig and the personal physician of Frederick the Wise, but also a Hellenist, the first rector of the Wittenberg University, and a prominent humanist. Called “lux mundi” by his contemporaries, he was a member of the Leipzig circle of the \textit{Sodalitas litteraria Rhenana} of Conrad Celtis, which for some time took his name and was called \textit{Sodalitas Polichyana}.\textsuperscript{52}

Joseph Grünpeck (ca. 1473 – 1530) was another medical humanist whose diverse pursuits found their reflection in his writings on the French pox. Less than a year after the publication of the two treatises on the French disease, Grünpeck composed a Latin festspiel performed during one of the numerous visits of Emperor Maximilian I to Augsburg. It was published as part of the \textit{Comoedie vitilissime, omnem latini sermonis elegantiam contientes. e

\textsuperscript{50} Charles B. Schmitt, “Aristotle Among the Physicians” in Andrew Wear, Roger K. French, Ian M. Lonie, \textit{The Medical Renaissance of the Sixteenth Century} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985): 4-5: “...there was a pecking order: the logician at the bottom of the ladder, the natural philosopher above him, but physicians at the top, with \textit{theoretici} being superior to \textit{practici}.”


\textsuperscript{52} Nutton, “Medicine at German Universities,” 85-110; Schlereth, \textit{Martin Pollich von Mellerichstadt}, 178.
quibus quisque optimus latinus evadere potest (“Very useful comedies that contain all the elegance of the Latin language, from which everybody can become a perfect Latinist”) and is considered the first German Neo-Latin festival play. The festspiel is written in the form of a dispute between Virtus (Virtue) and Fallacicaptrix (Deceitful Huntress) at the court of a King (Maximilian). Just like Hercules in a famous tale ascribed to Prodicos of Ceos, Maximilian has to choose between Virtue and Vice. Virtus complains to him that Fallacicaptrix attempts to rule in all parts of the world, chasing Virtus away. She reminds the King that she has always been by his side helping, protecting and consoling him. One of such occasions was Maximilian’s war with “the treacherous King of France” in which Virtus was his advisor. “And elsewhere I have never deserted you; [therefore] remove all the maliciousness from me today, [and] you shall obtain victory in all things and, finally, be victorious as long as the sky upholds the stars,” she tells him. In the end, the King chooses “mi amantissima Virtus” and expels Fallacicaptrix from his kingdom. A little less than a year later, on 20 August 1498, Grünpeck was crowned poeta laureatus at the Imperial Diet in Freiburg, and became private secretary to Maximilian. As his secretary, Grünpeck worked on the biography of the emperor and his father Frederick III together with Johann Stabius, Maximilian’s court scholar, and Albrecht Altdorfer.  

In 1501, Grünpeck performed in a play by Conrad Celtis, Ludus Dianae in front of the emperor and his wife Bianca Maria Sforza in Linz. Other actors were Celtis himself, the secretary of the Austrian chancellery, Petrus Bonomus and the physician Dirk van Ulsen. Dirk van Ulsen (ca. 1460 – 1508) was born in Zwolle, but spent most of his life living in the

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53 Joseph Grünpeck, Comoedie vtilissime, omnem latini sermonis elegantiam contientes. e quibus quisque optimus latinus evadere potest (Augsburg: Hans Froschauer, [1497]).
55 Joseph Grünpeck, Comoedie vtilissime, C3 r-v.
south of Germany. Having most likely studied in Italy, he was a refined intellectual, member of the literary circle of Conrad Celtis, and a friend of Hartmann Schedel – a fellow physician, resident of Nuremberg and the author of the famous Weltchronik. Ulsen also personally knew Albrecht Dürer.58

Ulrich von Hutten (1488-1523) was not a physician, but his De Guaiaci Medicina et Morbo Gallico Liber Unus is the most researched early sixteenth-century German treatise on the French pox.59 He was a prominent humanist, crowned poet laureate by Maximilian I, and the first “Reichsritter,”60 who left a wealth of writings on all sorts of subjects.61

Other medical authors who are dealt with in this dissertation might not have been part of the humanist circles, but were active in areas outside of the medical domain. Alexander Seitz (1473-1544) composed moralistic treatises, dramas, and prognostications, and later became a proponent of the Reformation;62 Lorenz Fries (1490-1531/32), in addition to medical works, published on the subjects of astrology, geography, bathing, and the art of memory.63

As my analysis of the medical texts from the period under study reveals, medical perceptions of morbus gallicus were formed by a variety of literary, religious, astrological, and polemical texts. Thus, in order to situate the disease in its historical context, I examine miscellaneous writings of various genres.

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58 See Santing, “Medizin und Humanismus.”
61 For a list of his works, see Flood, “Ulrich von Hutten.”
Approaches and notions

Body

The human body lies at the center of collective images and is essential to perceptions of self and other.\(^{64}\) It is a microcosm of the social body and as such provides symbols for the expression of social experience, giving rise to the rhetoric of health of political or social entities.\(^{65}\) Thus, the notions of disease and those of nationhood often feature side by side. In the words of Kevin Siena, “it was perhaps in discussions of nation that it [the French pox] performed its most elaborate and significant symbolic work. Because the body was a primary metaphor for nation, the urge to preserve a clean national body and the anxiety of possible infection from without gave sixteenth and seventeenth-century commentators a powerful discourse to help formulate early notions of national identity.”\(^{66}\)

Healy’s book *Fictions of Disease* and Harris’s works focusing on the role of disease in shaping the English national “body” have changed my perspective on the French disease and invited me to think of it, in the light of Douglas’s theories, as a matter beyond the physical body. And so did Puff’s and Rublack’s writings, particularly Puff’s findings that, in Reformation Germany and Switzerland, sexuality was (as it is today) “often used to control the boundaries between the pure and the impure, rights and wrongs, indigenous and the foreign”\(^{67}\) and Rublack’s analysis of the importance of dress for defining German-ness in early modern Germany, as “seen to mould a person and materialize identity.”\(^{68}\)

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\(^{67}\) Puff, *Sodomy in Reformation Germany*, 7.

Syphilis

Arrizabalaga, Henderson, French, and Stein have warned against the methodological dangers of equating morbus gallicus with modern-day syphilis. Following their approach, in this dissertation I distinguish between syphilis and the French pox.69 At the same time, I find it important to stress that the establishment of the physiological reality of morbus gallicus is not my goal, and I use morbus gallicus following its usage in the Later Middle Ages.

“National” and “German”

The use of the words “German” and “national” in relation to late medieval and early modern German material has been a subject of heated debates in the last several decades.70 I have been most influenced by the following three recent studies on German late medieval national identities: The Shaping of the German Identity by Len Scales, The Origins of Nationalism by Caspar Hirschi, and Joachim Whaley’s two-volume Germany and the Holy Roman Empire, all published in 2012. These three historians have independently concluded that late medieval German identities in Late Middle Ages were centered upon the figure of the emperor, despite his lack of authority compared to the French and English monarchs at the time.

Thus, in his meticulous analysis of German ceremonial records, legal documents, and polemical and literary sources from the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries, Scales notes that “German” was used in relation to the emperors, kings, electors and other princes, whereas the “triumphs and failures were understood as reflecting honour or shame upon the German people – a viewpoint which was applied particularly to deeds done beyond Germany’s frontiers or in conflict with non-German neighbors.”71


71 Scales, The Shaping of German Identity, 535.
In his second monograph after *Wettkampf der Nationen*, Hirschi crystallizes his view that “nationalism” was born not in the nineteenth century like the modernist nationalist theories claim, but in the fifteenth with the re-interpretation of classical ideas about political power and civic identity by Renaissance humanists. Touching upon Italian and French humanists, he particularly focuses on the German context. Hirschi reaches a conclusion, already foreshadowed in his first book, that the national discourse in the German lands was “mainly used to compensate the limited legal means of the Emperor to coerce subsidiary powers within the Empire into supporting his military campaigns outside of the Empire. Appeals to the national honor and patriotic duty were meant to raise the psychological pressure on princes and municipalities to contribute troops or money of their own volition.” 72 The language of these appeals was eagerly adopted by humanists, who advocated for a competition with other nations (such as France and Italy) and, according to Hirschi, venerated Maximilian as the leader of the German nation.73

Joachim Whaley also highlights the role of the empire in generating the idea of “Germany.” However, contrary to Scales, who traces the development of nationalist thought back to Alexander of Roes and Conrad of Megenberg, both Whaley and Hirschi date the emergence of German national rhetoric to the end of the fifteenth century. If, for Hirschi, the movement of German humanism and the rediscovery of ancient texts played a major role in this movement, for Whaley, it was the threat coming from the Ottoman Turks and the French: “The emergence of a Turkish threat in the east and of a Burgundian/French threat in the West generated the rhetoric of German national self-defense that introduced a new vocabulary into

73 Ibid., 155. Hirschi argues that “Maximilian did not even ask his humanist supporters to contribute to his own genealogical and literary projects of massive proportions” (Ibid.). However, as Larry Silver (whose works are absent from Hirschi’s biography) demonstrated in his work, Maximilian I did employ a number of humanists directly to work on his projects of representational biographies, histories, etc, including Grünpeck. See Silver, *Marketing Maximilian.*
the language of imperial politics. At the same time, resistance to Habsburg ambitions in Italy defined another distinction between what was German on the one hand and ‘Welsch’ (Latin or Italian) on the other.”

I find it necessary to stress that in my dissertation, unlike Scales, Whaley, and Hirschi, I do not attempt to establish the extent to which the word “German” applied to any particular group. My primary concern lies with perceptions and images of German-ness in learned culture. When I am not using the term “German” as an indication of a birthplace (e.g., “a German astrologer”), I am employing it as a construct, one which is leaning on the pre-existing textual tradition and is negotiated against the image of external and internal “others” in the writings of the educated elites of the German lands. This construct was not in any way linear, but fluid and flexible. To quote Len Scales, “what late medieval Germans had to say about themselves appears self-contradictory, anxious, uncertain and incomplete.” Nevertheless, it was marked by certain distinct patterns, which I explore in the third chapter, and in which the French disease was part.

Auto- and hetero-image

The field of imagology has long been concerned with the study of national perceptions and stereotypes as “images,” not visual or pictorial representations, but “attributions of moral or characterological nature.” Images are mimetic constructs, which follow representational conventions and general patterns regardless of any specific nation or culture. Auto-image or “self-image,” then, refers “to a characterological reputation current within and shared by a group,” whereas the hetero-image denotes “the opinion that others have about a group’s purported character.” Images vary according to the proximity or the remoteness of the

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75 Scales, *Shaping of German Identity*, 530.
77 Ibid., 342-343.
“other,” thus countries that present a threat of political or economic rivalry are usually described in negative terms, giving rise to xenophobia, while countries which do not pose any threat are represented in “pleasant” terms, evoking exoticism or xenophilia. Hetero-images of perceivably “superior” countries are accordingly infused with laudable as well as pejorative characteristics. The latter dynamic applied to the German auto-images and their hetero-images of the French. France was “at once an object of desire and derision,”78 to use Homi Bhabha’s metaphor. Accordingly, \textit{morbus gallicus} was associated with luxury goods, which bore positive as well as negative characteristics.

**Framing disease**

Already in the first pages of the introduction I use the word “framing” in relation to the French disease. Following Charles E. Rosenberg’s definition, I employ framing as the “fashioning of explanatory and classificatory schemes.”79 Names are central to “framing.” In the words of Rosenberg, “in some ways disease does not exist until we have agreed that it does, by perceiving, \textit{naming}, and responding to it.”80 As my analysis shows, \textit{morbus gallicus} was not only the most popular name of the disease, but also acted as a “frame” for its causes and qualities all pointing to its intrinsic French-ness.

**Description of chapters**

In the first chapter I examine the nomenclature of the French pox in medical literature. Language and particularly names were essential in medieval medical epistemology, and the naming of the French disease was a primary matter of concern for the medical writers. The nomenclature was associated with several contested issues. First of all, was it a new or old disease? If it was an old disease, what was its “true” name? If it was a new disease, then what

80 Ibid.
was its appropriate name? I begin with a short overview of the Neapolitan campaign of Charles VIII (1494-1495) and then move to the first reactions to the French pox in German medical and non-medical sources. I then focus on discussions of a “correct” name for the new disease in the medical literature, which occupy the largest part in the chapter.

The second chapter discusses the astrological, humoral, and theological causes of the French pox in medical treatises. For some authors, the name of the French pox constituted a framework in itself for explaining its causes and properties. Religious, astrological, and humoral explanations of the outbreak of the French pox to various degrees evoked the connection between the disease and the French. Some pointed to the disease being a punishment for the immoral behavior of the princes, who, because of their lack of support for Maximilian’s campaigns against the French, prevented the emperor from fulfilling the tasks he was destined to fulfill as the emperor, that is, safeguarding of the peace and conquering the Turks and other infidels. Others held the French accountable for provoking God’s wrath and thus causing the disease. The theme of “the children of the planets” helped to explain why the disease originated among the French for the first time. At the same time, the disease was absorbed into the prognostic tradition, with its familiar late medieval polemical narrative of the confrontation between the German emperor and the French king. The four-humor theory and medical theories of Paracelsus also accommodated the perception that the disease was not only named after the French, but also in fact originated among the French people.

The third chapter explores ways in which the French disease was absorbed into contemporary perceptions of French-ness and German-ness. Mediated through the narrative of the inborn innocence of the ancient and modern Germani, the French disease was seen as a foreign commodity and as a metaphor for moral corruption caused by the use of all things foreign. I begin by exploring the narratives of German-ness and French-ness in late medieval German texts and the ways in which they related to each other. I then move to discussions of
German-ness influenced by the rediscovery of Tacitus’s *Germania*, and turn to perceptions of the French disease as a foreign commodity, which symbolizes moral decay. In the last part, I focus on the metaphor of the disease as an enemy, attacking the German body politic.
CHAPTER 1 | WHAT’S IN A NAME?

“Composed as they are of letters, diseases have no other reality than the order of their composition. In the final analysis, their varieties refer to those few simple individuals, and whatever may be built up with them and above them is merely Name.”

Iwan Bloch counted more than 400 terms used for “syphilis” from the end of the fifteenth until the end of the nineteenth century in the Old World, noting that no other disease had ever been called by such an array of names. The list of these names in his monograph is nearly 30 pages long. The four majors types of the disease’s denominations are names after the saints (the disease of St. Job, the disease of St. Sementus, the disease of St. Mevennus); after the body parts the disease affected (for example, mentulagra – a disease of the mentula or penis), after manifestations of the disease on the body (purpelln, scabies, etc.), and after geographical locations labeled as ‘syphilis’’s early modern “patients A” (morbus gallicus or the French disease, the Neapolitan disease, the Spanish sickness, etc.). For Bloch, the appearance of the name “morbus gallicus” in the 1490s, meant that it had not been known in Europe before that.

Bloch recognized morbus gallicus and its Latin and vernacular equivalents as the most popular name of the disease in the first decades of its outbreak in the German lands and in Italy. This denomination was tied to a political event, the invasion of Italy by the troops of Charles VIII, the king of France (1483-1498) in 1494-95. The causal connection between the Neapolitan campaign of Charles VIII and the German king Maximilian’s anti-French campaign was repeated and discussed in contemporary medical writings and non-medical sources alike.

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82 Bloch, Der Ursprung der Syphilis, vol. 1, 61.
83 Ibid., 58-97.
84 Ibid., 61.
85 Ibid., 63.
The majority of the latter readily assumed this causal connection, while medical authors often disagreed with this denomination, dismissing it as “popular.” Originally from a non-medical vocabulary, *morbus gallicus* had to be negotiated by medical professionals before it became widely accepted in the medical milieu. Certainly, not all medical authors found it necessary to elaborate on the issue of the disease’s nomenclature in their treatises, but those who did so had strong reasons, which had to do with their medical allegiances, cultural perceptions, and even political aspirations. Despite the objection made using the name *morbus gallicus* in relation to the disease, it remained its most widespread denomination in the German context in the medical as well as non-medical literature.

Given the importance of the nomenclature of the French pox, I have chosen to devote a whole chapter to the name *morbus gallicus* and other alternative names of the disease. My major interest is in the ways of adoption of the name by German medical authors in the first decades since its alleged arrival to the German lands. I begin with a short description of the Italian campaign of 1494-1495 and its reception by contemporaries in the Italian states and the German lands. I then move to the usages of *morbus gallicus* and its Latin and vernacular equivalents (*morbus francus, morbus francicus, böse Franzos, Franzosen, mala Franzosen, Franzosenkrankheit*, etc.) in the late medieval German medical literature with a particular focus on discussions of the origins and meaning of the name. As I show, the naming of new diseases was taken seriously by medical authors, since they expected names to convey facts about the malady’s essence or/and causes and, at the same time, remain faithful to the medical tradition. I particularly focus on the Leipzig debate, which stands out among other medical disputations since the issue of the disease’s nomenclature was one of the central points of controversy. Due to the fact that the Leipzig debate began as a response to a similar dispute in Ferrara, the latter will be touched upon here as well. I then analyze other early reactions to the
name *morbus gallicus*, which ranged from indifference to cheerful enthusiasm, and reasoning behind rejecting or favoring the name *morbus gallicus*.

**The Neapolitan expedition of Charles VIII**

On 29 August 1494, Charles VIII left Paris to claim his ancestral right to the Kingdom of Naples at the head of an army, which consisted of Flemish, Gascon, Swiss, Italian and Spanish mercenaries. Charles had claim to the Neapolitan throne through his grandmother, Marie of Anjou of the Angevin dynasty that ruled in the Kingdom of Naples from 1265 to 1435. Charles began planning an Italian invasion already in the early 1490s, after Pope Innocent VIII had excommunicated and deposed King Ferdinand I of Naples. The latter’s sudden death on 25 January 1494 accelerated Charles’s projects. On September 9, the French, via Savoy, entered the town of Asti which was under the rule of Charles VIII’s cousin Louis, duke of Orleans. In nearly half a year, on 22 February 1495, the French troops, via Florence and Rome (where Charles stayed for a month at the beginning of 1495), arrived at Naples and conquered it in about three weeks. Charles VIII intended to remain there until the summer of 1495.86

Meanwhile, Italian states were mobilizing against the French king. On 31 March 1495, their efforts resulted in the foundation of the League of Venice aimed at protecting signatory Italian states from acts of aggression by rulers with authority over any Italian states. The league included Emperor Maximilian I, Pope Alexander VI, Ferdinand of Aragon, Ludovico of Milan, Venice and the King of England. On 12 May 1495, Charles VIII made his formal entry into Naples and left it eight days later, heading north by land. The combined forces of the League

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of Venice confronted the French army in the Battle of Fornovo on 6 July 1495. Both sides had heavy losses; the French retreated – signing the Peace of Vercelli on October 9 with the League of Venice (but in fact mostly with Milan) which upheld the French conquest of Naples – and shortly returned to France.

As a result of the peace agreement, Naples was plunged into a civil war between the supporters of the French and their rivals. By late summer 1496, the French troops had almost lost the Kingdom of Naples, and all that remained of their triumphal march across Italy was an insignificant presence. Meanwhile, Italian states involved in the crisis were experiencing their own political troubles. Ludovico Sforza, the uncle of Emperor Maximilian’s second wife, Bianca Maria Sforza, hoping to strengthen his position with the help of the emperor, urged Maximilian to help him settle his affairs in Italy. In August 1496, Maximilian arrived in Italy with a meager army composed of his own horsemen and Swiss mercenaries. By late October, he was in Pisa from where he was hoping to retake Livorno from the Florentines with the help of Milan and Venice. Several ships were sent by the French king to aid his allies in Florence. In the middle of the siege, Maximilian abruptly decided to suspend the assault, returned to Milan and, from there, rushed back to the German lands, reaching home by December 1496.

First reactions

Marcellus Cumanus, who took part in this conflict as the physician of the Venetian troops and left one of the first accounts of the new disease, does not refer to it as “French,” but notes that it manifested itself for the first time among the troops in the wake of the Battle of Fornovo, the largest military collision of the first Italian War. In his Observationes Medicae Cumanus narrates: “I can bear witness that in the year 1495, while I was in the camp of Navarra with the troops of the Venetian and Milanese lords, I saw that many cavalrymen and foot

87 It was published for the first time in 1668. See Georg Hieronymus Velsch, Sylloge curationum et observationum medicinalium centurias... complectens (Augsburg, 1668).
soldiers were affected by a celestial influenza that became an outburst of humors…”88 A physician from Ferrara, Coradino Gilino, two years later writes in his *De morbo quem gallicum nuncupant*: “Starting from the past year of 1496 this ruthless disease has invaded many men – both in Italy and beyond the mountains. The Italians call it *morbus gallicus*, stating that the French brought it to Italy. The French, on the other hand, call it Italian or Neapolitan disease…”

89 Later, Francesco Guicciardini (1483-1540), the famous Florentine historian and diplomat, reproduced in his famous *Storia d’Italia* the by then already widespread belief that the appearance of the disease in Italy was connected with the French invasion:

After having narrated so many other things, it seems to me not unworthy of note that those very times when it seemed destined that the woes of Italy should have begun with the passage of the French (or at any rate were attributed to them) was the same period when there first appeared that malady which the French called the Neapolitan disease and the Italians commonly called either boils or the French disease. The reason was that it manifested itself among the French when they were in Naples and then, as they marched back to France, they spread it all over Italy. This disease, which was altogether new or at least unknown up to that in our hemisphere, if not in its most remote and out of the way parts, was for many years especially so horrible that it deserves to be mentioned as one of the gravest calamities.90

The first accounts of the disease from the German lands refer to it as the French disease as well. For example, the Erfurt chronicle reads: “In the year of 1497, a disease spread in the area of Doringen and Erfurt, in towns and in the countryside, which is called the French.”91

The majority of sources, like the entry for 1495 from the Augsburg Chronicle of Hector Mülich, express the view that the disease originated among the French: “At this time a great plague

89 Quoted in Jean Astruc, *De morbis venereis: libri IX.* (Paris: apud Guillelmum Cavelier, 1740), vol. 1, 24: “Cum anno elapso 1496. morbus quidam saevissimus mortales quamplurimos invaserit tam in Italia quam etiam ultra montes, hunc Italì morbum Gallicum appellant, eum Gallos in Italiani apportasse asserentes: Galli vero Italicum seu Neapolitanum morbum nominant, eo quod in Italia & maxime Neapoli se hac truculenta[m] peste affectos esse dicant.”
91 Quoted in Bloch, *Der Ursprung der Syphilis*, vol. 1, 270: “1497 anno domini do wanderte eyne Krangheit jm lande zu Doringen vnnd zu Erfort jn der stad vnnd jn fele landen, dy man hisz dy Franczoszen.”
came in these lands that is called the French because for the first time this disease emerged in France. And from there it spread all over the world.” Later narratives also trace the origins of the French disease to the French. The chronicle of Dietrich Westhoff, begun in 1548, alleges that the French disease was named so “because this plague had befallen the French in France,” and, during the conflict between Maximilian, Ludovico Gibboso, the Venetians, and the King of France was contracted by foot soldiers who brought it to the German lands.

In the third chapter, I look at more examples of the French-origins story of *morbus gallicus* and its political connotations in non-medical literature, but in this chapter I will focus mostly on medical sources. It is certainly difficult to separate the non-medical and medical usages of the term *morbus gallicus* and its vernacular equivalents. Written often by medical doctors highly educated in humanities, early modern medical treatises on the French disease are imbued with poetics and metaphors that can be found also in non-medical literature and that are the focus of the third chapter. However, medical authors were bound by epistemological conventions of their medical profession and it is the negotiations of the French-ness of the French disease within the existing medical tradition that I am mostly interested in.

The German medical author Joseph Grünpeck, whom I will discuss in more detail below, was one of the first medical writers to tie the appearance of disease to war. “Foreign people, coming to other countries to wage wars bring with them not only terror, devastation of fields, famine, fire, and other calamities, but also leave behind them particular misfortunes,

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93 “Chronik des Dietrich Westhoff von 750-1550,” in *Die Chroniken der Deutsche Städte*, vol. 20: *Die Chroniken der westfälischen und niederrheinischen Städte*, 368: “Item dis jaers als keiser Maximiliaus mit Lodowico Gibboso, dem koning to Frankrijch, und mit den Venedigern krijg voerde, brachten | die lantsknechte disse jameliche und verdervende plage der franzosen mit ine net Frankrijch in Duetslant, und word van den knechten morbifranzos genant, darumb dat sie disse plage bij den Franzosen in Frankrijch overkomen hedden...”
unknown and deadly diseases,” he writes. Another German author, Otto Raut, evokes the same connection between the French disease, war, and famine in Italy.

There was nothing new in associating disease with war. Pestilence, war, famine, and death, the familiar four horsemen of Apocalypse, were often depicted as interconnected phenomena. Thucydides had provided a model for the connection already in the fifth century BCE with his description of the spread of an epidemic disease in Athens in the second year of the Peloponnesian War, which in the Middle Ages became to be associated with plague. It entered the medical vocabulary with the help of Galen who used it as a way to demonstrate that unburnt corpses of men at the battlefield can cause the corruption of the air that in its turn causes disease. However, the fact that the disease was named after a particular people that participated in this war is worth our attention.

Medical discussions of the name

In the first years since the outbreak, not all medical men in the German lands accepted the name morbus gallicus – a term used by their medical colleagues across the Alps for the first time. They often felt compelled to explain that morbus gallicus and its various vernacular forms were popular and not academic designations of the disease. Prefacing references to morbus gallicus, the following formulas were employed by Late Medieval authors: “quam

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94 Joseph Grünpeck, “De Mentulagra,” 55-56: “Repentens autem memoria, alieni populi adventum in aliquid provinciam, quum præsertim id belli causa fit, non solum terrorem, agrorum vastationem, famem, ignem, cladem et alias calamitates inferre, sed peculiaria etiam damna, insolitos et invisos morbos post se reliquere, in mentem venit ad castra hostium max festinantum esse, si et ista foeda lues militum comes foret, ex cuius eventu coniecturari possit, universum genus humanum eius foediti obnoxium fore et per eam illud vaticinium expleri, quod ex Tiberino flumine paullo ante evenerat.”
95 Otto Raut, “Pronosticum ad annos domini millesimum quingentesimum secundum et tertium,” in Die ältesten Schriftsteller, ed. Fuchs, 297.
gentes Francigenarum appellant,”99 “De morbo quem gallicum nuncupant,”100 “De pustulis et morbo qui vulgato nomine mal de franzos appellatur,”101 “... pusculis ulceribus, & doloribus morbi Gallici, mali frantzoss appellati,”102 etc. This cautionary approach was due to the importance accorded to names in medieval natural philosophy. We know that Galen wrote the treatise *On Correctness of Names*, which unfortunately has been lost. Nevertheless, his ideas about language and the use of words survive in his other extant writings. Galen considered the correct usage of the Greek language a way to ensure proper communication and avoid misinterpretations: “If we have the appropriate words, we should use them. Otherwise, it’s better to put each thing into words using a phrase, and not to name it metaphorically, whenever someone wants to teach and not babble away... The initial teaching of all technical things needs the appropriate words in order to be clear and articulated.”103 The “appropriate words” for Galen were the ones from the Attic dialect, used by Hippocrates and other Greek doctors, himself included. Galen admits that new names can be used in case there are none in the Greek medical corpus: “For those things of which we do not have names, either to transfer the usage from those for which we do have names, or to make up names by some analogy from the already named things, or to make use of names given to other things.”104 However, he himself did not invent any new words and discouraged others from doing so with his example.

99 The full title of Grünpeck’s first Latin treatise is “Tractatus de pestilentiali scorra sive mala de Franzos originem remediasque eiusdem continens compilatus a verabili viro magistro Ioseph Grunpeck de Burckhausen super carmina quaedam Sebastiani Brant utriusqve iuris professoris,” in Fuchs, *Die ältesten Schriftsteller*, 3.
104 Ibid., 143.
Canon had been essential to medieval intellectual thought, and the Hellenistic revival in Renaissance medicine only strengthened the connection with tradition. The French disease in many ways questioned allegiances to the canon. To Late Medieval physicians, the use of this common new name indicated that the French disease had not been mentioned in classical medical treatises and therefore was to be considered new. Just like Bloch, who believed that the absence of references to the French disease before the 1490s meant that it was a new disease, late medieval medical doctors viewed the *morbus gallicus*’s nomenclature in the context of the debate on its novelty. But claiming any disease as new at the end of the fifteenth century meant rejecting the traditions of medicine and the Hellenistic culture, a stronger interest in which was developing at the time among humanist-minded medical doctors.\(^{105}\)

*Nomina* were at the center of debates between nominalists and realists. Starting with Aristotle, the understanding of an object was thought to be achieved with the help of two questions – *quid nominis* (“nominal essence”) and *quid rei* (“real essence”). If nominalists regarded the name of an object as an arbitrary sign of its meaning, realists declared it primary to its essence; that is, nominalists perceived names as not being able to reveal anything about the essence of the object they designated, whereas realists believed that, with the help of deductive semantic analysis of a name, they could learn more about the thing it referred to.\(^ {106}\) In line with this idea, some physicians considered names as a correlate to the things they designated. Being perceived this way, names had “a crucial role to play in the identification of such things as new illnesses and newly discovered plants.”\(^ {107}\) Since a wrong name might prevent physicians from understanding the real essence of the disease it represented, finding a right name for a disease was considered essential to ensuring its proper treatment.\(^ {108}\)


Indeed, not all medical authors concerned themselves with the correctness of the name morbus gallicus. Konrad Schellig (1432-1514), the author of the first medical treatise on the French disease published in the German lands, was among the medical doctors who did not show much concern for its name. His treatise In pustulas malas, morbum, quam malum de Francia vulgus appellat appeared in Heidelberg in 1496, prefaced by an introduction written by Jacob Wimpfeling (1450-1528). Schellig had spent most of his life in Heidelberg, serving as a private physician to Frederick I, Elector of Palatine, and later to his successor Philip. It was in the entourage of the latter that Schellig attended the Diet of Worms in 1495 where he heard discussions, which laid the foundation for the Edict on Blasphemy of Maximilian I published on 7 August 1495 both in Latin and vernacular – the first imperial response to the disease, referring to it as “pösen plattern.”

A graduate of Heidelberg and by that time already a well-known humanist, Jacob Wimpfeling was asked to write a preface to Schellig’s book by the Elector of Palatine. Two years later, the Elector would invite Wimpfeling to teach rhetoric and poetry at the local Heidelberg University. In his short prefatory letter, Wimpfeling introduces the main points of Schellig’s treatise and notes that this disease “as the Insubrians [Insubria – the Duchy of Milan – I. S.] lament, the French have imported into their country.” He adds: “This is not a new disease, as the common people believe, but was known in earlier times…”


of the treatise Schellig states: “I call it evil pustules.”

This is the only sentence in the treatise, which deals with the naming of the disease.

The physician Bartholomäus Steber, a dean at the Vienna university’s medical faculty, was the author of one of the earliest treatises on the French disease – *A malafranczos, morbo Gallorum praeservatio ac cura*, published in Vienna in 1498. Steber argues that the disease is new, distinguishing it from all other previously known diseases, and is generally called the French disease (*morbo, quem gallicum dicunt*), without discussing the name itself.

The Marbach physician Alexander Seitz (1470-1540) concerned himself with the naming of the disease a little more than Schellig and Steber. In 1509, he published a treatise on the “evil French,” *Ein nutzlich regiment wider die bösen Franzosen*. The work was written at the request of Elizabeth Schott, the abbess of the Cistercian convent at Lichtenstern, and published at her expense. In his treatise, Seitz calls the malady *bösen Franzosen*, comparing it with *mentagra*, the disease mentioned by Pliny the Elder in Book XXVI of his *Natural History*:

“Particularly Pliny in the twenty-sixth book of his Natural History and the learned mention this disease as “mentagra,” which is now called “pudendagra”; and this disease does not spot or punish children and women, but only noble men.”

Book 26 of *Historia Naturalis* talks about a previously unknown disease, called *mentagra* or lichens, which covers the skin “with a disfiguring, scaly eruption.” Pliny’s text served as a valuable authority for the medical authors who wished to rely on an ancient source to describe *morbus gallicus* as a new disease and who,

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112 Schellig, “In pustulas malas,” 73: “Has pustulas voco malas.”
unlike Leoniceno and other Hellenists discussed below, considered Pliny part of the medical canon. Like the French disease, *mentagra* manifested itself on the skin and came from elsewhere: “This plague was unknown to our fathers and forefathers. It first made its way into Italy in the middle of the principate of Tiberius Claudius Caesar, when a Roman knight of Perusia, a quaestor’s secretary, introduced the infection from Asia Minor, where he had taken up his duties. Women were not liable to the disease, or slaves and the lower and middle classes, but the nobles were very much infected through the momentary contact of a kiss.”

However, Seitz concludes that *morbus gallicus* is different from the disease described by Pliny, since in his view it affected everyone: “young and old, good and bad, heretics, Jews, and the Christian” and even animals.

There were, however, other medical writers, who, unlike Schellig, Steber, and Seitz, paid rather a lot of attention to the naming of the disease. The humanist Ulrich von Hutten even lamented that medical doctors were dedicating too much time to the issue of its nomenclature, neglecting the question of its treatment. One of the most engaging debates on the name *morbus gallicus* took place in Leipzig in the late 1500s between two Leipzig physicians, Simon Pistoris and Martin Pollich von Mellerstadt. As a result of the controversy, Simon Pistoris had to leave Leipzig and his office as head of the medical faculty at Leipzig University.

**The Leipzig dispute**

The foundation for the Leipzig dispute was laid by a debate at the court of Ferrara, which took place in 1497 between Niccolò Leoniceno (1428-1524), Sebastiano dall’Aquila

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117 Seitz, “Ein nützlich regiment,” 9: “...und is solich meinung gütlich ze glauben / so solich kranckheit versört jung und alt böß frum juden heiden und christen auch daß unvernünfftig vich Seu visch katzen etc. kein unterscheit hat...”

The three participants of the Ferrara debate could not agree on the nature of the French disease. Gilino, in his treatise *De morbo quem gallicum nuncupant*, argued that the disease had already existed in Antiquity under the name of *ignis persicus*, the “Persian fire” – a disease mentioned by such medical authorities as Celsius, Galen, and Avicenna. Dall’Aquila, in his major work on *morbus gallicus Interpretatio Morbi Gallici et Cura*, published twelve years after the debate in 1509, maintained that the disease had been known to previous generations and was described by Galen as *elephantiasis* (or leprosy). Leoniceno was the most prominent out of the three. A notorious medical Hellenist, “the doyen of medical humanists,” he became famous for his criticism of the medical university curriculum, Avicenna, and Pliny. His *Libellus de epidemia quam vulgo morbum gallicum vocant* was published twice before the end of 1497. Leoniceno argued that the French disease was caused by the corruption of the air, triggered by a change in heavenly bodies. As such it was yet another illness caused by changes in the air, mentioned by Hippocrates in his *Aphorisms*. He believed that the ancient name of the disease had been lost during the Middle Ages and that a proper name for it was still to be found:

The physicians of our time have not yet settled on a proper name. Common people call it *Malum Gallicum*, either because the French brought it to Italy, or because the disease and the French appeared in Italy at the same time. There is no lack of those who believe that this disease and the *elephantiasis* of the ancients were one and the same. Some feel it is the ancient *lichenas*, others – *asaphati*, pruna or carbonis, yet others – sacred or Persian fire. This ambiguity of naming and the diversity of views about the disease gave rise to many

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speculations that we are dealing with a new disease, previously unknown to physicians… 124

In 1498, Leoniceno’s *Libellus* was published in Leipzig and was shortly afterwards followed by a response written by the dean of the medical faculty at Leipzig University Simon Pistoris (1453-1523), *Positio de morbo franco*. 125 In his short treatise, Pistoris argues that air, as one of the four main elements, cannot become corrupt. *Morbus Francus* thus was a new disease, unknown to Hippocrates, which had originated from the hidden qualities of the air. Such a statement could not remain unnoticed by Pistoris’s colleague, Martin Pollich von Mellerstadt (ca. 1450-1513), a fellow resident of Leipzig and Hellinist, who had previously expressed his support of Leoniceno’s opinion on the French disease. Pollich followed with a refutation of Pistoris’s *conclusio finalis* in which he reiterated Leoniceno’s arguments. This marked the beginning of a battle of pamphlets that lasted for three years. 126

Like Leoniceno, Pollich was a Hellenist, and believed that finding a right name for the disease was essential to its proper treatment. He even wrote to Giovanni Mainardi (1462-1536), one of the most prominent Italian medical men at the time, asking him to evaluate his dispute with Pistoris. Unsurprisingly, Mainardi responded with a publication that expressed thoughts similar to Pollich’s and Leoniceno’s. In a pamphlet with the telling title *De erroribus Symonis Pistoris de Lypczk circa morbum gallicum* (“On the mistakes of Simon Pistoris from Leipzig

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regarding *morbus gallicus*) Mainardi argued that a disease’s name was of great importance. According to him, Pistoris was too hasty in appropriating its common designation, since “names should not be considered unimportant, especially by a physician, who bears responsibility for human life and makes mistakes in them.”\(^\text{127}\) Mainardi writes that with his letter he wanted to “demonstrate that in every science it is important to understand the terms correctly, particularly in medicine, where a mistake in naming is just as dangerous as choosing one remedy over the other, ignorance over knowledge, harmful instead of harmless, as treating one disease instead of the other.”\(^\text{128}\)

Simon Pistoris represented a different direction in medicine. He blamed the Hellinists for favoring eloquence and language over *ars medica*, and referred to Galen, who urged medical men to deal not with “scientific names, but with things.”\(^\text{129}\) In a number of writings, Galen does indeed state that semantics is less important than medicine and that one “should not be deceived by names, but look to the very essence of things.”\(^\text{130}\) However, as discussed earlier, Galen also believed that the correct usage of names was nevertheless vital to the expression of one’s medical ideas and that new words should be avoided in favor of the ones already present in the corpus of medical writings.

The controversy forced Pistoris to leave the city. He moved to Frankfurt on the Oder to become a private physician to Joachim I of Brandenburg. The dispute helped Pollich to secure


\(^{128}\) Ibid., 263-265: “Satis enim monstravimus, multum in omni scientia conducere, rerum vocabula recte intelligere, praesertim vero in medicina, ubi tanto cum discrimine in nominibus erratur, quanto cum discrimine et aliud pro alicui medicamentum, et inexpertum pro experto, et nocuum pro innocuo propinatur, quanto etiam cum periculo unus pro alicui morbus intercuratur.”

\(^{129}\) Simon Pistoris, “Declaratio defensiva cuiusdam positionis de malo franco nuper per doctorem Symonem Pistoris disputatae,” in *Die ältesten Schriftsteller*, ed. Fuchs, 156: “Audiat precor et nostri Galeni apertissima verba primo de differentiis pulsuum, dum inquit: nihil rursus neque scrutarer, utrum proprie et improprae vocare vel permutare nomina, sicut utique agunt philosophae; superflua enim omnia haec et extra nostram artem: non enim nomen scientia, sed rerum; neque eos, qui non nominant bene, ad medicos mittunt homines, sed eos, qui sanitate indigent.”

\(^{130}\) Morison, “Language,” 133.
the position of the head of the newly established Wittenberg University. However, despite Pollich’s Hellenist enthusiasm so pronounced during the Leipzig dispute, the medical curriculum at the university remained grounded in the tradition of scholasticism.131

Otto Raut (1460-1508), the town physician of Ulm, gives a summary of various theories of the nature of the disease and the names attached to it in his Pronosticum for 1502 and 1503.132 Raut tells us that some physicians refer to Celsius and define morbus gallicus as elephantiasis; others cite Pliny and call it mentagra or lichens. He then concludes: “Do not be amazed with the way I talk about it; indeed, I would not call it by a unique name for the doctrine of the disease and its manifoldness is such, that at any time not only its appearance, but also its origins seem different. Also, it befits the physician to dispute the names of a disease only a little or not at all, and rather [it befits him] to portray the disease’s nature and occurrences.”133

To summarize Raut’s position, he acknowledges the variety of names of the new disease, but choses morbus gallicus in the end, as a conditional designation.

Wendelin Hock of Brackenau (- ca. 1535), a physician in Strasbourg who published a number of medical treatises but of whom little is known,134 talks about different approaches to naming diseases in his treatise on the French pox, entitled Mentagra, sive tractatus de causis, preservativis, regimine et cura morbi gallici: vulgo Mala françosz. It was published for the first time in 1514, and appeared at least in two more editions in the next fifteen years, in 1529

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131 Nutton, “Medicine at German Universities,” 97.
133 Otto Raut, “Pronosticum ad annos domini millesimum quingentesimum secundum et tertium, exploratum per Ottonem Raut, artium et medicinarum doctorem, in Ulma physicum expertissimum. Item notatu digna de causa et cura morbi nunc temporis grassantis, qui malum Franciae sive scorra nominatur,” in Fuchs, Die ältesten Schriftsteller, 297: “Non miraris, quod sic ipsum descripsi, nec unico nomine non nominaverim, tanta enim doctrina huiaus morbi et varietas est, quod non solum aliquando specie sed et genere differente videtur. Convenit etiam medicato de nominibus nil aut parum discipere morborum, sed naturam morbi et eius accidentia exprimere.”
and 1531. Hock writes that the disease is known under a variety of names in various countries: “As it were, it occurred at that time: as one may know from the year of our Lord 1494 until the present year of 1514 everywhere a contagious disease called \textit{morbus gallicus} has fairly seethed. And it has acquired many names. For just as it invaded peoples of many climates, various names were attached to it.”

Hock goes on to lay out Aristotle’s theory of the four causes – formal, efficient, material, and final – and connects it to the nomenclature of the disease. He writes that a disease can be called “after the form it resembles, thus \textit{elephantiasis} from the elephant, \textit{serpigo} from the serpent. And sometimes after a formal cause. And in other times after an efficient cause.”

He concludes by saying that in his opinion \textit{morbus gallicus} was named after its cause, the expedition of Charles VIII to Naples: “... I say that \textit{morbus gallicus} is called this way because of its cause. For it was discovered in the great kingdom of Naples, where the French stayed after the Rooster [Charles VIII] marched into Italy with a mighty army, and because of this the Italians call it \textit{morbus gallicus} and think that the disease is natural among the French. However,

in France, since this disease began to appear after King Charles had returned with his men, it was believed to have been brought from Naples; thus, they called this disease *morbus neapolitanum.*”

Lorenz Fries (ca. 1490-1531/32), an Alsatian astrologer, physician, geographer, and prolific author best known for his *Spiegel der Arznei,* published his first work on the French disease a little after Hock published his, around 1517-1518. The original publication had been lost, but a later version printed in 1532 under the title *Epitome Opuscoli* has survived. Fries deals with the issue of the disease’s name already in the first chapter of his treatise, “On the origins and names of this disease.” He writes that doctors named the disease “French” or “Neapolitan” because they believed it had come from France or Naples: “The aforementioned doctors looking for cure began to call that pestilential disease ‘Gallicus’ or ‘Frantzigenus,’ and some [called it] ‘Neapolitanus,’ according to where it had come to us first, and doctors delegated [these names] based on the origin.” He suggests that a proper name of the disease might have been lost, since “according to Constantinus that disease was called epidemic, which suddenly and at once in a similar way attacked many men, and this disease can be seen in various climates.” Interestingly, Fries concludes by saying that the name of the “French disease” persevered due to the absence of discussions around it, which as we have seen above, was not true: “However, since controversy did not arise among physicians on the names, the above mentioned [names] were unsheathed.”

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Joseph Grünpeck was a medical author who embraced the name morbus gallicus more than any of his medical colleagues in the German lands. For him it truly represented the essence of the thing it designated. Due to the popularity of his three treatises on the French disease, and their importance to my argument in this and the next chapter, I will pay more attention to Grünpeck than to other authors.

For some time, Grünpeck remained an under-researched figure in the history of German humanism, disregarded as a mere “dilettante humanist” by some and “layman in physic” by others, but there have been several important studies done about him in recent years. At the time of the publication of his first two treatises on the French disease, Grünpeck was only 23 years old. Using the standard medieval humility topos, Grünpeck describes himself in the Latin treatise as “only yesterday a small boy living in Burghausen, playing the game of letters.” Proksch writes that Grünpeck’s modesty led some to disregard his work as insignificant and unimportant. Since then Russell and Hayton have highlighted the importance that these treatises had accorded Grünpeck and the role they played in the advancement of his career at the court, while Stein identified Grünpeck’s Ein hübscher Tractat von dem ursprung des Bösen Franzos as one of the ten most important vernacular treatises and

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143 Sudhoff, The Earliest Printed Literature on Syphilis, xxiv.
145 Grünpeck, “De pestilentiali scorra,” 12: “pridie is puer tantillus in Burckhausen ludum litterarum incolebat.”
pamphlets on the French pox published between 1496 and 1620 that formed the disease’s medical vernacular discourse in the German lands.\(^{147}\)

In the summer of 1496, Grünpeck traveled to Italy, where he came across the army of Maximilian I returning to Germany, and saw people suffering from the French pox for the first time. Several years later he described this encounter with the disease in *Mentulagra alias morbo gallico Libellus*. Upon his return to Augsburg, Grünpeck published his first treatise on the French disease, *Tractatus de pestilentiali scorra sive mala de Franzos. originem remediaque: eiusdem continens compilatus a Joseph Grunpeck de Burckhausen super carmina quaedam Sebastian Brant utriusque juris professoris* (“A Treatise on the pestilence 'scorra', or mala de Franzos, its origin and remedies [for it], composed by Josephus Grunpeck of Burckhausen, following certain poems by Sebastian Brant, professor of civil and canon law”). The German version entitled *Ein hübscher Tractat von dem ursprung des Bösen Franzos, das man nennet die Wylden wärtzen: Auch ein Regiment wie man sich regiren soll in diser zeyt* (“An elegant treatise on the origin of the evil Franzos, called the wild warts. Also a regimen on how to conduct oneself during this time”) appeared several weeks later and was the first treatise on the French pox in vernacular printed in the German lands.\(^{148}\)

In 1501, Grünpeck became ill with the French disease. Coincidentally, by that time Maximilian I had the French pox himself.\(^{149}\) Shone away by his friends, Grünpeck fled the court and secluded himself in Burghausen. Away from his patron, he composed his third treatise on the French disease entitled *Libellus Josephi Grünbeckii de mentulagra alias morbo*.

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\(^{147}\) Stein, *Negotiating the French Pox*, 16-17.

\(^{148}\) As Hayton and Stein have already pointed out, Russel’s dating of the treatises is in contradiction to the treatises’s internal dates. See Paul A. Russel, ‘Syphilis, God’s Scourge of Nature’s Vengeance,’’ 293; Stein, *Negotiating the French Pox*, 17, n. 71; Hayton, “Joseph Grünpeck’s Astrological Explanation,” 85, n. 15.

\(^{149}\) Wiesflecker asserts that Maximilian I became infected with the French disease in 1497, but was later cured. According to him, this explains Maximilian’s interest in the disease, which led him to the opening of eight hospitals in various hereditary lands (Hermann Wiesflecker, *Kaiser Maximilian I., das Reich, Österreich und Europa an der Wende zur Neuzeit*. Vol. 5: *Der Kaiser und seine Umwelt, Hof, Staat, Wirtschaft, Gesellschaft und Kultur* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 1986), 338-339). See also Karl Schadelbauer, “Kaiser Maximilian I. und die gallische Krankheit,” * Sudhoffs Archiv für Geschichte der Medizin* 22/1 (1929), 102.
gallico (“A booklet on the mentulagra or morbus gallicus by Joseph Grünpeck”) printed in 1503. This is how in his treatise Grünpeck describes the social isolation he experienced during his sickness:

> When I became sick, I ceased my service to the Emperor and all communication with my friends for two years, lying in a small bed, having thousands of strange ideas and phantoms of imagination against my will for nearly two years. Meanwhile the longitude of time, the loneliness, the hardships, the expenses, the neglect of many important affairs (which happens when one is separated from his master), the disturbing pustules, ulceration of body members, the joint pain began to feel unbearable. I could not find relief in anything else except for in the small book I had published earlier.\(^{150}\)

Grünpeck’s first two treatises on the French disease appeared in at least five Latin editions in Augsburg, Magdeburg, Leipzig, Cologne, and Nuremberg\(^{151}\) and two German editions in Nuremberg and Augsburg from 1496 to 1500.\(^{152}\) The first Latin edition was printed in Augsburg on 18 October 1496 when Emperor Maximilian I was still in Italy with his army. The first German translation was printed on 11 December 1496. As Grünpeck tells his readers, he translated his treatise to German because “there are many more people tormented by it every day, who do not understand Latin than those who do and who cannot help or advise themselves in their sufferings.” He continues: “Out of brotherly love and devotion for my neighbor the following I have translated from Latin to German. I humbly beg you with all respect and reverence to forgive me where my crude German requires more words for what Latin can define with fewer words.”\(^{153}\) The vernacular treatise omits certain allegorical passages and

\(^{150}\) Grünpeck, “Libellus Iosephi Grunpeckii De Mentulagra alias morbo gallico,” 52: “Quo vulnere totus infectus, duobus fere annis a Caesaris consuetudine, sociorum contubernis et omnium agendarum rerum cura alienus in lecticularia milie cogitationum formam totidemque imaginacionum figuram frustra cudere coactus fui. Interim quum diuturnitatem temporis, solitudinem et graves impensas, multarum etiam fortunarum (ut fit, quum a domino quis suo disinguitur) negligentiam, et quod prius nominare debebam, pustularum molestias, membrorum exulcerationem, iuncturarum dolores impatienter ferre coepi, et me ipsum ex libello meo, quem paullo ante edideram... recuperarem.”


\(^{152}\) Joseph Grünpeck, Von dem Ursprung des bösen Franzosen (Augsburg: Johann Schaur, 1496); Joseph Grünpeck, Von dem Ursprung des bösen Franzosen (Nuremberg: Kaspar Hochfeder, 1496).

references to Ancient authorities given in the Latin version, but otherwise remains true to the original text.

Grünpeck prefaced the Latin and vernacular treatises by *Eulogium de scorra pestilentiali* – a poem written by a fellow humanist, Sebastian Brant (1457-1521). The poem was published for the first time between August and October 1496 as a separate single-leaf pamphlet; that is, during Maximilian’s campaign in Italy. In 1498, it was featured in the *Varia Sebastiani Brant Carmina*, a collection of selected poems by Sebastian Brant (printed by the same printer who published Brant’s poem the first time, Johann Bergmann von Olpe) where it was placed before a poem dedicated to Emperor Maximilian I. At the time of the publication of the poem, Brant was already a well-known author, made famous through his *Narrenschiff*, published in 1494. Including a poem by such a prominent literary figure doubtlessly rendered some weight to Grünpeck’s first published works.

In the poem, Brant maintains that the disease was named after the French, because they brought it with them to Liguria, from where it spread via the mountains to Germany, to people living near the Danube, and further east to Thracia, Bohemia, and Poland. “Even the Sarmatians dread this disease. And at the end of the world, the British, surrounded by the flowing and waning sea, are not protected enough,” he writes.
It is not clear whether Brant regarded the French pox as a new disease, but Grünpeck certainly did, referring to it as a new disease on several occasions: “novum genus morbi”\textsuperscript{158}, “unerhörte, ungesehne, unbekannte allen tödlichen menschen… kranckheyt,”\textsuperscript{159} etc. According to him, the disease appeared among the French for the first time: “…On top of it all, this terrible, previously unheard of and unseen disease, Böss Franzos… was sent from the French to Italy, and then to the German [lands]…” Since it appeared among the French for the first time, it became known as malum de Franzos:

It has become a habit to call it malum de Franzos; and it is not after the Germans, Italians, British, English, Sarmatians or any other people that it received its name, but after the people of France, who acquired a particular and lasting stigma associated with this name which will never be erased.\textsuperscript{160}

Just as Grünpeck predicted, the name morbus gallicus, regardless of the efforts of some medical writers to caution against its usage, remained the most widespread term used in relation to the disease in the German lands throughout the late fifteenth - early sixteenth century. It was such a recognizable name, that in his booklet De morbo gallico published in 1519 Ulrich von Hutten wrote that he preferred to use the name morbus gallicus because he feared that using a different name would confuse people.\textsuperscript{161} In his treatise, Hutten recounts the story of the first appearance of the disease, familiar to his contemporaries, even though he gives a different date: “In the Year of Christ 1493, or thereabout, this Evil began amongst the People, not only of

\textsuperscript{158} Ibid., 8.
\textsuperscript{159} Grünpeck, “Ein hübscher Tractat,” 32-33.
\textsuperscript{160} Grünpeck, “Tractatus de pestilentiali,” 17: “Namque malum de Franzos vocitari consuevit; non autem a Germanis, Italis, Britannis, Anglica, Sarmacis alisve gentibus nomen sibi inditum accepit, sed Gallica de gente, quae sui nominem monumentum peculiare ac perpetuum sibi iniussit, quod nullum unquam passarum est lituram.”
France, but originally at Naples in the French Camp, who under King Charles were set down before that Place, and where it was taken notice of, before it came elsewhere.”

Theophrast von Hohenheim or Paracelsus (1493-1541) was another important German medical author who had something to say about the nomenclature of the French pox, although Claudia Stein has chosen to exclude his works from her study. “To introduce them [the writings of Paracelsus] would necessitate comparing them with those of other pox authors, and hence emphasize difference in sixteenth-century medical theory,” she writes, “But my aim is, rather, to trace the constitutive elements of a unitarian medical world shared by the authors of the available sixteenth-century vernacular literature on the pox.”

Even though already in his times Paracelsus was championed as the “Lutherus Medicorum,” his understanding of the disease’s nomenclature and its origins (the matter that concerns us in the second chapter) was in dialogue with the existing medical theories and therefore deserves to be studied here as well.

Paracelsus was very interested in the French disease, to which he dedicated some of his first treatises. He was particular critical of the use of the Guaiac tree as a treatment for the disease, and since the Guaiac tree was imported by the Fugger family, who helped Charles V to win the imperial election, they obstructed the publication of the works by Paracelsus in Nuremberg, where he had moved after fleeing legal proceedings in Basel. While working on Paragranum, his first general theoretical book on medicine, Paracelsus learned about the decision of the Nuremberg city authorities not to publish his writings on the French disease upon advice of Heinrich Stromer, the Dean of the Leipzig university’s medical faculty who

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162 Ulrich von Hutten, De Morbo Gallico, 1. Idem, De guaiaci medicina et morbo gallico liber unus, 399-400:
“Annus fuit a Christo nato post millesimum & quadrigentesimum nonagesimus tertius aut circa, cum irrepit pestiferum malum, non in Gallia quidem, sed apud Neapolim primum; nomen vero inde sortitum est, quod in Gallorum exercitu qui illic Caroli regis sui auspiciis belligerabat apparuit prius quam usquam alibi.”

163 Stein, Negotiating the French Pox, 20.


165 Henry Maximilian Pachter, Paracelsus: Magic into Science, the Story of Paracelsus (New York: Schuman, 1951), 161-185. Stein refutes the popular assumption that the Fuggers held a monopoly on the Guaiac trade. Stein, Negotiating the French Pox, 101-103.
was also a shareholder in the Fugger’s guaiac trade. He responded to the rejection of his writings on morbus gallicus in the book’s introduction: “O why do you, you anointed fools, slander my writings, which you can only discredit by asserting that I do not know anything else or write about any disease except for luxus and veneris? Is that such a small thing then? Is this the way you see it? Considering that I incorporate all surgical diseases, as they are transformed into the French disease – which is indeed the greatest disease in the entire world, since no worse has ever been known, and since it indeed spares no one and attacks the largest number in the worst manner – should I be despised for thus concentrating on such a thing?”

He addresses the subject of the French disease in a number of his works, but the ones devoted specifically to the French disease are Vom Holz Guajaco gründlicher Heilung (1529), Von der französischer Krankheit drei Bücher Para (1529), Der drit tractat, sagt von dem gemeinschaften, so die franzoesisch art mit andern des menschen wesen haben in Das (angebliche) Dritte Buch der Großen Wundarznei (written in 1536, but published for the first time only in 1579), and Von Ursprung und Herkommen der Franzosen samt der Recepten Heilung, acht Bücher (written in 1529, first published in 1564).170

In his analysis of Paracelsus’s use of language, Michael Kuhn notes that Paracelsus regarded medical philologists as “nonsensical,” believing that philological critique of sources could not advance medicine.171 At the same time, Paracelsus was a realist who saw names as correlating to the things named and strove to create a new system of medical nomenclature.

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166 Ibid., 6-7; See also Pachter, Paracelsus: Magic into Science, 175-183.
167 Weeks, Paracelsus, 87.
169 Ibid., 92-96, 458.
170 For a list of Paracelsus’s writings touching upon the subject of the French disease, see: Johann Karl Proksch, Paracelsus über die venerischen Krankheiten, 11. Also see Gundolf Keil and Willem F. Daems, “Paracelsus und die "Franzosen”: Betrachtungen zur Venerologie Hohenheims, I: Pathologie und nosologisches Konzept,” Nova Acta Paracelsica IX (1977), 99-151.
171 Kuhn, De nomine et vocabulo, 48.
corresponding to his own natural philosophical epistemology. In his endeavor, he did not leave
the nomenclature of the French disease unnoticed.\(^{172}\)

Paracelsus pays the most attention to the nomenclature of the French disease in his *Von
Ursprung, Herkommen, unnd Anfang der Frantzosen… acht Bücher*. He writes that there exist
three types of names of diseases: names that do not match diseases they designate (like *febris*),
names based on the “demonstration of disease,” that is, symptoms of disease (like *caducus*),
and names of foreign diseases coming from a particular country (like *persicus* from Persia).
He goes on to say that certain names like *caducus* and *persicus* should not be used by medical
doctors and should be replaced by those that reflect the matter of disease. As for the French
disease, Paracelsus continues, ignorant doctors have called it by a variety of names, including
*magenta, pustualae*, etc., but “out of all the names the name of the country persists and justly
so.”\(^{173}\) He calls *Franzosen* a generally correct name, since it indirectly conveys the astrological
influence that caused the disease, but advises to use a different term in Latin medical writings
based on the disease’s matter (*luxus*\(^{174}\)), influence (Venus), or treatment drug (*crepinus*).\(^{175}\)

Paracelsus repeats his approval of the “French disease” as the appropriate name in *Der
drit tractat, sagt von dem gemeinschaften, so die franzoesisch art mit andern des menschen
wesen haben*: “I would like the name to remain, because the disease originated from the
French,”\(^{176}\) and offers several befitting Latin names including “scelus Gallorum,”

\(^{172}\) Ibid., 177-184.

\(^{173}\) Paracelsus, “Von Ursprung und Herkommen der Franzosen samt der Recepten Heilung, acht Bücher,” in
mane der Namen des lands bliben und billich.”

\(^{174}\) Weeks notes that “luxus” “is obviously sexualized” by Paracelsus with the intention of “bringing out the
connotation of *luxuria*, “dissipation” (Weeks, *Paracelsus*, 467, n. 5). Proksch stresses that even though
Paracelsus attributed the causes of the French disease to the influence of Venus, Jacques de Béthencourt
should be credited with the first use of the term venereal in relation to the disease (Proksch, *Paracelsus über die
Venerischen Krankheiten*, 14).

\(^{175}\) Paracelsus, “Von Ursprung und Herkommen der Franzosen,” 187. Also see Kuhn, *De nomine et vocabulo*,
177-180.

\(^{176}\) Paracelsus, “Der drit tractat, sagt von dem gemeinschaften, so die franzoesisch art mit andern des menschen
Namen mag ich bleiben lassen, dann von den Franzosen ist die Krankheit entsprungen.”
“Leprosorum Gallinorum spurius,” “Basiliscus Gallorum,” “Gonorrhoea Francigena,” etc.\textsuperscript{177} He also notes that the disease appeared in Naples.\textsuperscript{178} In \textit{Chirurgia Magna} (1536) he writes that the French pox originated among the French people, from the intercourse of a French leper and a “shameless prostitute” with genital buboes and spread to the rest of the world primarily through coitus, but initially through other means as well.\textsuperscript{179} In \textit{Vom Ursprung und Herkommen der Franzosen} (1529) he makes no mention of the prostitute, but attributes the French disease to \textit{luxuria} during conception and the influence of Venus, writing that it originated in 1480.\textsuperscript{180}

The export of the guaiac wood from the Americas by the Augsburg merchant family of the Fuggers added new overtones to the story of the origins of the French disease. In 1517, Emperor Maximilian I and his chancellor Cardinal Matthew Lang sent a group of medical doctors to Spain to acquire information on the use of the guaiac wood. Nicolaus Pol (ca. 1467 – 1532), the private physician of Maximilian I and later Charles V was a member of the expedition. Upon his return, he composed a work on the use of the tree, which was not published until after his death in 1535.\textsuperscript{181} Pol does not touch upon the origins and name of the disease, focusing on diet and preparation of the guaiac bark.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[177] Ibid., 440-441.
\item[178] Ibid., 440: “Auf das folget, dass ein solche congregatio in Neapolis gelegen ist, von den die krankheit entsprungen, darumb der Namen vom selbigen her wol geben werden, Neapolitanum crimen.”
\item[179] I have used a later edition. Paracelsus, \textit{Philippi Aureoli Theophrasti Paracelsi Bombast Eremitae, summi inter Germanos Medici & Philosophi Chirurgia magna} (Argentorati [i. e. Basel], 1573), 97: “Morbum Gallicum, iam verbi gratia, consideremus, unde is originem duxerit. Ex coito nimirum Leprosi Galli, cum scorto impudenti, Bubonibus veneiris laborante, quod deinde scortum co[n]tagio omnes infect, qui potea in eius amplexus venerunt, atq[ue] sic ex Lepra & Bubone veneroe, Gallica ista Lues ortha, per contagium totum perreptavit orbem, quemadmodum ex Equi & Asinae coitu Mulorum genus extitit. Neque vero inter initia allo quam per veneros amplexus contractu, malum contagiosum fuit.” Also see Schleiner, \textit{Medical Ethics in the Renaissance}, 184-185. Pietro Mainardi wrote in 1525 that the disease occurred from an intercourse between a leper and a Spanish prostitute, who subsequently infected soldiers in the camp of Charles VIII, whereas in his treatises \textit{De morbo gallico tractus} (1560) Gabriele Falloppio linked the disease to poison with which the Spanish soldiers poisoned the wells during the War of Naples (Healy, \textit{Fictions of Disease}, 133).
\end{footnotes}
Preceding the publication of Pol’s booklet was a short treatise by the physician Leonard Schmaus, issued in Augsburg, the town of the Fuggers, in 1518. In his booklet Schmaus argued that the disease was not new, but had been known to the inhabitants of the Indies and to German merchants. There was an outbreak of the disease during the particularly hot and wet year of 1494, when Europe became flooded and the disease spread via the hot and humid air. He did not explain the nomenclature of the disease but, too, chose the conventional popular name *morbus gallicus*, noting, however, the various names of the disease used by medical authors, which he took from Niccolo Leoniceno (quoted below), including *elephantiasis*, *lichenas*, *asaphati*, *carbonis*, and *ignis persicus*.\(^{182}\) The same year, the Augsburg printers Sigmund Grimm, a physician, and Max Wirsung, a merchant and apothecary, published the first, anonymous description in the German language on how to prepare and use the guaiac wood.\(^{183}\) Without explaining the causes or the name of the disease, they, too, chose to refer to it as “kranckhait der Frantzosen.”

Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo y Valdés (1478-1557), a Spanish writer and one of the first colonizers of the Indies, who had taken part in the Spanish war against the French king during his Neapolitan campaign, argued in his *Sumario de historia natural de las Indias* (“Summary Account of the Natural History of the Indies”), written in the early 1500s, but published only in 1526, that the French disease had in fact come from America. He claimed that the disease originated in the “Indies” and was brought to Europe by the crew of Christopher Columbus from their voyage to America. According to Oviedo, upon their return to Spain, members of Columbus’s crew were sent to Naples to fight against the French army. While in Naples, the Spanish soldiers infected the local courtesans and through them the disease spread

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to the Italians and the French: “And because it was at this time that the French arrived with the aforementioned Charles, the Italians called this malady the French sickness, and the French called it the Neapolitan sickness because they had never seen it before the time of that war.”

One of the chapters in his book advertised the curative powers of the guaiac tree. The American origin theory has been debated ever since; however, the Urheimat of syphilis remains undetermined. To quote Stein, “it is unlikely that a definite answer will be provided in the near future.”

The disease’s Spanish origins story found its reflection in a number of German medical treatises published in the second half of the sixteenth century. The Nuremberg surgeon Franz Renner, in his *Ein new wolgegründet nützlichs und haylsams Handtbüchlein gemeiner Praktik aller innerlicher und eusserlicher Erzney wider die Krankheit der Franzosen* (“A New Well-Reasoned, Helpful and Useful Little Handbook of General Practice of All Internal and External Medicine Against the Frightening Repulsive Franzosen”), published for the first time in 1548, mentions that it was believed that the French disease had been brought to the German lands from France in 1495. However, Renner notes, since then, learned men had demonstrated that in the same year there was a beautiful Spanish courtesan at the court of the Spanish king who infected a great number of highborn men with the disease, including Neapolitans who

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stayed at the time at the court. Later they returned to Naples and when the French king sacked
the city during his Italian campaign in 1495, many of his men contracted it. Because of this,
many have proposed to call it “Hispanische plag.” Renner concludes, that it is clear to
everybody that the disease has originated on the “Indian islands” and spread to other areas via
air.\footnote{Franz Renner, \textit{Ein new wolgegründet nützlichs unnd haylsams Handtbüchlein gemeiner Praktik aller
innerlicher und eusserlicher Erzney wider die Krankheit der Franzosen} ([Nuremberg], 1557), A v-A2 r: “Wie
dem allem befindt sich doch gantz lauter vnd klar / das dise kranckheyt ihren ersten vrsprung auß den Insulen
inn India hat / alda sie von Natur gantz gemein vnmnd nach arth des luftls / mit des Himmels einflus mehrers
regiert / dann anderen orten vnmnd Landschaften.”}

Johannes Wittich (1537-1596), a personal physician to the counts of Schwartzburg and
the city physician of Arnstadt, in his \textit{Report on the Guaiac Tree} published in Leipzig in 1592,
tells a story which is far from the one told a century earlier, but nevertheless bears some
resemblance to it. According to Wittich, in 1493,\footnote{The text reads “in 1439,” but this is most probably a printing error.} there was a battle for Naples in Italy, “led
by the Catholic king against the king of France,” known as Charles. At the time of the battle,
“Christophorus Colonus” arrived at the camp in Naples with his Spanish troops from India,
where they had just discovered the Island of Saint Domingo (where the Guaiac tree grows).
With him he brought a great number of Indian men and women. After the Catholic king made
peace with the king of France, the armies intermingled, and the Spanish men mixed with Indian
women, and the Indian men with Spanish women, and afterwards “the pollution took control”
over the Italians, French, and Germans, and thus spread all over Europe. At the beginning this
disease was given different wondrous names: the Spaniards, thinking that it had come from the
French, called it the French, and the French called it the Neapolitan disease, because they
contracted this disease fighting for Naples. The Germans, however, associating themselves
with the Spanish, blamed the latter, calling this disease “the Spanish scabies” (\textit{Spanische
Krätze). Some, however, called it the “weaving Indian plague,” and that was also the right name because this disease had been brought from India, Wittich concludes.  

As is evident from these examples, the term “Spanish sickness,” although widespread, did not overshadow the name *morbus gallicus*. The latter maintained its currency in the German lands and continued to be used alone or alongside “Spanish sickness” all throughout the second half of Early Modern Times.  

Thus, for example, an early eighteenth-century Styrian Völkertafel, a comparative early modern ethnology, attributes “an eigner” (meaning “his own” or the French disease) to the Frenchmen as their archetypical disease (see fig.1). 

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191 For examples of later usages see Steven Blankaart, “Abhandlung der sogenannnten Frantzoss oder Spanischen Pocken-Krankheit” in *Die beläugert- und entsetzte Venus das ist, chirurgische Abhandlung der sogenannnten Frantzosen* (Leipzig, 1689); Nicolaas Heinsius, Heinrich Elias Hundertmarck, *Schauchenthe Venus; oder, Curieuser Tractat von spanischen Pocken und so genanten Frantzosen* (Frankfurt, Leipzig: Christoph Hülse, 1700).

The term “syphilis” appeared for the first time in the poem *Syphilis sive de morbo gallico libri tres* (1530) by the Italian physician Girolamo Fracastoro. Fracastoro named the disease after a fictional shepherd, Syphilus, who had angered the gods by defying them. In his study of the etymological origins of the word “syphilis,” Walther Pflug comes to a conclusion that it originated from the Arabic word “sufl” which he translates as “die untere Welt” or “weltlich.” Based on his research, Pflug concludes that Fracastoro had attempted to coin a term to match its all-encompassing nature as opposed to local, “national” names. By naming the disease “syphilis,” Fracastoro gave it a truly universal name, turning it, Pflug suggests, into a “Weltkrankheit.” Nonetheless, the “national” names of the disease continued to predominate even after the introduction of “syphilis” in the works of Fracastoro.

And what did the French medical authors think of *morbus gallicus*? According to Hutten, the French, unhappy with the association between their country and such a horrible disease, gave it the name “Neapolitan disease,” since they found it insulting that the disease

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had been named after them. The French medical author and physician Jean Astruc (1684-1766) in his eighteenth-century compendium on “syphilis” notes that the name was so popular in Italy, Germany, and England, that Jacques de Béthencourt and Denys Fontanon, among the first French doctors to write on the disease, had to use this name and “gave themselves up, so to speak, to the insult.”

For the purpose of comparison I would like to provide a brief overview of the discussions of the name in the writings of three major early sixteenth-century French physicians: Jacques de Béthencourt, Symphorien Champier, and Jean François Fernel.

The Rouen physician Jacques de Béthencourt in his *Nova poenitentialis Quadragesima* or “A new penitential fast and expiatory purgatory on morbus gallicus or venereus; with a dialogue between Mercury and the Guaiac Wood, contending with one another to be chosen for the above-mentioned disease” reiterates the theory that diseases are named after various things: after the organ they affect, after its symptoms, after its causes, based on physical resemblance, etc. The disease is called “French” because it manifested itself for the first time in the army of the French King Charles VIII when he was invading the Kingdom of Naples. He, however, offers the name “morbus venereus” saying that he believes diseases should be named after their causes.

Another early sixteenth-century French medical author, the Lyonnaise physician and humanist Symphorien Champier (1471-1539), showed a particular interest in the French

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194 Ulrich von Hutten, *De guaiaci medicina et morbo gallico liber unus*, 400: “Qua occasione Galli ominosam ab se appellationem amolientes non Gallicum hunc, sed morbum Neapolitanum vocant, et contumeliam agnoscunt cognominem sibi pestem fieri.”


disease. Champier believed that the French disease was new and caused by the wrath of God, and was involved in a polemic on its origins and causes with Leonhard Fuchs. Even though Champier does not offer a new alternative name for the disease, as Brian Copenhaver notes, “one popular name for the dreaded disease offended Champier’s patriotism.” The French campaign in Naples was part of Champier’s familial history: a relative of the famous French captain François Champier who took part in the expedition of Charles VIII to Naples, he was also related to the illustrious Chevalier Bayard, who took part in the Neapolitan campaign. In a letter to Leonhart Fuchs, Champier, alluding to Deuteronomy 32:11, describes the disease as a punishment for the lack of chastity sent to “spot” the French, Italians, Germans, Englishmen, Danes, the people of Poland, Pannonia, and Spain.

Jean François Fernel (1497-1558), a French sixteenth-century physician and medical author and a noted Paracelsian, for the first time gives the name “lues venerea” to the French pox in his theoretical work De Abditis Rerum Causis, or, On the Hidden Causes of Things (1548). He does not explain his use of this term explicitly, but mentions that he is mostly concerned with the disease’s causes rather than its origins, among the existing theories of which he mentions an “unusual conjunction of stars… pollution of the waters… impurity of some

199 Ibid., 77.
202 The term “lues venerea” did not gain currency in German literature until the seventeenth century, and for a long time did not result in any vernacular equivalents. The vernacular name Lustseuche, originally from the religious vocabulary, became another denomination of the French pox only in the eighteenth century. See “Lustseuche” in Deutsches Wörterbuch, ed. Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm (Leipzig: Verlag von S. Hirzel, 1956), vol. 12, 1350-1351.
prostitute.”203 But, since he classifies the disease as contagious and transmittable by coitus and by contact in general,204 one can assume that he, just like Béthencourt, gives the disease its name based on the cause of transmission. Charles Sherrington sketches out the subsequent reception of the term “lues venerea” in England and France in the second half of the sixteenth-century, quoting Gottfried Grüner’s opinion of Fernel as “the reformer in this matter of nomenclature.”205

According to Wickersheimer, *morbus gallicus* was rarely used in French medical literature in the fifteenth - sixteenth century, and he found no instances of its vernacular.206 Wickersheimer and Sudhoff both provide a great many examples of the use of the term “mal de Naples” instead. Karl Sudhoff cites an entry from a French chronicle, in which the disease is referred to as “mal de Naples” with the following explanation provided: “because the French returning from Naples were ill with it… and people say that the Lombards invented this disease to avenge the French.”207 These French examples show that the nomenclature of *morbus gallicus* had its own “national” agenda in France in the early sixteenth century. In this way it was similar to the German lands and one might assume a number of other countries.

As this chapter demonstrates, the name *morbus gallicus* and its vernacular equivalents were accepted as suitable in medical treatises as well as in chronicles. Medical writers did not take *morbus gallicus* for granted, but engaged in debates about the disease’s proper name. Those who deemed it appropriate, did so either because in their opinion it indicated that the

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disease had appeared for the first time among the French people or because they recognized it as the most popular name of the disease. Even after a new theory of its origins connected to the guaiac bark trade began to feature in medical treatises, in the majority of sources the disease continued to be called morbus gallicus and the story about its first appearance among the troops of Charles VIII was reproduced in almost every popular treatise on the French pox. In the next chapter, I will look at how morbus gallicus provided a frame for explanations of the disease’s theological, astrological, and medical origins, all of which pointed to its French-ness.
CHAPTER 2 | THE FRENCH DISEASE AND ITS MANIFOLD CAUSES

Late medieval medical authors perceived morbus gallicus as “French” not only on the basis of its name, but also of its causes. The French-ness of the disease was reflected in the theories of its causality pertaining to such diverse domains as theology, astrology, and the humoral theory. The initial cause of the disease, according to the medieval macrocosmic worldview, was God’s will. The next in the hierarchy of causes were planetary motions. Regardless of the critique of divinatory astrology by Marsilio Ficino and his pupil Pico della Mirandola in the fifteenth century, “that which foretells things to come by the stars” continued to play an important role in medical writing all throughout the sixteenth century. Planetary constellations were believed to affect the air (by simply corrupting it or through the air’s occult or hidden cause), giving rise to pestilences, which befell on those whose humoral complexions were prone to particular sicknesses.

Following astrology was the efficient cause, one of the causes from the Aristotelean four-fold concept of causality, which, in addition to the efficient cause, included formal, material, and final causes. Galen adopted this four-fold concept for the medical field, stressing that only the efficient cause was important for the treatment of patients, which he further subdivided into three more: causa contentiva, causa antecedens, and causa procatarctica or causa primitiva. An example often cited to explain the relationship between these causes is the case of putrid fever: its causa primitiva is the excess of heat of the sun, its

causa antecedens is the change in the humoral complexion (dyscrasia), whereas its causa contentiva (that is, the disease itself) is the formation of putrid fever from the putrid humors.\textsuperscript{211} Since God was generally considered the initial cause of the French disease, I shall start with theological explanations of its origins.

"Deus operatur sedis causis concurrentibus,"\textsuperscript{212} Non-medical and medical writers alike referred to God’s will as the primary external cause of the French disease. Even though some authors preferred astrological or humoral explanations to religious ones, to quote Nancy Siraisi, “medical explanations of the causes of plague, whether or not they invoked astrology, were, of course, consonant with the idea that the primary cause was God’s will.”\textsuperscript{213} God’s agency in explanations of the origins of the French disease has been studied in a great number of works on the French pox.\textsuperscript{214} What has escaped the attention of historians are the theological explanations that pointed to its French-ness, and I intend to fill that void in this chapter.

In late medieval medicine, illnesses continued to be seen as collective or individual punishments for transgressing God’s laws.\textsuperscript{215} To quote Grigsby, “medieval notions of disease

\begin{lagenotes}
\item[\textsuperscript{211}] Karine van ‘t Land, "Internal, yet extrinsic.” 105.
\item[\textsuperscript{213}] Siraisi, Medieval and Early Renaissance Medicine, 129.
\item[\textsuperscript{215}] Literature on this subject is vast: e. g., Winfried Schleiner, Medical Ethics in the Renaissance, esp. chapter 6; Amundsen, Medicine, Society, and Faith; Peter L. Allen, The Wages of Sin: Sex and Disease, Past and Present (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 49-60; Neithard Bulst, “Die Pest verstehen: Wahrnehmungen, Deutungen und Reaktionen im Mittelalter und in der Frühen Neuzeit” in Naturkatastrophen, ed. Groh, Kempe, Maulschagen, 145-164; Bryon Lee Grigsby, Pestilence in Medieval and Early Modern English Literature (New York: Routledge, 2004); James C. Nohrnberg, “‘This Disfigured People’: Representations of Sin as Pathological Bodily and Mental Affliction in Dante's Inferno XXIX-XXX,” in Rhetorics of Bodily Disease and Health in
\end{lagenotes}
and morality are not simply metaphors; instead, they were seen as literal truths.”

Grigsby writes that the connection between disease and sinfulness in Christian medicine originated from the Hippocratic-Galenic concept of sophrosyne. Hippocrates and later Galen argued that diseases stemmed from three causes: the aging of the body, the body’s predisposition to certain diseases, and immoderation. Sophrosyne was a spiritual and physical regimen, which kept humors in balance and the body healthy. The Galenic notion of immoderation survived the Christianization of medicine in the medieval times and became partly manifest in the idea that sin caused diseases.

The idea that contagious diseases were manifestations of God’s wrath caused by the digression of his laws was rooted in several major biblical passages. Leviticus 26, Deuteronomy 27-28, and Exodus 7-12 mention new, previously unheard of diseases inflicted on people for their sins. The novelty of afflictions was regarded as a testament to the true almightiness of God. This religious paradigm found reflection in the early treatises on the French pox, in which it was argued that the French disease was a new disease, unmatched in its loathsomeness with any other known maladies. This “religious” perspective on the French disease was at odds with the view of the Hellenist medical doctors, who insisted that the French disease was in fact an old malady, described already by the Greeks. The story of St. Job was often associated with the French pox, just like it had been associated with leprosy before that, and the pox was sometimes referred to as the disease of St. Job.

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216 Grigsby, Pestilence in Medieval and Early Modern English Literature, 17.
218 Arrizabalaga, Henderson, French, The Great Pox, 52-54.
Not all the medical writers concerned themselves with religious causes. Some, like Hans Widmann, acknowledges the role of God in the outbreak of *morbus gallicus*, but maintains that “the physician, as a physician, does not concern himself much with these causes, but rather with the cause that is within the body”\(^219\) and deals only with humoral causes in his treatise. Those who did, mentioned either the general state of sinfulness or various particular sins as responsible for the appearance of the French disease. Thus, for example, Alexander Seitz notes that “according to theologians, the cause of this disease is the rod and punishment of the heavenly lords meant to punish us for our sins so that we would improve the health of our bliss, akin to the Pharaoh’s punishment.”\(^220\)

The French disease was presented as a warning from Heavens, a plea for moral improvement and the reform of a sinful life. God was sending the French disease not only to punish humankind for their sins but also to give them a chance to purify their souls.\(^221\) A scourge from Heaven sent to encourage people to reform,\(^222\) the disease required prayers and repentance for a successful treatment. “The remedy over nature, that comes down from above, is for man to be in God’s graces and cleanse himself through confession and suffering,”\(^223\) writes Grünpeck.

The Edict on Blasphemy, issued both in Latin and vernacular by Maximilian I at the Diet of Worms on 7 August 1495, is an example of treating the French disease as a call for

\(^{219}\) Quoted in Amundsen, “The Moral Stance,” 322.

\(^{220}\) Seitz, “Ein nutzlich regiment,” 8: “anfangs nach meinung der theologi ist dise kranckheit ain růt vnd straff des himelfürsten unser sünd damit ze straffen / da durch wir gebesser zů heil unser seligkeit / als gestrafft ward Pharaon.”

\(^{221}\) See Vollmer, “Sünde – Krankheit – ’väterliche Züchtigung’.”

\(^{222}\) Grünpeck, “De petilentiali,” 9: “Quare haud clam est, haec flagitia e deifica voluntate in terram ad terrorem hominum demitti. Quam ob rem etiam haec colluvies, quam malum de Franzos vocant, ex superna vindicta demergi par videri potest.”

\(^{223}\) Grünpeck, “Ein hübscher Tractat,” 46: “die ertzney über die natur, die von oben herab koornet, ist, das der mensch sey in der genad Gottes vnd sich reynige durch beycht und bůss.”
moral improvement. The edict describes *morbus francicum* as a new, previously unheard of disease, sent as a reminder of the “just punishment of God.” The edict provided penalties for cursing and blamed the disease on the decline of religious piety among the citizens of the empire. Darin Hayton sees the edict in the context of Maximilian's social and political reforms aimed at acquiring larger powers in the empire. Bruce Boehrer goes so far as to call it an excuse “to institute close censorship and surveillance of speech.” Amundsen criticized Boehrer’s view as “revealing much more of the cynical ideology of the former [Boehrer] than about the motives of the latter [Maximilian I].” Whether or not Maximilian’s intent was to introduce “censorship” in the empire, he associated the French disease with a need for moral reform among his citizens. Such confluence of religious and political themes was central to contemporary narratives of the French disease. Two notions, obedience and imperial authority, stood at the heart of these narratives, with the French disease acting as their meeting point.

**The Politics of God’s Wrath**

In order to see how the French fit into discussions of obedience and imperial authority in the first German writings on the French pox, one ought to look at the significance of the Neapolitan campaign to Maximilian I. The Italian expedition of Charles VIII was a very sensitive topic for Emperor Maximilian I, since he considered it an obstacle in accomplishing his two most longed-for goals: papal coronation and a crusade against the Turks. In 1486, Maximilian I was elected King of the Romans, when his father Frederick III was still alive. However, he had not been able to reach Rome for an imperial coronation due to complex relations with the papal seat and Italian states. In fact, he had never succeeded in becoming an

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224 I have used the German edition in Suhoff, *Aus der Frühgeschichte der Syphilis*, 4-7. For the Latin edition, see Fuchs, *Die ältesten Schriftsteller*, 305-6. For the discussion of its publication date, see Hayton, “Joseph Grünpeck’s Astrological Explanation,” 84, note 10.  
225 In the vernacular version the disease is called “pősen plattern.”  
emperor *de jure* and had to proclaim himself one in 1508. His successor Charles V was the last emperor to be crowned by the pope (although it took place in Bologna and not in Rome). As a result, throughout his whole life Maximilian had been anxious about the soundness of his imperial title. The imperial pretensions of the French kings only fuelled Maximilian’s suspicions.\(^{229}\)

He was also afraid that the advance of the French would prevent him from leading a crusade against the Turks. Contemporaries saw the Italian expedition in the context of crusading rhetoric, not least because Naples was considered one of the bases from which to launch a successful attack on the Turks and thus a key to Jerusalem. Maximilian’s fears were aggravated by the imperial symbolism and implications of Charles VIII’s march through Italy. The French propagandists proclaimed the French king a new Charlemagne, sent to liberate Italy and the whole of Christendom from the Turkish threat. During Charles’s stay in Florence in 1494, Marsilio Ficino composed an oration in his honor filled with eschatological references and allusions to Charles VIII being the Last Emperor, while the Florentines were the chosen people.\(^{230}\)

Crusade was a mission Maximilian sought to accomplish throughout his whole life.\(^{231}\) Already in 1493 Frederick III founded the Knights of the Order of Saint George, a chivalric order that Maximilian supported, considering St. George, the crusaders’ saint, his patron saint. Since the middle of the fifteenth century, imperial German authorities had shown the greatest support for papal anti-Turkish politics among the European princes. One of their main reasons was the Turkish threat to the Habsburg hereditary Austrian lands, the southeastern frontier of


the empire. In April-June 1490 Pope Innocent VIII convened a congress of Christian princes in Rome. He proposed a plan, according to which the Christian powers were to divide into three groups and recapture the Balkans, Constantinople, Egypt, and Jerusalem in three years.

Already the *Nuremberg Chronicle* of Hartmann Schedel, published in 1493, presents a “program” of Maximilian’s crusade against the Turks: France, Spain, and England will recognize Maximilian as the leader of Christendom. He will lead a crusade to Constantinople and Jerusalem and return via Rome, where all the cardinals and the bishops of the Church will celebrate him. Noble women, wearing flowers in their hair, will throw roses and lilies at him as he marches through the city. The victor, however, will not proceed to the Capitol or the Temple of Jupiter, but straight to the Church of St. Peter, where he will discuss his victory with Pope Alexander VI and prelates of the Church.

Crusading rhetoric was tied to the “Last Emperor” prophecy. According to the late medieval prophetic literature, the Last Emperor was to appear in the world at the end of times to conquer all the enemies of Christianity and unite all countries in order to stall the coming of Antichrist. The Last Roman Emperor prophecy was developed as early as in mid-tenth century, and was based on a variety of New and Old Testament texts. There were two major traditions of the Last Emperor myth. One of them was based on the prophecy of the Cumaean Sibyl, according to which the last emperor was to put an end to wars and establish a golden age with Emperor Augustus seen as exemplary ruler. The other variation of the myth was developed in the prophecy of the Tiburtine Sibyl written in the fourth century CE and in the *Revelations* of Pseudo-Methodius (ca. seventh century CE). According to the second tradition, the Last Emperor was to conquer all the enemies of Christendom and unite it before the end of times.

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233 Ibid., 82-83.
In the thirteenth century, a German pro-imperial polemicist Alexander of Roes popularized this latter theme in his *Memoriale de prerogativa*. According to him, as long as the Last Emperor is alive, he is protecting the world from Antichrist. His enemies threatening the collapse of the Empire are thus endangering the whole of Christendom. The prophecy of the Last Emperor was later incorporated into the crusading rhetoric: the Last Emperor was expected to lead a crusade against the infidels.\(^{235}\)

Wiesflecker summarized Maximilian’s political program in the following way: France had to be subdued with the help of England, Italy and the pope or even annihilated and divided between these countries in order to organize a crusade to Constantinople.\(^{236}\) However, throughout his rule Maximilian repeatedly failed to persuade the estates to finance his campaigns against France, since they regarded them a matter of his dynastic interests. At the Diet of Worms in 1495, during which the Blasphemy Edict was issued, Maximilian attempted to secure the financial backing of German princes for his anti-French campaign in Italy, but received almost no support.\(^{237}\)

To win the needed financial backing for his anti-French campaigns, Maximilian I actively fostered anti-French propaganda with the help of Northern humanists, called by Joachim Whaley “a legion of literary propagandists for the Reich, who would use their influence and connections to create a humanist clientele network.”\(^{238}\) The French being the


targets of the genuine German hatred of the French,” 239 “sworn enemies of the Germans” (Teutscher Nation abgesagten Feinds), 240 the French king – “the common enemy of the empire” (publicus inimicus Imperii), 241 the kingdom of France – “an evil beast” (mala bestia), 242 are but a few epithets used by late medieval German authors. Encouraged by Maximilian, German polemicists spread his ideas. If one accepts Flood’s view of the Holy Roman Empire as “always an abstraction, a fiction, a dream,” 243 the discussions on German-ness and French-ness perpetuated by humanists were ensuring the viability of this “dream.”

As Darin Hayton has pointed out, Sebastian Brant’s Eulogium and Joseph Grünpeck’s first treatise on the French pox are to be seen in the context of their attempts to win the sympathies of the German princes for Maximilian’s actions at home and abroad. 244 At the time of the publication of Brant’s Eulogium de scorra pestilentiali, discussed in the first chapter, Maximilian I was still in Italy, “among the spotted Ligurians.” 245 Deemed by Darrel Amundsen “a political manifesto, a plea to the German people to support their emperor so that this scourge sent from heaven to punish them for their lack of patriotism, be removed,” 246 it was meant to express support for Maximilian’s anti-French campaign in Italy and his domestic and foreign agenda as a whole. 247

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239 Hieronymus Gebwiler, Libertas Germaniae (Strasbourg: Johann Schott, 1519), D3 r: “genuinum certe Alem[m]anorum in Gallos odium.”
243 Flood, Poets Laureate, xlix.
244 Darin Hayton, The Crown and the Cosmos, chapter 2.
247 In addition to Hayton’s and Amundsen’s works quoted above, the political opportunism of Brant’s and Grünpeck’s writings on the French pox was observed by Paul Russel in his “Astrology as popular propaganda” and Dieter Wuttke, “Sebastian Brants Syphilis-Flugblatt des Jahres 1496,” in Girolamo Fracastoro, Lehrgedicht über die Syphilis, ed and trans. Georg Wührle (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1993): 133.
Both Brant and Grünpeck hinted that the French disease was a direct consequence of the disobedience of the German princes and foreign powers towards the emperor. Brant’s poem mentions disobedience to the wishes of the gods to have one emperor as the main reason behind the outbreak of *morbus gallicus*: “And you, Italians, first be obedient to the kind king [Maximilian], for somebody not as good could undermine and destroy you. The die is cast, Rhamnusia is playing and she resents us for wanting less.”248 According to Grünpeck, pride was the cause of the French disease: “The holy doctors say: just like there are three major sins, from which all other sins emerge, so there are three spears, with which men are punished. The three sins are pride, avarice, and unchastity, and the punishments are pestilence, bloodshed, and famine, with which the Almighty God in the old days suppressed the audacity and malice of men, and which he inflicts on us today.”249 It is curious that Grünpeck mentions pride as the cause of the epidemic, since it was one of the main negative characteristics attributed to the French people, as I show in the third chapter. At the same time, its Greek equivalent, hubris, was considered the opposite of sophrosyne or moderation. Overreaching behavior was believed to anger the gods and cause distemper, that is, the disease itself.

Brant notes the disobedience of the German princes: “We notice that few are faithful to the empire and it hardly nowadays pleases the Germans to have an emperor. For they desire to rule themselves in blind confusion...”250 To them, Brant directs his plea: “O German virtue and vigorous hearts, wish not to act foolishly and abandon your bridles and power to others.”251

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248 In this context, “for wanting less imperial authority.” Grünpeck, “Tractatus de pestilentiali,” 7: “Vosque, Itali, inprimis regem observate benignum / Ne nos deterior subruatm interimat. / “Alea iacta quidem est pernix; Rhamnusia ludit, / Atque indignatur, nos voluisse minus.”

249 Grünpeck, “Ein hübscher Tractat,” 33: “Es sagen die heyligen Doctores: gleicherweiss als drey haubtsünd sind, darauss all ander sünde entspringen, also auch sind drey geyseln, domit die menschen gestrafft werden. Die drey sünde sind die hoffart, geyttigkeit, vnkeüsche: aber die straffen sind pestilenz, blůtuergiessen vnd hunger, mit würchen der allmächtig Got in den alten tagen die törsch vnd bosheyet der menschen bezwungen, auch heiß den tag vns domit peyniget.”

250 Grünpeck, “Tractatus de pestilentiali,” 4-5: “Imperio paucos iam cernimus esse fideles, / Vix modo Germanis Caesarem habere placet. / Pro se quisque student caeco regnare tumultu...”

Brant compares the German nobility to the frogs who, unhappy with their king, desired a new one and were sent King Ibis to rule over them, an allusion to one of Aesop’s Fables. The fable in question is *The Frogs Asking Zeus for a King* – a popular subject in the German broadsheets of the time. Several years after the publication of this poem, Brant prepared an annotated edition of Aesop’s Fables. According to the cautionary tale, frogs asked Zeus to send them a king. In response, Zeus sent them a crane who began eating the frogs. Just as “frogs must have their storks,” so people deserve the rulers they have, Martin Luther wrote.

Just like the frogs, “the Germans are striving in this greatest effort to cut off the head [the Emperor], which they themselves have begotten.” As a result of the lack of faith on the part of the German princes in the emperor, angry Gods send diseases on Earth: “Thereupon, God the Avenger often sends piercing diseases, and every kind of fever, numerous new monsters, wild beasts and portents, profane miracles and numerous deaths, unknown to nature.” At the end of the poem Brant urges everyone to pray for the health of the German emperor and exclaims that he would rather “throw himself under the foot” of Maximilian than be under “a foreign yoke.” The poem ends with a display of Brant’s patriotic feelings: “So may God and the Mother of God forever protect the German kingdom and the Teutonic glory.”

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252 Grünpeck, “Tractatus de pestentiali scorra,” 5.
255 Grünpeck, “Tractatus de pestentiali scorra,” 5: “Inter multa quidem, quae me nescire fatebor / Ingenue, hoc prope scire reor, / Germanos vel ad hoc summo conamine niti, / Quo sibi praecidant, quod peperere caput.”
256 Ibid., 5: “Inde adeo in terras mittit deus ulterior acerbos / Iam totiens morbos, febris et omne genus, / Tot nova monstraa, fera et portenta, ostenta profana, et / Natura et invisam multimodamque necem.”
257 Ibid., 7.
258 Ibid.: “Si Germana deus regna atque deifera mater / Perpetua observent Theutonicumque decus.”
Brant’s message of obedience to the imperial authority can also be discerned in the woodcut that accompanied his poem (fig. 2).\(^{259}\) It shows Baby Jesus in the lap of the Virgin Mary, shooting cleansing arrows towards kneeling figures covered in ulcers. The arrows correspond to a verse from Brant’s poem in which he calls diseases “the spears of God, with which the badness is cleansed, and the sins are scourged and eliminated.”\(^{260}\) The imagery of arrows of disease predates Christianity and goes back to the *Iliad*, in which Apollo is described not only as a healer but also as an archer striking with the arrows of pestilential disease.\(^{261}\) The idea that God sends purifying “scourges” is also found in a number of Biblical texts, particularly in Jeremiah.\(^{262}\) The image of spotted syphilitics was not only meant as a visual reminder to look out for the signs of the new disease. It also fulfilled a devotional aspect since the disease and its spots were an indication of sinfulness.\(^{263}\) The broadsheet’s audience was thus to repent their sins and pray to the Virgin Mary and God, as the texts by Brant and Grünpeck suggest.

\(^{259}\) A modified version of this woodcut also appeared in Joseph Grünpeck’s edition of Brant’s *Eulogium*: the royal figure is kneeling and is no longer surrounded by an army; a female figure replaces a male figure to the king’s right. Darin Hayton has suggested that the replacement corresponded to Grünpeck’s argument that women were the agents of the disease - the man in front was thus the women’s “most recent victim.” Hayton, “Joseph Grünpeck’s Astrological Explanation,” 94. Quétel attributes the woodcuts to Albrecht Dürer in his *History of Syphilis*, 13. However, I have not found any such reference in other sources.

\(^{260}\) Grünpeck, “Tractatus de pestilentiali,” 7: “Sunt ea tela deûm, quibus exitiale piatur, Atque flagellatur deprimiturque nefas.”


\(^{262}\) KJV Jeremiah 8: 7-11: “Thus saith the Lord; Behold, I frame evil against you, and devise a device against you: return ye now every one from his evil way, and make your ways and your doings good.”

\(^{263}\) See, for example, Jonathan Gil Harris, “Po(X) Marks the Spot.”
Brant’s work is an example of the **Pestblätter** genre – popular prints that explained the origins of diseases, talked about cures, and were illustrated with images of saints that were believed to help the sufferers cope with diseases. Another example of this tradition is a broadsheet featuring a woodcut by Albrecht Dürer known as the “Syphilitic Man” (fig. 3) accompanied by a poem entitled *Theodericus Ulsenius Phrisius medicus universis litterarum patronis in epidimicam scabiem, quae passim toto orbe grassatur, Vaticinium dicat* (“The medical doctor Theodore Ulsenius from Frisia talks to all patrons of literature about the
prediction regarding the epidemics of scabies which marches across the whole world")\textsuperscript{264} and written by the city physician of Nuremberg, the Dutch astrologer and poet Dirk van Ulsen or Theodor Ulsenius (ca. 1460-1508).\textsuperscript{265} The Nuremberg publisher Hans Mair printed the first edition of the broadsheet on 1 August 1496; the second edition appeared in Augsburg around 1497.\textsuperscript{266}

The identity of the figure in Dürer’s woodcut has been at the center of attention of a number of researchers. Gilman suggested that Dürer’s syphilitic man is “a German caricature of the sufferer as a fop, as a Frenchman, as the outsider already associated in German myth with sexual excesses and deviances.”\textsuperscript{267} Colin Eisler, disagreeing with Gilman, argued that the figure in Dürer’s woodcut represents a German landsknecht “dressed in a usual uniform of hired Northern foot soldiers characteristic of German or Swiss military.”\textsuperscript{268} Eisler’s interpretation is supported by the fact that mercenaries were often seen as the carriers of the disease.\textsuperscript{269} The celestial globe above the figure is meant to represent the conjunction that Ulsenius mentions in the text. On both sides of the figure one can see the coat of arms of Nuremberg, and the sun represents Apollo mentioned in the text.

\textsuperscript{264} For a critical edition, see: Conrad Fuchs, \textit{Theodorici Ulsenii Phrisii Vaticinium in epidemicam scabium, quae passim toto orbe grassatur: nebst einigen anderen Nachträgen zur Sammlung der ältesten Schriftsteller über die Lustseuche in Deutschland} (Göttingen: Dieterich, 1850).

\textsuperscript{265} Kemper, “Zur Syphilis-Erkrankung des Conrad Celtis”; Santing, “Medizin und Humanismus.”


\textsuperscript{269} Larry Silver, “Pox vobiscum: Early Modern German Art and Syphilis” in \textit{Tributes in Honor of James H. Marrow. Studies in Painting and Manuscript Illumination of the Late Middle Ages and Northern Renaissance}, ed. Jeffrey Hamburger and Anne Korteweg (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), 465-76.
Fig. 3: “The Syphilitic Man.” Theodericus Ulsenius Phrisius medicus universis litterarum patronis in epidemicam scabiem, quae passim toto orbe grassatur, Vaticinium dicat.

Wellcome Library (London) Wellcome Images L0014503.
https://wellcomeimages.org/indexplus/obf_images/10/a6/7f940c365e54242ab83def538012.jpg
Like Brant’s broadsheet discussed above, this print has a devotional aspect, which is not immediately apparent. The figure in the woodcut is displaying his wounds in a Christ-like gesture. He is wrapped in a red mantel that could be interpreted as a symbol of the Passions of Christ. At first the gesturing might seem characteristic of Christ at the Judgment Day tradition after the Gospel of St. Matthew 25: eternal punishment to the ones standing to the left, and life eternal to the ones standing to the right. Perhaps, however, it would be more accurate to read this figure in the context of the Man of Sorrows imagery, as Eisler suggests. The ulcers covering the body of the landsknecht were visual warnings for people looking at the woodcut (like the spotted syphilitics in Brant’s broadsheet) and a reminder of sufferings endured by Christ for the sins of mankind. The image was meant to compel the audience to pity the sick, find peace in their sickness, and contemplate their sins ahead of the Judgment Day, a portent of which, the French disease, was sometimes presented as one of the four horsemen of the Apocalypse. To quote Charles Webster,

“as in the medieval period, in the sixteenth century medical doctors were prominent players in the apocalyptic dialogue. Through their intervention, new disasters such as syphilis were identified as part of the prophetic scheme and were thereby accorded an even higher profile than they had already attained.”

Martin Luther also adopted an eschatological view of the French pox. Morbus gallicus occupies a prominent place in Luther’s chronological chart Supputatio annorum mundi, published for the first time in 1541. In this work, Luther traces world history from the expulsion from the Garden of Eden until 1540, the year that Luther believed to correspond to the year 5500 in world history. Luther’s chronology was based on the idea that the history of the earth would last for 6000 years. The year 1540 marked the beginning of the sixth millennium, during

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270 Eisler, “Who is Dürer’s Syphilitic Man?” 57.
which Luther expected the Second Coming to happen. In his eschatological view of history, “this new French disease, also called Spanish [disease], brought to the West from the new islands,” placed in his chart as occurring for the first time in 1496-1497 was “one of the greatest external signs of the past,” a warning from Heaven of the seventh age to come.

The woodcut accompanying Brant’s poem reinforces the importance of Maximilian’s Italian mission for his crusading activities. In addition to Mary with Baby Jesus, it portrays Maximilian holding a banner featuring the cross of the patron saint of crusaders, St. George (fig. 2). Thus, the textual and visual narratives of Brant’s pamphlet lead the viewers to regard Maximilian’s campaign as part of his greater mission to conquer the infidels and fulfill the prophecy of the Last Emperor. The fear of the “Turks” was far greater than that of the French, as the numerous pamphlets of the time demonstrate, and, as Whaley writes, the German estates were more eager to regard the Turks as their enemies than the Italian states and the French kings. Brant’s poem thus attempted to transform these anti-Turkish sentiments into support for Maximilian’s Italian and anti-French campaigns. These motifs were used by Grünpeck and Brant to gather support for domestic and international politics of Emperor Maximilian I.

Erasmus of Rotterdam also named the disobedience to the emperor as the reason behind calamities afflicting the German Empire, with the French disease being one of them. Erasmus’s Utilissima consultatio de bello Turcis inferendo, et obiter enarratus psalmus 28 (“A most useful discussion concerning proposals for the war against the Turks, including an exposition

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275 Whaley, Germany and the Holy Roman Empire, 37.
276 Kurt Stadtwald refers to turning anti-Italian sentiments into “pro-imperial support”: Stadtwald, Roman popes and German patriots, 52.
277 Brant also fuses apocalyptic anxieties and need to support Emperor Maximilian in “Vom endkrist” and “Vo abgang des gloube.” See Sebastian Brant, Das Narrenschiff (Basel: Johann Bergmann von Olpe, 1494).
of Psalm 28”), published in 1530, is an example of Türkenbüchlein, popular moralizing texts with religious references focusing on the wickedness at home, rather than among the Turks. Less than half a year before the publication, Sultan Suleiman had besieged Vienna. Even though his attack had failed, it stirred panic among the subjects of the German Empire, cries for a crusade and hopes for an eventual defeat of the Ottomans.

In his pamphlet, Erasmus refers to the Turks and the French disease as scourges sent by God for the sins of humankind. The first way to remove the scourge is to repent the sins and reform the spiritual state at home. God had already tried to warn the people about their actions, but they did not listen:

God has acted like a faithful physician, always trying some new treatment; he sent among us an unprecedented and incurable form of leprosy, commonly known as the French pox (for no good reason, since it is rife in every land), striking humanity with a truly dreadful scourge. So far from this horrible disease teaching us chastity and sobriety, we have actually turned it into a joke: it has apparently reached the point where, among your courtiers, who suppose themselves such fine and witty fellows, anyone not infected with the disease is considered a boor and a bumpkin. How else can I describe this than as farting at the Lord, and, as the saying goes, giving him the finger as he seeks to correct us?²⁷⁹

Erasmus writes that some princes do not want to participate in the war against the Turks, since they think “it has nothing to do with the Christian religion but that it is merely a struggle for the throne of Hungary between the two princes.”²⁸⁰ The princes fear the growing authority of the emperor who had recently defeated the French, since “the pleasures of power often know no restraint.”²⁸¹ As a result, some of them voice their support for the Turkish prince, saying that “it is easier to be a Christian under Turkish rule than under the Christian princes or the Roman pontiff.”²⁸² “Seeing the Scythians and the Icthyopagi found the Roman Empire’s yoke

²⁸⁰ Ibid., 256.
²⁸¹ Ibid.
²⁸² Ibid., 257.
insufferable, shall we choose to place our necks beneath the Turkish yoke?,” – he asks.\textsuperscript{283} However, to Erasmus, a war against the Turks is not an answer, since no one can defeat a “hydra with innumerable heads.”\textsuperscript{284} The answer, instead, is to repent the sins and reform oneself. The princes, too, shall reform, become more obedient, and cut down on expenses such as “parades, presents, banquets, elaborate embassies, games, and gambling,” either contributing money to the campaign against the Turks or offering alms to God.\textsuperscript{285} Thus, just like Brant and Grünpeck before him, Erasmus used the crusading theme and the French disease to criticize the lack of civic obedience and corrupt morals as a whole.

The rhetoric used by Grünpeck and Brant in their writings on the French disease is similar to the anti-French and pro-imperial rhetoric in the works of Ulrich von Hutten, urging the German princes to support their emperor in liberating Italy from foreigners. While in Italy, Hutten witnessed a different episode of the Italian Wars.\textsuperscript{286} After Hutten had heard about Maximilian’s retreat from the Duchy of Milan he, while still in Italy, set out to produce a poem glorifying the emperor as the liberator of Italy. His \textit{Epistola Italiae ad divum Maximilianum Caesarem Augustum Ulricho Hutteno equite Germano autore} was printed in Strasbourg in late summer of 1516, after Maximilian had already returned back to the German lands.\textsuperscript{287} It is written in the form of a poem addressed by Italia to Emperor Maximilian. Suffering from the actions of the French and Spanish kings, and of the pope, Italia urges the Holy Roman Emperor

\textsuperscript{283} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{284} Ibid., 260.
\textsuperscript{285} Ibid., 256.
\textsuperscript{286} On 1 January 1515, upon the death of Louis XII, Francis I became the new king of France. One of the first goals of the new ruler was the reconquest of the Duchy of Milan and the lands in the Veneto, previously captured by Maximilian I. The French secured their victory at the Battle of Marignano that took place in September 1515, and on October 11 Francis I and his troops made their entry into Milan. Two months after Francis I’s departure from re-conquered Milan, Maximilian I attempted to win the Duchy of Milan back with the help of the Swiss troops, but retracted in the last moment without even laying siege. See Mallett and Shaw, \textit{The Italian Wars}, 116-138.
\textsuperscript{287} Shortly afterwards, at the request of Ulrich von Hutten, Eobanus Hessus composed a fictional reply to Italia from Maximilian. Hutten’s poem and Hessus’ reply were printed together in a booklet in November 1516 in Erfurt. For the history of the publication of \textit{Epistola Italiae ad divum Maximilianum Caesarem Augustum Ulricho Hutteno equite Germano autore} and Hessus’s reply, see: Vredevelt, \textit{The Poetic Works of Helius Eobanus Hessus}, vol. 3, 352-369.
to liberate and protect her from rapacious foreign rulers: “My country will be free either through you or not at all. You are my lord; your word is my command. With you as my prince, I shall raise my head proudly above the subjugated peoples, just in the days of yore.” The poem compares Maximilian with Charlemagne and “the two Ottos” and calls him “the head of Rome” (Rome is “the head of the world”). Italia praises Maximilian’s concern for domestic politics (a view not shared by his princes): “Ah, how often I feared, when you were so intent on German affairs, that you might, in some measure, be distracted by love for your homeland!” “Germany is indeed valiant in war, but Italy offers greater wealth. Such riches are certainly a prize fit for the bold of heart,” she continues.

Eobanus Hessus was the author of the fictitious response of Maximilian to Italia. In the letter, Maximilian enumerates his past exploits against the “perfidious Frenchmen” and other nations, but states that he cannot be as victorious as the two Ottos since the circumstances have changed greatly:

In those days, Germany did not have so many sovereign princes, nor had that villainous contempt for the emperor cropped up as yet. The fatherland obeyed the emperors harmoniously; no one carved out a personal state for himself… And because everybody fancies himself an emperor, I myself retain nothing but the empty name.

However, in his treatise on the use of the Guaiac tree for treating morbus gallicus, Ulrich von Hutten, the “defender of fatherland,” refers to the French as “the most outstanding people, it would be hard to find a more civilized and hospitable [people].” He notes that the disease occurs more often among the German people than among Frenchmen.

289 Ibid., 378-379.
290 Ibid., 404-405.
291 Ibid., 400-404.
293 Hutten, De guaiaci medicina et morbo gallico liber unus, 400: “…gentis clarissimae et qua vix alia hoc tempore ciuillior aut hospitalior…”
and Spaniards, due to the former’s immoderacy in food and drink which he proclaims the main reason for God’s wrath. His righteous indignation over gluttony and drunkenness of the German nobility occupies the longest chapter in his treatise. He also accuses the Church of making use of the French disease for their enrichment by inventing new saints and collecting money for indulgences, but nevertheless urges his readers to pray to St. Rochus, whom he considered to be the true patron saint of syphilitics. Hutten urges the nobility to abandon their indulgence in expensive foreign food and drinks, which causes the French pox, and turn to the more important tasks: the conquest of the Turks and other infidels. The latter can only be accomplished by defeating the French, who are distracting the emperor from his main tasks as the Christian ruler. Thus, Hutten’s rhetorical goals are similar to that of Brant, Grünpeck, and Erasmus. All of them associated the French pox with the vices of the princes and their lack of support of Maximilian’s campaigns on the international arena.

The French are to blame

Not everybody agreed with Hutten regarding the role of the French in the causes of the French disease. In fact, he was the only one who defended them so openly. As I already mention in the first chapter, many claimed that the French disease had befallen the French people first. Joseph Grünpeck writes that the disease was sent to the French from Heaven: “Sent to the Gauls from the citadel of the immortal gods, [it is] now spreading to all the corners of the world and becoming dreadfully fierce in many regions.” Alexander Seitz, in his *Ein nutzlich

294 Ibid., 403: “Omnibus in Italia et Hispania, ac sicubi præterea sobrii sunt homines, mitior, nobis propter crapulam & vicus intemperantiam, ut divitius inhæret, ita comprehensos infestissime torquet, acerbissime adfligit.”
295 Ibid., chapter 20. I review this chapter of Hutten’s treatise in more detail in Chapter 3.
297 Hutten, *De guaiaci medicina et morbo gallico liber unus*, 401.
298 Ibid., 470.
299 Grünpeck, “Tractatus de pestilentiali,” 8: “Insuper novum genus morbi, naturae invisum, minaci ferocitate, quod e deorum immortalium olim arce in Gallos demissum fuit, omnes mundi cardines enititur, pluribus in regionibus atrocissime etiam incrudescescens.”
regiment wider die bösen Franzosen, wrote that the French disease originated in Alvernia (Auvergne) in 1491.\textsuperscript{300}

In his third treatise on the French disease Libellus Josephi Grünbeckii de mentulagra alias morbo gallico (1503) Grünpeck draws an explicit connection between the disease and the Italian campaign of Charles VIII:

From the western shores of Gaul, a cruel, deplorable and terrible evil crept over to them, and nothing as atrocious, nothing as horrible and disgusting has ever been known or seen in the world. First, this disease stopped in Insubria, similar to a hurricane stirred by piled up clouds. Then, moving across the atmosphere, pushed by the power of the winds, it raged through the whole province of Liguria. As a horrible and pestilential scourge, it descended upon the whole French army which King Charles VIII had happened to gather there, driven by his ambition and caprice to conquer Italy ... From there the poison, directed by contagion, spread across the entire Liguria and other regions of Italy, Germany and Spain and all other parts of the world.\textsuperscript{301}

Grünpeck is confident that the French were the first to be affected, because he himself examined the first victims of the epidemic. As we learn from his Libellus, while traveling around Italy Grünpeck happened to be in the “Etruscan fields” (Tuscany) where he heard from the locals that two powerful armies stationed nearby were about to fight “for the liberation of Italy.”\textsuperscript{302} Grünpeck rushed to the enemy camp “to see if this shameful disease [morbus gallicus] was the companion of soldiers.”\textsuperscript{303} There he observed the signs and symptoms of this new disease. The battle for the liberation of Italy, however, did not take place due to a sudden suspension of military actions between the French on one side and Maximilian I and the Duke

\textsuperscript{300} Alexander Seitz, “Ein nutzlich regiment wider die bösen Franzosen,” 8: “Dan allß solich kranckheit anfienge in Alvernia deß jars vierzehen hundert nüntzig und ein jar...”

\textsuperscript{301} Grünpeck, “De Mentulagra,” 51: “...Inter ceteras obrepsit ab occidentali sinu, gallico tractu, cuiusdam infirmitatis tempestas, adeo saeva, atra et foeda, quod ea nihil quicquam atrocius, terribilis et sordidus in mortalium regione visum vel auditum est. Collegit autem se primo super Insbrum instar procellosae nubis in ingentem acervum, deinde per magnum coeli spatium, totam Ligurum provinciam, vi ventorum sparsa horridam et pestiferam veneni procellam passim in Gallorum exercitus (quos ibi forte Caroli, eorum regis, ambitio et Italiae subigendae libido conscriptum) deorsum egit... Hinc infectio (contagione duce) per totam Liguriam ceterasque Italiae oras, Germaniam et Hispaniam et omnes mundi partes grassata, humanum genus mirum in modum afflxit et hodie dirissime excruciat.”

\textsuperscript{302} Ibid., 55: “Ex silva equidem in duabus fere horis ad Hetruscorum agros, praecipuus novitatum cultores, pervolavi. Ibi fana obviai duos potentissimos exercitus non procul ab hoc loco pro Italiae libertate pugnatiros nunciatu.”

\textsuperscript{303} Ibid.,” 56: “ista foeda lues militum comes foret.”
of Milan, “who sought to repel the French attacks on Italian liberty” on the other side. This is how Grünpeck later described this episode in his Historia Frederici et Maximiliani:

Meanwhile, King Charles of France conquered Naples and encumbered Rome and Milan with great fear and horror. A union between Duke Louis of Milan and Venice was concluded, and Maximilian went to Italy to approach the French camp. However, when he arrived in Liguria, he waited for a long time in Genoa, Pisa and at the sea for the help against France from entire Italy [to come], but did not see it. In fact, he was tricked and forgotten. Via the Pennine Alps he returned to the German land and never again trusted the Italians.

The idea that the French were the first to be infected with the disease and reasons for it can be found in Grünpeck’s first treatise, particularly in his translation in prose of Brant’s poem, the meaning of which he slightly changed in his translation. As a result, Brant’s original poem and Grünpeck’s translation offer rather different ideas about who is to blame for the outburst of the illness. As Grünpeck tells his readers: “And as though same Latin verses were not translated to German word for word, some still have been changed, and each can ponder over by himself, why this happened.”

One of the first verses altered by Grünpeck is Brant’s sentence, quoted above, on the disobedience of the German princes as the reason behind the outbreak of the French disease. Grünpeck deliberately changed the text to state that the French (and not the Germans) were the ones displeased with being ruled by the emperor: “As we know, few are faithful to the Roman Empire and it hardly pleases the French to have an emperor, and everyone strives to rule


306 Grünpeck, “Ein hübscher Tractat,” 48: “...vnd ob die selbigen lateinischen verse nit also von wort zů wort getütschet, auch etlich verwandelt worden sind, mag ein yegklicher ermesen bey jm selbs, warumb das beschehen sey.”
himself in the blind race of the world.” Grünpeck alters the meaning of yet another of Brant’s verses. As referred to above, Brant’s original text reads: “Among many things which I admit I do not know, I believe I know one thing well: the Germans are striving in this greatest effort to cut off the head [the Emperor], which they themselfe have begotten.” Grünpeck translates it as: “Among many things I know I do not understand, I think there is one that is not unknown to you: as you know, the Latinates with great effort are trying to cut the head that the Germans have elected.”

Being placed between the two altered passages, both the allusion to the Greek-Roman relations and Brant’s metaphor of the frogs from Aesop’s fable are transformed into an allusion to relations between Italy, France, and the German Empire. The Roman Empire becomes associated with the German Empire, and Greece with Italy: “Greece wishing to revolt against the Roman government, was lost and in ruins suffers from a cruel yoke.” Like Greece, which had never been satisfied with the rule of the Roman Empire since its conquest in 146 BCE, was eventually conquered by the Turks in 1453, Italy was ravaged by the French, after several Italian states reached agreements with France to the detriment of imperial interests.

Another medical author who compares the Neapolitan campaign of Charles VIII to Roman history is Otto Raut. In his *Pronosticum*, Raut draws a parallel between the Goths (who once “inflicted diseases and famine” upon Rome) and the French people, “those most

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308 Grünpeck, “Tractatus de pestilentiali scorra,” 5: “Inter multa quidem, quae me nescire fatebor/ Ingenue, hoc unum te prope scire reor, / Germanos vel ad hoc summo conamine niti, / Quo sibi praecidant, quod peperere caput.”
inconstant and fickle people who are presently unfortunately troubling Italy from all sides,” and after whom the disease was named. Raut seems to suggest that the Italian campaign of Charles VIII was akin to the sack of Rome by Alaric I, and the French to the Barbaric Goths.

Grünpeck presents the French disease as a moral consequence of the Italian expedition of the French king Charles VIII. Given their disobedience to the emperor, it is not surprising that the disease would first strike the army of the French King, blinded by his desire to conquer Italy (Italiae subigendae libido). As such, the French are akin to Shepherd Syphilus from the famous poem by Girolamo Fracostoro, Syphilis sive morbus gallicus (1530) after whom the disease got its present name. To give a short summary of the plot, on a particularly hot summer day shepherd Syphilus laments that the Gods are not taking proper care of his flock. In despair, he rejects his faith and choses to venerate his king instead. After the king hears what Syphilus had done, he orders everyone to abandon the gods and venerate him in the same manner in which Syphilus had been worshipping him. Syphilus’s actions anger the Sun, who hurls rays of light at the earth, which makes the air corrupt and causes the disease to appear. Syphilus appears to be the first to be infected: “The first man to display disfiguring sores over his body was Syphilus, who by the shedding of blood instituted divine rites in the king’s honour and altars in the mountains sacred to him; he was the first to experience sleepless nights and tortured limbs, and from this first victim the disease derived its name and from him the farmers called the sickness Syphilis.” Just like Syphilus, the French had angered the gods and thus a terrible malady was inflicted upon them. But if Syphilus was guilty of blasphemy, the French


committed a sin of a political nature – excessive pride that resulted in disobedience to their emperor.

The sins that turned the French into the first culprits of the disease were not of sexual, but of political nature: according to Brant and Grünpeck, it was their *superbia* and *avaritia*, the lustful desire of the French to conquer Italy and the rejection of the authority of the German emperor. The choice of pride over sins related to sexuality is not surprising, since the understanding of the French pox as a predominantly venereal disease did not develop until the 1520s, and in the first decades of the disease sexual intercourse was described as only one of the many ways to contract it.\(^{315}\) According to Arrizabalaga, French, and Henderson, only half of the early treatises on the French pox mentioned that the disease could be contracted through sexual activity\(^{316}\) and for “some early writers maintaining an active sex life, even if regulated, formed a core component of their therapeutic regimen for the French Disease.”\(^{317}\) At the same time, “the venereal nature of the disease would not typically have caused those who contracted it to be regarded as guilty of an act of sexual immorality for which they were being punished.”\(^{318}\) As Tilmann Walter shows, in the first decades of the outbreak of the French pox unruly sexuality was not considered the major sin to cause the French disease: “for many forms of sin with unchastity being only one of them the notion of a pervasive ‘pestilence’ was a sufficient warning from Heavens.”\(^{319}\) The sins of pride and disobedience, named by Brant and Grünpeck as the triggers of the epidemic, were considered far graver than sexual corruption.

Another interesting example of a peculiar confluence of religious and political themes in contemporary perceptions of the French disease is found in the chronicle of Materne Berler

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\(^{315}\) Jean de Béthencourt is considered the first to use the term “mal venerien.” For the periodization of the history of the French disease, see Temkin, “On the History of Morality and Syphilis.”


\(^{317}\) Arrizabalaga, “Medical Responses to the ‘French Disease,’” 48.


(1494) from the Alsatian town of Rouffach, written between 1510 and 1530.320 Dating the outbreak of the disease to 1494, Berler writes that the disease manifested itself for the first time in Naples in 1495 during the campaign of Charles VIII. He writes that “since it originated and seized the French people, it is called frantzossen.” In his opinion the disease was inflicted on the French as a punishment for the violation of the sacred institute of marriage by Charles VIII:

> I believe that this mighty punishment from God occurred, because King Charles did not content himself with Margaret, the daughter of the Roman king, who was to be wedded to him and who was with him, but instead out of great lust removed from his father-in-law and by force married noble Anna von Britannia.321

In 1491, Charles VIII of France married Anne of Brittany, who had been married by proxy to Maximilian I from 1490. The wedding was made even more scandalous by the fact that, in order to marry Anne of Brittany, Charles VIII had to break his engagement with Margaret of Austria, the daughter of Maximilian I, who was promised to him by the Treaty of Arras concluded in 1482.322 Maximilian, furious about the French king’s disregard of the agreements initiated what Wiesflecker calls a “Presserkrieg.”323 The German humanist Jacob Wimpfeling composed a poem “Contra Carolum Regem Gallorum” which he sent to the French humanist Robert Gaguin.324 In the poem, Wimpfeling accused the French king of kidnapping the wife of the German king and ended it with the following words: “If it is true that in Heavens there are those who see such things, the wrath of god the protector is on its way.”325 The two exchanged several more letters, in which Gaguin defended Charles VIII as “the most innocent

325 Ibid., 181: “Esse tamen superos coelo, qui talia curent. Si verum est, properat vindicis ira dei.”
Maximilian reacted to the wedding by writing a polemical work against the French published in both Latin and German, detailing the misdeeds of Charles VIII and accusing him of kidnapping his wife and of treacherousness (Verrätterei) and artfulness (Listigkeit). He questioned the Christian qualities of Charles VIII and wrote that the French would eventually be punished for their sins. He ended his letter with a plea to the German princes to help him avenge this attack on the empire and the German nation and not leave the guilty party who had averted his attention from the most important task – fighting the Turks – unpunished. Around the same time a popular song about the kidnapping of the bride and the trample of the sacrament of marriage began to circulate, which concluded with an appeal to Frederick III and the Christian princes to render help to Maximilian.

Given the religious overtones of Maximilian’s anti-French rhetoric, it is not surprising that only several years later the French disease was portrayed as part of a similar politicized religious narrative by Grünpeck, Maximilian’s future biographer, and by a number of other contemporaries. They incorporated politicized explanations of the causes of the disease into the tradition of attributing contagious diseases to the wrath of God, thus demonstrating that the disease was justly called “French.” Conceived as a punishment inflicted on the French people

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327 *Antwurt zu handthabung vnd behaltnuß der Römischen Künigklichenn Maiestat eeren vnd glympfens, auf der frantzosen falsch erticht vnd vngegründt ausschreiben in nachuolgenden henndeln* ([Augsburg], not before 1492.05), [8] r: “… sollend ir dennoch gedencken das die götliche straff. so der almechtig: got die ye lenger verzeucht das er die ye swerer vnd schöpfer vber euch senden wirdet.”
for their disobedience to the emperor, which then spread to other countries and most importantly to the German lands, the disease helped strengthen the postulate that relations between Maximilian and the French were threatening not only the Habsburg dynasty but also all the German subjects of the emperor.

**Jupiter’s children**

God’s will was considered the primary cause of the French disease, whereas celestial bodies were seen as the next in the system of causation. Astrology became part of the medical tradition in the thirteenth and fourteenth century through the works of the Arab astrologers Albumasar and Mashallah, popularized by Pietro d’Abano, Pierre d’Ailly, and others. The foundation of their teachings was the notion that planets governed individuals and even entire countries. At the same time, each profession, human organ, age, etc. was subject to a ruling planet. On the basis of astronomical observations and calculations, personal horoscopes and prognostications were produced that contained forecasts for individuals and countries on such diverse spheres as politics, health, agriculture, and fortune.

Astrology often featured in plague tracts – a genre which developed in the middle of the fourteenth century with the advent of the Black Death. These tracts, also known as *consilia*, gave concise, practical advice on the signs, symptoms, and treatment of diseases and were often written at the request of local authorities or patrons who found the need to make information about contagious diseases available to their subjects. One of the earliest plague tracts was the report of the Medical Faculty of Paris commissioned by King Philip VI of France in October 1348. The report focused on astrological causes of the plague and discussed various treatments for it. According to the Paris doctors, the plague originated in the celestial conjunction of

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330 To establish a hierarchy of causes, Joseph Grünpeck, for example, states in his treatise that planets do not act on their own referring to Jeremiah X. “Tractatus de pestilentiali,” 9: “Astris ipsis denegata est potesta iuxta illud Jeremiae X. A signis coeli nolite timere, quae gentes formidant, quioniam dominus misit pestem in Israel.” See Hayton, “Joseph Grünpeck’s Astrological Explanation.”
Saturn, Jupiter, and Mars which occurred on 20 March 1345. The conjunction of these planets believed to be particularly portentous and to bring, in addition to plague, the great calamities of hunger and bloodshed.331

Similarly to the authors of plague consilia, early chroniclers of the French disease regarded great conjunctions as the astrological cause of the French disease, even though they had different opinions on the planets involved and the chronology of celestial events. Brant traces the origins of the disease to the great conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter without specifying the date of the celestial event.332 Grünpeck’s explanations of the disease coincide with Brant’s, but differ in detail. According to Grünpeck, the epidemic was caused by three consecutive astrological events. The conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn in the sign of Scorpio, ruled by Mars that took place on November 25, 1484 was the first astrological event to cause the epidemic. Together with a solar eclipse that took place in March 1495 and a conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter in the sign of Scorpio in November 1495, this conjunction was a portent of wars, famine, and pestilence.333

Bartholomäus Steber’s astrological explanations of the origins of the French disease are similar to that of Grünpeck. He too regarded the conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter in Scorpio, ruled by Mars, which took place in 1484, along with the solar eclipse of March 1495, as the celestial causes of the epidemic. At the same time, he added several more events that triggered the epidemic: a lunar eclipse in the house of Leo which took place on 20 July 1487 and also involved Mars being in the sign of Virgo and Saturn in the sign of Scorpio; and the conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn which took place on 23 February 1494 with Saturn being in

331 Tester, A History of Western Astrology, 185-188.
332 Grünpeck, “De pestilentiali scorrà,” 6: “Fit, quotiens propriis Saturnus ab aedibus exit / Inque Iovis migrat morbifer ille domos. / Nam tum reliquias duri senis atque maligni / Iupiter expellit, purgat et evacuat.”
the sign of Pisces. The French disease, Steber writes, was a result of Saturn’s celestial motion, which occurs every 300 years.\textsuperscript{334}

Alexander Seitz also considered the movements of Saturn to be the cause of the French disease.\textsuperscript{335} In 1521, he elaborated his position in a treatise on the role played by Saturn in causing pestilences.\textsuperscript{336} Otto Raut wrote that the epidemic was brought by the conjunction of Jupiter, Saturn, and Mars in the house of Scorpio, with Mars dominating the conjunction, but offers a different date of the occurrence – 25 October 1485.\textsuperscript{337} Hock Wendelin suggested that the disease originated from the great conjunction of Jupiter, Mars, Sun, and Mercury in the house of Libra that took place in October 1483 and a number of numerous subsequent celestial events.\textsuperscript{338} According to Lorenz Fries, the French disease was caused by several conjunctions starting from the conjunction of Jupiter, Mars, Mercury, and Sun in the sign of Libra in October 1483, which was followed by several celestial events in November. The latter took place in the signs of Taurus and Scorpio which indicated that the disease affected not only the genitals (governed by Scorpio), but also the throat and intestines (governed by Taurus).\textsuperscript{339} Ulrich von Hutten notes that astrologers derive the cause of the French disease from the conjunction of Saturn and Mars (“which happened not long before”), and from two eclipses of the sun.\textsuperscript{340} Magnus Hundt does not specify the conjunction that caused the French disease, but notes elsewhere in his treatise that conjunctions of Saturn and Mars and eclipses of the Sun cause pestilences.\textsuperscript{341}

\textsuperscript{334} Steber, “A mala Franczos, morbo gallorum, praeaservatio ac cura,” 122.
\textsuperscript{335} Seitz, “Ein nutzlich regiment,” 8-9: “...sy Saturnus kummen in das zeichen wider / so sind in den zeichen widern und visch etlich stern alwegen etlich wunderbarlich geschichten und kranckheit stiftende so der Saturnus darin hauset...”
\textsuperscript{336} Seitz, ”Ain schöner Tractat von dem Saturnische[n] gschoß der Pestilenz.”
\textsuperscript{337} Raut, “Pronosticam ad annos domini millesimum quingentesimum secundum et tertium,” 295.
\textsuperscript{338} Hock, Mentagra sive tractatus de causis, praeaservativis, 9 r.
\textsuperscript{339} Lorenz Fries, Epitome Opusculi, B3 r-v.
\textsuperscript{340} Hutten, De Guaiaci medicina et morbo gallico liber unus, 404: “Huc astrologi ex syderum motu ratiocinati in conunctionen, quae fuit paualoante Saturni et Martis, ac binas solis eclipses causam eius reiecrunt...”
\textsuperscript{341} Magnus Hundt, Eyn kurztes und sehr Nutzbarlichs Regiment wider die schwynde und erschreckliche krankheit der Pestilentz (Leipzig: Valten Schumann, 1529), A3 v: “die zusammen lauffung der Planeten Saturni vnd Martis / vnd fisternis der Sonne.”
The conjunction of 1484 also features in Albrecht Dürer’s woodcut the “Syphilitic Man.” The poem it was printed with contains exactly one hundred hexameters and, as Catrien Santing shows in her article, was meant to impress Ulsenius’s refined audience of fellow humanists with his knowledge of classical mythology and command of Latin. The narrator finds himself at a meeting of physicians who cannot agree on a correct dosage of medicine against the disease. Getting tired of their conversation, he falls asleep and meets Apollo, the god of medicine who speaks to him about the new disease. He tells the author that there are two treatments available: herbs and poetry. Apollo is also the god of poetry (a hint that Ulsenius, like Apollo, is versed both in healing and poetry). Apollo explains the astrological and humoral causes of the disease and names reddish swelling behind the ears, rash, painful itching, and breaking pustules as the signs of the disease. According to Ulsenius, the epidemic occurred when the planet Saturn met his son Jupiter in the house of Scorpio. Since such conjunctions had always been considered a sign of disasters, and since there also had been a conjunction of Mars and Venus, heavenly bodies were to fall on Earth, monsters were to be born, and it was to rain with stones. Due to the fact that Mars was the ruling planet of Germany, the latter was to be particularly affected by the disease.342

Like Theodore Ulsenius, Grünpeck also believed that Germany was governed by Mars, whereas the French were governed by Jupiter and England by Saturn. Since these three planets were involved in the great conjunction which caused the epidemic, the disease spread to the countries they governed: “Then this disease descended upon Italians, who are thought to have imported it from the French, then Mars, the ruler of that conjunction, carried it to the Germans. Afterwards it poured over to the Englishmen and other servants of Saturn.”343

342 Santing, “Medizin und Humanismus,” especially 143-144.
These explanations were based on the notion of the “children of planets” – a belief that each country and social or political group, as well as each individual, had a particular connection with one of the seven planets (the Sun, Moon, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn), which determined their destiny, character, and complexion. This motif, developed in a number of astrological treatises in the Middle Ages, became widespread in the German lands in the early fifteenth century through popular writings of various genres.

Contemporaneous with the outbreak of the French disease, *Tractus de Complexionibus* by a certain Johannes of Neuhaus (Magister Joannis de Nova domo) published in 1500 in Leipzig, develops the motif of the children of the planets. Nothing is known about the author, and Werner Seyfert suggested Johannes of Neuhaus as the printer of the incunabula, and a thirteenth-century French philosopher and theologian John of Paris as its author.

The first lines of the text read: “The variety of complexions follows from the variety of their causes. This proposition is known in itself because under this or that [stellar] constellation there is this or that complexion, character, color, figure, and disposition.” The text offers a taxonomy of humors and characters of people and ends with the following statement: “The Saxons, and the Frisians, the Poles and the Thuringians all have the same customs, because they are brought up in the same location and under the same constellation.”

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344 Lynn Thorndike, “De Complexionibus,” *Isis* 49/4 (1958): 398: “The word, complexion, which today has become restricted to the appearance of the face, in the middle ages had the more general meaning of one’s physical constitution of bodily makeup as a whole.”


348 Ibid., 299: “Et ideo Saxones omnes sunt eiusdem moris et Frisones et Poloni et Thuringi, quia in eodem loco et ab eadem constellatione sunt nutriti.”
A major source for this theory was *Tetrabiblos* composed by Claudius Ptolemy in the second century CE. Ptolemy divided the world into four zones of influence of stars and zodiacs that defined the characters of individuals and entire peoples inhabiting them. *Tetrabiblos* offers an elaborate system of effects that the planets have on their “subjects” at different stages of their motion. Thus, for example, the subjects of the ascending Jupiter exceed in the hot and the moist, while the subjects of ascending Mars show “an excess of the warm and dry.”

Ptolemy’s ideas widely circulated in the Middle Ages: quoting the translator of *Tetrabiblos* to English, it “enjoyed almost the authority of a Bible among the astrological writers of a thousand years or more” after it was written.

The *Great Conjunctions, Nations, and Peoples* and *Letter Concerning Eclipses* of the Arab-speaking Jewish philosopher Mashallah or al-Mansur e al-Mamun, introduced into the Latin-reading world through a twelfth-century translation usually attributed to John of Seville, was another popular vehicle of this motif, enjoying great success throughout the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. It contains a whole book on the effects of governing planets on countries and professions: thus, Libra and Saturn ruled over the Christian land, Scorpio and Venus over the Arabs, Capricorn and Mercury over India, Leo and Mars over Turkey, etc.

Whereas there were almost no variations in the characteristics of the planets and their children throughout the centuries, the attribution of planets to countries and peoples differed from one author to another, largely because the original sources – the Greek and Arab astrological writers – had a different geo-political picture in mind while composing their works.

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351 I have used the first printed edition of the work. Johannes Hispanus, Joachim Heller, *Epitome totius astrologiae* (Nuremberg: Ioniis Montani & Vlrici Neuber, 1548), F1 r.
The connection between Saturn and the Jews was perhaps one of the most enduring. The idea that France was governed by Jupiter and England was governed by Saturn is present in astrological treatises that predate the advent of the French pox. Among them is an anonymous anti-French prognostication, composed in England and housed at the Bibliothèque Nationale, devoted to the appearance of a comet in 1368.

The “children of the planets” tradition not only provided rationales for the appearance of the French disease in the countries, but also constituted the underlying principle of the means of its advancement. In a passage in the Latin version of his first treatise, omitted from the vernacular text, Joseph Grünpeck reflects on how the disease spread across Europe, suggesting that it was passed on not from one person to another, but via celestial forces:

In our days it [the French disease] crept not only through Italy, but also through Germany, Sarmatia, Bohemia, Thrace and Britain and crawled into all the corners of the world where it has never been heard before… How can it happen that this disease was passed on to so many other peoples than the French when until now the French had suffered frequently from it, without ever being confined within city walls as to be prevented from venturing to other kingdoms? But rather as they became dispersed throughout the world they nevertheless did not spread this disease to other people, a disease which otherwise whirls as an arrow from one to another. Because of this, experts in astrology investigating the hidden cause of this affliction in detail, produced many worthy writings which I will not discuss here.

Grünpeck invokes the astrological doctrine of nativity, adding that all the people who had Jupiter as their ruling planet and at whose birth the sign which had been present during the

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353 “Incogniti astrologi predictio rerum incognitarum ex aspectu cometae caudatae, quae apparuit in Francia ad plagam occidentalem anno domini 1368 maxime que Lutetiae Parisiorum videbatur post solis occasum,” in Hebert Pruckner, Studien zu den astrologischen Schriften des Heinrich von Langenstein (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1933), 209: “Quia Saturnus, qui dominationem suam per multum longum tempus habuit causa sue influencia ad honorem regis Anglie et suorum, ad presens se applicat declinere. Et Jupiter planeta regnivolus fortunam significator substetit omnino Saturno in compleccionibus hominum contrarius, qui in regno Francie suum dominium et influenciam possidet, qui per multum longum tempus causa Saturni fuit in detrimento et infortunato.”
354 Grünpeck, “Tractatus de pestilentiali,” 17: “Namque quomodo fieri potuit, ut idem morbus de Gallis ad tot gentes transveheretur, quum eo antehac Francigenae saepius laborarint, nunquam tamen moenibus urbium pressi fuerunt, ut alia regna petere prohiberentur? Quinimum per orbis regiones sicut iam disseminati fuerunt, haud tamen id malum in alias homines miserunt, quod iam ab altero in alterum, tamquam sagitta, torquetur. Quamobrem astrorum peritissimi, latenter huius aegritudinis causam acutius investigantes, plura scripta digna protulere, qua hic non est recensendi locus.” Proksch understood this passage as an indication that the French disease was a disease that had occurred to the French in the past. However, Günpeck calls the disease “new” in other numerous instances.
conjunction of 1484 was present and a sun eclipse took place, were more prone to the French
disease.\footnote{Ibid. For a comprehensive discussion of Grünpeck’s astrological explanations, see Hayton, “Joseph
Grünpeck’s Astrological Explanation,” 85-94.}

Pere Pintor (c. 1423/4-1503), one of the seven personal physicians of Pope Alexander
VI and a source for Otto Raut, published two treatises on \textit{morbus gallicus} in 1499 and 1500.\footnote{On Pintor, see Arrizabalaga, French, Henderson, \textit{The Great Pox}, 112-144.} Like the authors discussed above, Pintor also believed that one of the causes of the French
disease was astrological. According to him, the disease was defined by various conjunctions
from 1483 (when the disease was formed) to 1494 (the year of its appearance), with the
participation of Saturn in the sign of Scorpio. Pintor also argued that the disease spread to the
countries whose ruling planets and signs participated in the conjunctions.\footnote{Ibid., 125.}

According to Ulrich von Hutten, astrologers considered the areas in the North and in the West particularly
affected by the celestial events that caused the outbreak of the French pox, since the first eclipse
took place in the sign of Aquarius (governing the North), and the second in the sign of Pisces
(governing the West).\footnote{Hutten, \textit{De guaiaci medicina et morbo gallico liber unus}, 404: “magis autem septentrioni id destinatum,
propter aquarii signum, quo prior eclipsis inciderit, et occidenti propter pisces, quod posterior attigerit.”}

\textbf{The Year 1484}

Returning to the conjunction of 1484, the reference to this year in Dürer's woodcut and
in the works by Grünpeck, Brant, and Steber is certainly not accidental. As Dieter Wuttke has
noted,\footnote{Wuttke, “Sebastian Brants Syphilis-Flugblatt,” 135-136.} this date was made popular primarily through \textit{Pronosticatio zu teutsch} written by the
astrologer and polemical writer Johannes Lichtenberger, “a late-medieval ‘bestseller’” in the
words of Dietrich Kurze.\footnote{Dietrich Kurze, “Popular Astrology and Prophecy in Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries,” in \textit{Astrologi
Gruyter, 1986), 183. For an excellent and very detailed analysis of Lichtenberger’s prognostication and its}
Heidelberg in 1488 and was shortly afterwards translated into the vernacular. During the next eleven years, from 1488 to 1499 it was reprinted fourteen times in Latin, German, and Italian. By 1525, there were nine further editions in Italy.\textsuperscript{361} During the Reformation, the prognostication became associated with Martin Luther. One of the predictions in Lichtenberger’s text concerns a “minor prophet” to be born in 1484, who would introduce changes into the Christian doctrine and laws. Even though Luther was born in 1483, many still believed that Lichtenberger’s text foreshadowed his birth, which assured extra popularity during the Reformation.\textsuperscript{362}

Lichtenberger’s text is a digest of several prognostic traditions, “not an integral corpus but rather as a quarry from which writers could, according to design, lift relevant set-pieces and suitable motifs.”\textsuperscript{363} Its compilatory nature was the reason it enjoyed such great popularity. Among Lichtenberger’s sources were the classic and popular works of the Church Fathers, Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, a number of Greek and Arab astrologers, Sybilline prophecies, Alexander of Roes’s \textit{Memoriale de prerogativa imperii Romani}, and the Joachimite prophetic literature, as well as more recent astrological treatises – \textit{Prenostica ad viginti annos duratura} of Paul of Middelburg published in 1484 and the \textit{Tractatus de Cometis} by an unknown author from 1474. Despite accusations of plagiarism, which appeared after the first publication of the prognostic on 1 April 1488, Lichtenberger’s work continued to be one of the most widely circulated books at the time.\textsuperscript{364}

\begin{footnotesize}


\textsuperscript{364} Kurze, “Popular Astrology and Prophecy,” 182-183.
\end{footnotesize}
Lichtenberger’s predictions are centered upon three celestial events. The first event was the major conjunction of November 1484 when Saturn in the sign of Scorpio suppressed Jupiter, which was under the influence of Mars. According to Lichtenberger, a “horrible” eclipse of the sun in 1485 and a conjunction of the malign planets Saturn and Mars will follow this conjunction on November 30, 1485. However, the consequence of the 1484 conjunction will be juxtaposed by the conjunction of Jupiter with Mars. These are the same three conjunctions that Grünpeck and Steber mention as the astrological causes of the French disease. The 1484 major conjunction is also present in Dürer’s woodcut. Grünpeck, Steber, and Dürer were not the only contemporaries who regarded the French disease as the disease forecasted by Lichtenberger; a sixteenth-century reader of the Pronosticatio noted in his copy that *malafrantzos* was indeed the epidemic predicted by the author.

By tracing the origins of the French disease to the celestial events mentioned in Lichtenberger’s prognostication, Grünpeck, Steber, Raut, and Dürer placed *morbus gallicus* in the context of other predictions of Lichtenberger, which are full of patriotic references. Born in Rhineland-Pfalz around 1440, Johannes Lichtenberger, after spending several years in Bavaria at the court of Duke Louis the Rich, most probably served as the court astrologer of Emperor Friederick III for several years. Loyal to the Habsburg dynasty, Lichtenberger composed a prognostication that rebuked the enemies of the Empire and glorified the emperor.

Lichtenberger’s prognostication offered predictions about foreign countries and territories within the German Empire, ending with more detailed predictions of events to come for every several years. It calls King Vladislaus II of Bohemia “the scourge of Christendom” (*Geißel der Christenheit*), accuses Kätzerei, the Jews, and Turks of wrongdoing, and praises Matthias Corvinus, the King of Hungary, for his efforts in battling the Turks. The prophecies

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365 Johannes Lichtenberger, *Pronosticatio zu theutsch* (Heidelberg, [Heinrich Knoblochtzer], 1488),
regarding the French-German relations are particularly relevant to our topic.\textsuperscript{367} One of the first pieces in the text is the prophecy of Bridget of Sweden in which the author laments the sorry state of the Church and identifies the French as one of the main enemies of the Church.\textsuperscript{368}

According to another prophecy, “a king with a beautiful countenance”\textsuperscript{369} will triumph after defeating the French: “A Frenchman will temporarily win over the Germans. But in the end the French will be defeated and the king with beautiful countenance will reign over all the lands… and will hold the monarchy and will rule alone from the East to the West.”\textsuperscript{370} Lichtenberger explains that many connect this prophecy to Friederick III. “But I think it will be Maximilian,” he writes.\textsuperscript{371}

Allusions to the prophecies of Bridget of Sweden are followed by references to those of Brother Reinhard the Lollard and are accompanied by a woodcut depicting a wolf and two eagles. The larger eagle represents Friedrich III, while the smaller is the symbol of his son Maximilian. According to the revelations of Reinhard, the wolf in this image is “die erde von occident” and thus represents France.\textsuperscript{372} Most probably, the tree alludes to the prophecy of a branch that was believed to prevail over the world and humble even the pope.\textsuperscript{373} Thus, this image is an allegorical representation of the struggle between the French and German rulers for dominion in Christendom. Later on in the text, Lichtenberger urges France to unite under the banner of the German eagle and bring peace to the world.\textsuperscript{374}

\textsuperscript{367} For national sentiments in late medieval German prophetic literature, see Dietrich Kurze, “Nachionale Regungen in der spätmittelalterlichen Prophetie,” \textit{Historische Zeitschrift} 202/1 (1966): 1-23; Frances Courtney Kneupper, \textit{The Empire at the End of Time: Identity and Reform in Late Medieval German Prophecy} (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), especially chapter 7 (“German Identity in Prophetic Thought”).

\textsuperscript{368} Lichtenberger, \textit{Pronosticatio zu theutsch}, B3 r.

\textsuperscript{369} Ibid., B4 v: “eyn konig mit eym küschen angesicht.”

\textsuperscript{370} Ibid., B4 v-B5 r: “Eyn Frantzose wirt vberwintlich vil dütschen flagen. Zum letzsten wirt der Frantzose vnderlygen vnd der küsche am angesicht wirt regnere an allen enden wirt ingen in das nestyn sy / ner müter des adlers vnd wirt halten die monarchie das est alleyn halten das regiment von oriente biss in occident.”

\textsuperscript{371} Ibid: “Aber ich wil ess sy Maximilianus.” Also see Reeves, \textit{The Influence of Prophecy in Later Middle Ages}, 347-52.

\textsuperscript{372} Ibid, B5 r.

\textsuperscript{373} Frank Borchard, \textit{German Antiquity in Renaissance Myth} (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1971), 257.

\textsuperscript{374} Johannes Lichtenberger, \textit{Pronosticatio zu theutsch}, D3 v-D4 r.
Covering such diverse topics as the Bohemians and the Turks, as well as different aspects of astrology, magic, and religion, Lichtenberger’s prophecies did not deal with the French inordinately, however, anti-French sentiments played a significant role in their characterization. In addition to all the things mentioned above, Lichtenberger writes in his *Pronosticatio zu teutsch* that, as much as “disorderly acts of lust with the youth” are spreading in the Italian lands, “unchaste love” is common among the French.  

Kurze established that interest in Lichtenberger's *Pronosticatio* in the German lands was particularly high at the time of “crisis and unrest” and wars with France. Six different editions were published in 1620-1621, at the beginning of the Thirty Years War; five more appeared between 1686 and 1691. In 1813, *Pronosticatio* was published again as a separate booklet together with a pamphlet against Napoleon.

In 1508, Grünpeck published his most successful prognostication, *Speculum Naturalis*, which was called by Robinson-Hammerstein “the crucial adaptation for the more popular transmission” of Lichtenberger’s work. A testament to the popularity of the *Speculum* is an anecdote told by Paul Russell. In 1508, Emperor Maximilian wrote to the humanist Willibald Pirckheimer asking for a copy of the *Speculum Naturalis*. The latter replied that all the copies had been sold out. Robinson-Hammerstein succinctly summarized the message of Grünpeck’s prognostic:

> The estates of the Empire, after the defeat and demise of their former leader, Berthold von Henneberg, are being encouraged to continue with their efforts at Empire Reform in the interest of the ‘common good.’ At the same time the practica was published as a means of stimulating popular moral support for these endeavors.

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375 Ibid., G4a: “wie vyl vnordentliche werck der begerlichkeyt mit iungen vnd umbfahen werden geubet in welschen lande wie vyl der by den Frantzosen vnd sust vyl vnreyner liebe werden vben die mans personen gleichsam die frauwen.”
376 Kurze, “Prophecy and History,” 65.
Grünpeck writes that his prognostication is meant to make people shake off their slumber to see the state of sinfulness they had fallen into. This is a reference to Romans 13:11: “And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.” God has been sending wars, famine, and pestilence upon earth to make people think of their sins and become pure through repentance, but the sinners have failed to adhere to His admonitions, and He now sends celestial signs to Germany, “the heart or the head of Christendom,” hoping that they would come to their senses. Like in his treatises on the French disease, Grünpeck stresses that God’s will is the primary cause of all calamities and “wondrous signs,” while the role of the stars is secondary. The conjunction of Jupiter, Saturn, and Mars is again mentioned by Grünpeck as the conjunction of the outer planets that often brings large-scale disasters. He mentions seven more conjunctions and makes predictions for 1516-1524.

Order is one of the most important concepts in Grünpeck’s prophecy. If people follow all the spiritual, natural, and secular laws, God will stop sending them calamities. For a peaceful and prosperous Christendom, all countries should follow their missions. Grünpeck evokes a metaphor of a body denoting the Christian world, with different countries representing its organs. The three main “members” of Christendom are the German Empire, Italy, and France. Italy (responsible for the Church) is its head, the German lands with the domain of imperial power represent the heart, whereas France (the liver of the body of Christendom) is meant to

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381 Ibid, B v.

382 Grünpeck, *Ein spiegel, A5 v: “Natürlich / ist nichts wunderbarlichs künftlig dan[n] die wůrckungen die darauß entspringen mögen / ist aber sach das die nicht auß der werckstat der natur / sunder auß dem götlichen willen (das dan[n] auß baß zu glauben ist) außfliessen...”*


help the two countries in their good deeds.\textsuperscript{385} To ensure that the Ship of St. Peter is on the right course, these countries should fulfill their roles, and all other nations should follow them.

Sometime around 1529, Paracelsus published his own reflections on Lichtenberger’s prophecies concerning the French entitled \textit{Auslegung ü6ber ettliche Figuren Joh. Liechtenbergers aus dem ersten und dritten teils} (“Interpretation of several figures of Joh. Lichtenberger from the first and third parts”). It was around the same time that he composed his writings on the French disease. Whereas the majority of authors treat the theological, astrological, and humoral causes of the French disease separately, Paracelsus offers a unified theory of its causality where all these three elements are presented as intrinsic and interdependent and which is characterized by “an alarmist air of natural and historical catastrophe, a common vision in this time haunted by nightmares of cosmic disaster and divine punishment,” to quote Andrew Weeks.\textsuperscript{386}

According to Paracelsus, the disease originated as a punishment for lechery (\textit{hürerey}) and befell first the “most lecherous\textsuperscript{387} people that is the French”.\textsuperscript{388} He states that just as “lechery is the Babylon among all the sins, so is the French [disease] the Babylon among all the diseases. Such is proven by evidence from astrology, theology, and all the workings of nature, that a certain levity is among the Gauls, which infected all the other nations.”\textsuperscript{389} Venus

\textsuperscript{389} Ibid.: “wie hurerei Babylon ist under allen sünden, also seind die franzosen Babylon under allen krankheiten. solchs zu probirn beweist astrologia, theologia und alle naturales operationes, das da ein leichfertigkei ist inter Gallos, die al ander nation inficirt; gehört in die gloß: also ist der unflat zusamen komen.”
and luxus\textsuperscript{390} are the “mothers of the disease,”\textsuperscript{391} and the disease is transmitted through unkeuschheit. However, in order for the disease to take its toll, one needs to have a corresponding imaginatio.\textsuperscript{392} Paracelsus adopts the association between the French disease with impurity from medieval notions of leprosy, which, as Brody and later Grigsby demonstrated, were partially transferred onto the representations of the French disease.\textsuperscript{393} Paracelsus’s writings are part of a shift from perceiving the French pox as a disease caused by any number of sinful behavior not necessarily connected to sex towards contextualizing it as primarily a venereal disease.\textsuperscript{394}

Paracelsus’s conception of the disease as French is based largely on his stereotypes of the French, which he elaborates in his reflection of Lichtenberger’s prophecies. His treatise focuses on several passages from Prognosticatio which had initially appeared in a thirteenth-century treatise Memoriale prerogativa de Imperii Romani by Alexander of Roes. There are three estates of the French represented by three roosters, Alexander of Roes writes. The first rooster is proud, unchaste, quarrelsome, envious, and angry. The two other roosters are gentle,

\textsuperscript{390} Walter Pagel translates Paracelsus’ luxus as “exuberance” (Walter Pagel, Paracelsus, an Introduction to Philosophical Medicine in the Era of the Renaissance, 2nd ed. (Basel; New York: Karger, 1982), 139. According to Weeks, luxus is “obviously sexualized” by Paracelsus with the intention of “bringing out the connotation of luxuria, “dissipation” (Weeks, Paracelsus, 467, n. 5).

\textsuperscript{391} Paracelsus, Vom Ursprung und Herkommen der Franzosen, 190-192.

\textsuperscript{392} Ibid., 189-190: “… also wissen sie auch, das die Franzosen dem himel (ich meine das volk) ein unterworfen sorge gemacht haben, in welchem venus iren willen und exaltirung hat mögen verbringen; nemlich so venus ir krankheit ansgießen sol und den inlüß derselbigben geben, so mag es nicht anders beschehen dan durch die unkeuschheit, so dieselbig unter iren willem und gefallen beschicht, so gibt imaginatio, cupido und actio den inlüß der krankheit. … dan venus ist diser krankheit ein mutter, darumb so wissen, das disse krankheit und venerischer inlüß kein mensch beheelt, der nicht verwillicht, das ist actionem mit voller imaginirung und begirlichen sich inlasset.” On imaginatio in the works of Paracelsus, see Heinz Schott, “Paracelsus & van Helmont on Imagination: Magnetism and Medicine before Mesmer” in Paracelsian Moments: Science, Medicine & Astrology in Early Modern Europe, ed. Gerhild Scholz Williams, and Charles D. Gunnoe (Kirksville, Mo.: Truman State University Press, 2002), esp. 137-140.


\textsuperscript{394} Paracelsus falls under the second period in the history of syphilis under Temkin’s periodization “marked by “transition towards understanding that syphilis was a venereal disease.” Temkin, “On the History of Morality and Syphilis,” 474.
merry, and amiable. 395 Lichtenberger quoted this passage from Roes in his *Pronosticatio* (1488), accompanying it by a woodcut depicting three roosters (fig. 4). 396

Paracelsus agrees with Roes and Lichtenberger that the rooster is indeed the most suitable constellation for France, but denies that the French possess any good qualities. According to Paracelsus, just like the roosters they are full of pride and “are unchaste in their very nature.” 397 One of their worst qualities is “excessive pride… and this is how they approach

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396 Lichtenberger, *Pronosticatio zu theutsch*, D2 r.

and behave with all the other nations.” 398 Paracelsus concludes his insight into the nature of the French by stating that everyone should accept the order of law which serves the purpose of friendly life and decency, and help combat the evil, which gives rise to lust and disgrace. 399 In Paracelsus’s worldview, it makes perfect sense that the French disease was conceived in a lecherous people through an act of unchastity and under the influence of Venus since the French, akin to roosters, lack chastity.

The rooster owed its connection with France to a pun on the Latin word for France - Gallia and its connection with another Latin word - gallus (rooster). At the end of the fifteenth century, the rooster was used along with the fleur-de-lis, the coat of arms of the French kings, but was beginning to play a more prominent role in German anti-French propaganda with the increasing use of the single-headed and double-headed eagles by German kings and emperors on their coat of arms. The beginning of the sixteenth century was marked by an abundant presence of eagles as symbols of Emperor Maximilian I in visual as well as literary sources. 400

At the beginning of the sixteenth century, the rivalry between the French king and German emperor was often described as a battle of a Rooster and an Eagle. Maximilian I actively employed the animal imagery in his imperial propaganda, including in his Triumphal Arch, one the most large-scale prints glorifying the imperial power of the Habsburgs. 401

400 Influenced by their rivals on the other side of the River Rhine, the French kings adopted the rooster as their dynastic symbol around the same period of time. With the help of the humanists, it was turned into a positive representation and has served as one of the France’s national symbols ever since. On the use of the symbols of the rooster and the eagle by the French kings and German emperors, see Benedict Jacob Roemer-Büchner, Die Siegel der deutschen Kaiser, Könige und Gegenkönige (Frankfurt am Main: H. Keller, 1851); Franz-Heinz Hye, “Der Doppeladler als Symbol für Kaiser und Reich,” Mitteilungen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung 81 (1973): 83-84; Collette Beaune, “Pour une préhistoire du coq gaulois,” Médievales 10 (1986): 69-80.
uppermost panel of the Triumphal Arch contains a hieroglyphic image of Maximilian surrounded by symbolical animals. The colophon, composed by Stabius, explains the symbolical meaning of the scene: “It has been interpreted word by word to describe Maximilian as… Roman emperor [eagle], and lord of a great portion of the earth [snake on scepter]. He has by force of arms and superb victory [falcon on orb] yet with the greatest modesty [bull] subdued the most powerful king [of France; cock].”402

By using the rooster as the symbol of the French king, German humanists, among other things, made him look weak in comparison to his opponent, the German emperor. Being inferior to the eagle and not possessing any imperial powers, the rooster could never compete with the eagle, just like the French king could never defeat the German emperor, being inferior to the latter by default. “Cock, what are you crowing about? Why, scoundrel, do you scoff at the eagles? If you stared at the sun’s lamp, you would go blind,”403 Hutten exclaims in one of his epigrams. The eagle, being the king of the Bird’s Kingdom and the emblematic animal of Jove, is the only animal allowed to aspire to be the universal ruler.

1517-18. The woodcuts for the Triumphal Arch were made by the workshop of Albrecht Dürer, and the text in the colophons was composed by Maximilian’s court historiographer, Johannes Stabius (1450-1522). The print depicts the genealogy of Maximilian starting with Clovis I, stories from the mythical past, images of the Roman emperors, and scenes from Maximilian’s life. Silver, Marketing Maximilian. 402 It appeared for the first time on the frontispiece to the translation of Hieroglyphica, a Greek text on Egyptian hieroglyphs, translated by Willibald Pirckheimer (1470-1530) and illustrated by Albrecht Dürer. Quoted in Larry Silver, Marketing Maximilian, 24. 403 Ulrich von Hutten, Eobanus Hessus, “Epistola Italiae Ulricho Huttene Equite Germano Autore Resoncio Maximiliani Augusti Helio Eobano Hesso Autore Hutteni De Eadem Re Epigrammata Aliquot,” in The Poetic Works of Helius Eobanus Hessus, vol. 3, 419.
The interconnected political, theological, and astrological causes of the French disease all pointed to its “French” origins. The French were the first to contract morbus gallicus as a punishment by God for their disobedience to the German emperor. Caused by the great conjunction of 1484, the disease was one of the calamities forecasted by Johannes Lichtenberger and as such was part of the familiar prognostications on the fate of the German Empire and its relations with its enemies. The motif of the children of the planets also helped to support the view that the disease first originated among the French, and then spread to other countries that were governed by the planets, involved in the great conjunction of 1484.

**Bodies prone to diseases**

The planetary motions were believed to cause the putrefaction of the air which in turn caused the French disease. Magnus Hundt in his treatise on pestilence writes that the air, being inherently warm and moist, is more prone to “bad” changes, particularly during prolonged
periods of hot and wet weather. Otto Raut also blames the outbreak on hot and wet weather, and writes that the disease spread with water all around the world, but first came to Italy.

The mechanism behind the air’s putrefaction was subject to dispute. The cause for the air’s corruption was one of the central points in the Pistoris-Pollich controversy discussed in the first chapter. In the dispute, Pollich argued that the air was made corrupt as a result of the hot and humid weather. Pistoris, on the other hand, maintained that the air, as one of the four main elements could not become putrid and therefore its occult or hidden qualities were the cause of the disease. Otto Raut also writes that the disease comes from the hidden influences in the air.

The corrupt air was believed to carry plague and, to protect themselves, medieval doctors wore the notorious “plagues masks.” Erasmus even suggested a design of his own for a mask that he mentions in his *Colloquies*: “a mask that admits light through little glass windows and allows you to breathe through mouth and nose by means of a tube extending from the mask over your shoulders and down your back.” However, the putrid air, even though it was believed to cause pestilence, was nevertheless only its “external cause” which “was not
enough by itself: it needed a suitable material, a suitable body, to work on.” A suitable body was defined by a suitable combination of the four humors.

The composition of the humors was believed to differ from one person to another, depending on great many factors including location, profession, gender, time of birth, etc. Medical doctors believed that each temperament had a predisposition to a particular disease, which could decrease or increase depending on the season and a number of other circumstances. Not only were different temperaments associated with particular diseases, but diseases were believed to manifest themselves differently from one patient to the other; therefore, it was particularly important to define the temperament of the patient before any diagnosis or treatment. The theory of the four temperaments was used to explain why some people had different complexions and were more susceptible to the French disease than others and why not everybody breathing the same putrid air contracted the French disease.

The humoral theory dates back to the beginnings of the Greek medicine. There were four major types of complexions defined by each of the four temperaments: the predominance of blood was associated with the sanguine temperament, of yellow bile with the choleric temperament, the melancholic persons had an excess of black bile and the phlegmatic people were marked by the excess of phlegm. The sanguine complexion implied the predominance of hot and wet elements, phlegmatic - cold and moist, melancholic - cold and dry and choleric -

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412 Siraisi, Medieval and Early Renaissance Medicine, 128-129.
413 The theory was based on the notion that the world consisted of four elements – air, fire, earth and water – as articulated by Empedocles of Arcagas in the fifth century BCE. He argued that all the things in the world emerged out of the combination of the four elements and all matter was divided into four pairs of opposing principles (hot and moist, cold and moist, dry and cold, dry and hot). The body, being understood as a microcosm of the world, was believed to consist of four humors (yellow bile, black bile, phlegm and blood), corresponding to the four cosmic elements. The number of humors had been debated, but the fourfold concept of the humors prevailed together with the tetraraptite division of cosmos into four elements, qualities and seasons. For an overview of the subject, see Klibansky, Panofsky, Saxl, Saturn and melancholy, particularly part 1; Owsei Temkin, Galenism; Rise and Decline of a Medical Philosophy (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973); Clarence J. Glacken, Traces on the Rhodian Shore, 35-115; Nancy G. Siraisi, Medieval and Early Renaissance Medicine, 104-106, 116-118; Noga Arikha, Passions and Tempers: A History of the Humours (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2007), parts 1-4.
hot and dry. The cooling, wetting, heating, or drying of humors against their nature led to an imbalance of the humors – the reason why people got sick. Restoring the balance of humors through – again – cooling, wetting, heating, or drying them with various remedies was thus believed to be the cure of all diseases.

Complexions were, as already mentioned, considered to belong to the domain of efficient causes of disease that, following Galen, were divided into causa primitiva, causa antecedens and causa contentiva. In line with Galen’s medical concept, Conrad Schellig maintains that for morbus gallicus, its causa primitiva were excesses of qualities of the air (too dry, too humid, too warm, or too cold), caused by the motion of the stars and manifested in the disbalance of bodily humors, whereas its causa antecedens and causa contentiva were individual humoral complexions which pre-conditioned susceptibility to certain diseases.414 According to Lorenz Fries, causa primitiva emerged from “non-natural things” such as air, food and drink, movement and stillness, sleeping and being awake, as well as “repletion and emptiness” (“repletione et inanitione”).415 The causa primitiva of the French disease for him lay in the changes of the air, caused by the largest planetary conjunctions.416 The causae antecedentes and coniunctivis of the French disease pertain to the complexion, that is, the proneness of humors to corruption.417

For the majority of authors of medical treatises, the humoral root cause of the French disease, similar to the plague, lay in the excess of black bile and/or phlegm in the human body.418 In chapter 7 of his “Ein hubscher Tractat,” Joseph Grünpeck states that the humoral cause of the disease is the black bile, due to the participation of Saturn and Mars in the conjunction that triggered the disease: “because Saturn is cold and dry and rules over the

414 Schellig, “In pustulas malas,” 74-75.
415 Fries, Epitome Opusculi, B2 v.
416 Ibid. “Et ex illis causam huius aegritudinis rationabiliter æstimavere sapientes æris mutationem fuisse, ex planetar[u[m] notabilissimis co[n]stellationibus...”
417 Ibid., B2 v – B3 r.
418 Stein, Negotiating the French Pox, 41.
melancholy, which he increases and produces and drives into the body, rotting the good blood and ruining also the complexion..."\(^{419}\) The excess of black bile caused "disrupted blood."\(^{420}\) Grünpeck repeats his ideas in his last treatise on the French disease: "...the pernicious work of Mars and Saturn, secretly and undetectably it creeps into the human body, begins first in the liver, where it exerts its pestilential activity entirely scorching the blood, then attacking the neighboring organs, heart, lungs, spleen, and testicles."\(^{421}\) Johann Widmann and Bartholomäus Steber write that the disease comes from the excess of the black bile which generates putrid blood.\(^{422}\) Ulrich von Hutten informs his readers that physicians believe that the disease occurs from the imbalance of one of the four humors or from the corrupt blood.\(^{423}\) According to Magnus Hundt, the melancholic humor which mixes with the blood is the cause of the French disease as well.\(^{424}\) As Stein notes in her monograph, the "putrid blood" referred to by the medical writers was the nutritious blood that differed from the blood that was considered one of the four humors. In his treatise on the French disease, Alexander Seitz explains that nutritious blood is generated from digested food and drink and purified by bodily organs. The purification of the nutritious blood could be disrupted by many things including an

\(^{419}\) Grünpeck, “Ein hübscher Tractat,” 43-44: “... wann Saturnus ist kalt vnd trucken vnd herschet über die melancholey, wöliche er meret vnd machet vnd füret sy ein in den leyb, vnd verderbet das gůt geblüt, verkeret auch die complexion. Nach darnach Mars herschet in diser coniunction vnd ist in seinem eygnen hauss vermüschet er auch sein bossheyd vnd meret die feüchtigkeit coleram, wôlehe ist die annder materi des Bösen Franzos...”

\(^{420}\) Ibid., 44: “Die drit vrsache erscheinet das zerbrochen blüt.”

\(^{421}\) Grünpeck, “De Mentulagra,” 52-53: “...eundem ipsum fatalem inimicum esse perniciosum Saturni et Martis opus, clandestine et insensibiliter in corpora humana devolare, incipereque primo in hepate pestiferam ditionem suam exercere sanguinem prorsus adurendo, deinde vicina loca cordis, pulmonis, splenis et testiculorum repetendo...”


\(^{423}\) Hutten, De guaiaci medicina et morbo gallico liber unus, 404: “... dicebantque medici agritudinem esse a malo intus succo et vitiosis humoribus, melancholici, adustis, aut flava bile, vel pituita, sive salsa sive adusta, et ipsa aut aliquot horum vel omnibus etiam simul permixtis... Quidam breviter ex infecto sanguine corruptoque et adusto luem hanc oriri dictabant.”

\(^{424}\) Magnus Hundt, Eyn kurztes und sehr Nutzbarlichs Regiment, c2 v: “... so ist dy vorgehenste ursache / als vor feuchtigkeyt in de[n] cörper dy Melancolische / welche durch ihre gifftige scherff vnd unartige qualiteth / vnd eygenschafft sich mit de[n] geblüt vormischt / vn[d] in der leber und geedder sich ermereth...”
overabundance of one of the humors, which would make the nutritious blood “bad” or “corrupt.”

The notion that the French disease could be caused by “bad blood” remained popular all throughout the sixteenth century, surviving well into the twentieth century. As such, it became associated with the popular prejudice that infected blood could be used to poison with the French disease. Fuchs included a peculiar reference to an instance of such prejudice from a late sixteenth-century Nuremberg chronicle in his collection of sources on the French pox:

Also in that [1495] year, an evil, previously unheard of, cruel disease (which is called Frantzosen) was first brought from French footmen to Germany and this is how the disease is said to have appeared. When the emperor fought near Milan and brought the German footmen, the French are told to have taken blood from the lepers, and baked it in bread which they gave to the German footmen to eat; and likewise mixed the leprous blood with wine.

People with complexions opposite the humoral composition causing the disease, that is people with hot and moist (or hot and dry) temperaments, were generally regarded as more susceptible to pestilences. Thus, Alexander Seitz writes that the pestilence-bearing “Saturn spares his children who are melancholic – that is cold and dry,” but attacks persons with hot and warm elements in their temperaments. For this reason, women, who were generally believed to have a cold and moist complexion, were generally considered by medical authors to be less likely to develop the French disease inside their bodies, even though they could be infected with it through contact with bodily fluids of the sick.

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425 Stein, Negotiating the French Pox, 40-41.
427 Fuchs, Die ältesten Schriftsteller, 377: “Es ist auch in gemelten Jar die böse, zuvor vnerhörte, grausame kranckheit (die Frantzosen genant) von den Landsknechten aus Franckreich erstlicher in das Teutschlandt gebracht worden vnd soll sich diese krankheit solcher gestalt erhoben haben: Es sollen die Frantzosen (nachdem der keyser vmb Meylandt krieget vnd teutsche knecht hineingefüret hätte) blut von den Sundersiechen genommen haben vnd dasselbig in das brodt gebachen haben vnd den teutschen knechten zu essen gegeben; desgleichen auch solches Sundersiechenblut unter den Wein vermischt haben.”
429 Schleiner, Medical Ethics in the Renaissance, 182-202; Stein, Negotiating the Great Pox, 50-52.
Joseph Grünpeck uses the medical notion that hot-blooded people are more susceptible to pestilence as a foundation for his argument that the complexion of the French people was more prone to the French disease:

That happened thus, for it has been discovered that Jupiter rules over France and is a hot and moist planet. But life and strength are in warmth and in natural moisture, as the masters of nature indicate. Therefore, the French are fit by nature, but they fall more easily into this sicknesses, for their bodies are subject to greater harm than others, because they have more blood and more moisture and are more saturated, and these moistness and saturation are more prone to rotting, and can sooner be broken up.\(^{430}\)

Sebastian Brant holds similar views, even though according to him the main reason behind the proclivity of the French to the disease is in the aridity of their bodies: “This is why it comes more often to the French and to those, whom one calls Iberians, and seldom to where it is cold and humid,” he states.\(^{431}\)

The idea that different nations had different compositions of humors and experienced diseases in different ways was not new in the Later Middle Ages.\(^{432}\) An explanation of the differences in national humoral complexions based on environmental conditions emerged early. The first written work to formulate this idea was the Hippocratic text *On Airs, Waters, Places* written sometime in the fifth century BCE. It postulates that continuous exposure to the


\(^{431}\) Grünpeck, “Tractatus de pestilentiali,” 6: “Has a variolis distinguit cause, quod istis / Frigidus humor inest, hisque melancholicus. / Fit, quotiens propriis Saturnus ab aedibus exit, / Inque Iovis migrat morbifer ille domos. / Nam tum reliquias duri semis atque maligni / Jupiter expellit, purgat et evacuat. / Id quod ab octenis lustris contingere crebro / In terris, ubi sunt corpora sica, solet. / Vnde frequens Gallis morbi genus id vel Iberis, / Rarus apud gentes, frigus et humor ubi.”

same climatic conditions makes people share similar humoral complexions. The four humor theory in conjunction with belief in environmental influences became incorporated into the Christian tradition through the writings of Orosius, Cassiodorus, Isidore of Seville, and Paul the Deacon, to name but a few. The encyclopedists of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, such as Albertus Magnus, Bartholomew of England, Vincent of Beauvais and others, influenced by the information which emerged as a result of travels triggered by the Crusades and the Arab commentaries on Aristotle and other Ancient authorities, revived the Ancient theories, subjecting them to some changes.

In addition to Grünpek and Brant, Nicolaus Pol commented on the differences of bodily complexions of Germans and that of other people in his treatise on the guaiac treatment: “…it is clear that the climate, bodies, complexions, etc. of the Spaniards are different from those possessed by the Indians, Germans, and even by other Spaniards.” Employing familiar tropes, he states that the bodies of the German people are more robust due to exposure to colder climate.

Ulrich von Hutten notes this issue as well in his treatise, maintaining that despite the differences in complexions, the guaiac tree can cure anybody.

I will touch upon “German” and “French” temperaments in more detail in the next chapter, but it is important to note here that Grünpeck and Brant were not alone in describing the French as sanguinic (warm and moist) or choleric (dry and warm). However, I have not

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435 Nicolaus Pol, “De Cura Morbi Gallici,” trans. in Fisch, Nicolaus Pol, Doctor, 59. For the original, see Ibid., 58: “Quam similiter nos expertam credentes talem cum Hyspanorum regiones corpora complexiones etc. ab Indorum et Alemannorum, ab Hyspanorum etiam conditionibus differe corpertum sit eandem pro corporibus Alemanorum sanandis proportionabiliter transumere deo auxiliante pro ingenio conabimur.”

436 Ibid., 62-63.

437 Hutten, De guaiaci medicina et morbo gallico liber unus, 439: “quarum in Hispaniam quidem primum venit, ex Spagnola, arrectis in eventus expectationem aliis crica nationibus, ubi cum feliciter ea usos esse multos contigisset, acceperunt eam Siculi, deinde in Italiam transit statimque Germani et ipsi experimento vim eius didicimus. nuper et apud Gallos audivimus etius ope consanescere plurimos.”
managed to find any other instance in contemporary medical literature to a particular predisposition of the French people to *morbus gallicus* based on their humoral complexion. In this regard, Grünpeck can be seen as an innovator. Russell calls him “a great compiler of causes of events and disease, much less an original thinker than his medical-astrologer colleagues.”\(^{438}\)

I would argue with this characterization, stressing that Grünpeck carefully “cherry-picked” ideas from the existing medical and astrological traditions to construct a medical framework for the French causes of *morbus gallicus*. His explanation of the origins of the illness was meant to indicate that it bore the name of the French disease for a reason. Following his logic, the disease was French because it was intrinsic to the French people and because it originated among them for the first time. Paracelsus’s treatment of the causes of *morbus gallicus*, albeit not based on humoral medicine, was similarly concise and comprehensive.

Medical authors framed *morbus gallicus* within a tangle of religious, political, astrological, and medical contexts, all of which pointed to various aspects of the disease’s French-ness. The connection between the French disease and German-French relations indicates that *morbus gallicus* was to a large extent framed as a political matter, providing an opportune foundation for rhetorical calls to support Maximilian’s conjectural political program which can be summarized as: “For if Maximilian possessed Milan he would also possess the whole of Italy; if he possessed Italy, he would also possess Gaul (France), Germania (Germany), and thereafter not only the “Turks” (the Ottoman Empire), but also the “Solden” (the Egyptian Mamluk Empire) and thus dominate “inn Affrica, Assia und Erropa.”\(^{439}\) The issue of imperial authority, Last Emperor prophecies, crusading rhetoric, and Maximilian’s domestic politics all played a role in defining the disease as “French.” Among all the medical treatises examined in this chapter only that of Ulrich von Hutten actively opposed the


association between the disease and the French, but even Hutten recognized the viability of the
name *morbus gallicus* and used it in his work for reasons of clarity and simplicity.
CHAPTER 3 | POETICS OF THE FRENCH DISEASE

“In Foucauldian terms, disease is unstoppably discursive and irresistibly metaphoric.”

Already in the first years since its outbreak, *morbus gallicus* became linked to the German national discourse. In a number of writings dealt with in this chapter, the French pox is presented as a symbol of all things French and more broadly foreign, a threat to the intrinsically beneficial moral and cultural environment of the German lands and a force, corrupting the German body natural and thus its body politic. In the previous chapter I have looked at ways in which medical authors framed the disease as “French” with the help of religious, medical, astrological, and political explanations of its causes. In this chapter I examine the function of *morbus gallicus* in discussions of what it meant to be “German” in non-medical texts. In order to establish how *morbus gallicus* was incorporated into these discussions, I will first examine the narratives of German-ness and French-ness in late medieval German learned culture. As I argue, the pattern of perceiving the French in German learned culture was intrinsically dichotomic and was grounded in the notion of chastity. I then move to representations of *morbus gallicus* as a sign of moral corruption caused by an excessive use of foreign commodities. In the last section of this chapter I examine representations of the French disease as the French king himself.

*Differentia Gallorum et Germanorum*[^1]

The kingdom of France and the German Empire shared the same medieval past, territorial claims on Alsace and Lorraine, and a reputation of Barbarians in the eyes of their “civilized” and “cultural” neighbor – Italy – whom they both attempted to compete with.


throughout the Middle Ages and Early Modern times. Both of these political entities also
shared the fame of the first emperor in the West after the fall of the Roman Empire –
Charlemagne. Seeing as one of their major goals the substantiation of the German claim for
the imperial throne, the German polemicists attempted to prove that Charlemagne was
“German” and that the German people were indigenous unlike their neighbors on the other side
of the Rhine River.

As early as the thirteenth century, Alexander of Roes (1255-c. 1300) in his Memoriale
de prerogativa Imperii Romani, named by Frank Borchardt “a turning point, indeed a
normative model for polemical historiography in Germany until the Reformation,” distinguished between the Germans and the French by calling the first Franci and the latter
Francigenae. In his evocation of the popular Trojan myth, the Franks descended from Priam.
Sometime later, a number of Franks separated from the main group, moving to the territory
between Loire and Seine, where they intermarried with the local Gallic population, adopted
their language and customs and therefore could not be regarded anymore as Franks, but as
Francigenae. Linguistically, the word Francigenae meant “of Frankish origins.” Politically,
it indicated that Germans were the true heirs of the Roman Empire and the first settlers on the
Rhine River, while the French or Francigenae were a younger nation, a group that merely
descended from the Franks.

442 See Stadtwald, Roman Popes and German Patriots; Patrick Gilli, Au miroir de l’humanisme: les
représentations de la France dans la culture savante italienne à la fin du moyen âge (c. 1360-c.1490) (Rome:
Ecole française de Rome, 1997); Caspar Hirschi, The Origins of Nationalism, 119-152.
443 See Jacques Ridé, L’image du Gérmain dans la pensée et la littérature allemande de la redécouverte de
Tacite au XVIe siècle (Contributions à l’étude de la genèse de la mythe) (Lille: Atelier de reproduction des
thèses, 1977), vol. 1, 92-102, vol. 2, 748-758; Borchardt, The Renaissance Myth of the German Past (Baltimore:
Johns Hopkins Press, 1971); Münkler, Grünenberger, Mayer, Nationenbildung, 175-209; Hirschi, Wettkampf der
Nationen, esp. 315-319.
444 Borchardt, German Antiquity, 264.
445 Ridé, L’image du Gérmain, 93-105; Borchardt, German Antiquity, 258-264; Scales, The Shaping of German
Identity, especially 322.
446 Ridé, L’image du Gérmain, 102; Scales, The Shaping of German Identity, 375.
Another goal of the German late medieval polemicists was to establish clear divisions between the two peoples, by representing the contemporary Franci and Francigenae as possessing distinct characteristics. Medieval sources are full of references to national characteristics, but only in the Early Modern times did they begin to crystalize into firmer categories. To quote Joop Leerssen,

the European taxonomy of national character is itself an example of a process that characterizes modern (i.e., post-medieval) European thought: methodical systematization. The Middle Ages had, to be sure, known many commonplaces and prejudices about certain sets of people, but these were generally speaking neither stable nor systematic.

Late medieval German auto-images and hetero-images of the French were “a curious cocktail of tradition and modernity,” to quote Gonthier-Louis Fink. They were assorted from various “conventions and commonplaces inherited from a pre-existing textual tradition,” going back to the writings of various classical authors, including geographers like Erathostenes, Strabo, Claudius Ptolemy, Pliny the Elder, Poseidon, and Pomponius Mela, historians like Herodotus, Caesar, and Tacitus, Aristotle, Vitruvius, the Hippocratic writers, and Galen. Their texts found their way to medieval histories, political and medical writings, as well as ethnographies and literary works such as the writings of Isidore of Seville, Alexander of Roes, Albertus Magnus, Godfrey of Viterbo and Conrad of Megenberg. The Renaissance was marked by an increased interest in classical authors, but, as Frank Borchard demonstrates in his study of Renaissance myths of the German past, medieval texts retained their popularity and continued to be read in manuscript as well as printed form. In the Later Middle Ages

449 See introduction for these terms.
select commonplaces from the ancient and medieval “pool” of perceptions and stereotypes became ingrained in the German auto-images: “Germans, we might say, came to understand themselves as such not only because Italians, Frenchmen, Czechs or Poles told them they were German, and explained to them what it meant, but because Aristotle, Caesar and Isidore, and numerous other venerable authorities, told them.”

Explanations of the differences in national character were largely based on the theory of environmental influences. In Book VII of his Politics, Aristotle divides the world into cold Europe, warm Asia, and Greece with a moderate climate in between. People living in these climatological zones have different types of personality and different political systems. Thus, for example, people living in cold countries are sanguineous, full of courage, but lack caution. Glacken called Aristotle’s passage “one of the most influential statements ever made regarding the relation of climate to peoples” and the second most quoted work in this regard after the Hippocratic text On Airs, Waters, Places. Isidore of Seville’s Etymologies were another often-quoted text on environmental influences throughout the Middle Ages. Isidore maintained that

People’s faces and coloring, the size of their bodies, and their various temperaments correspond to various climates. Hence we find that the Romans are serious, the Greeks easy-going, the Africans changeable, and the Gauls fierce in nature and rather sharp in wit, because the character of the climate makes them so.

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453 Scales, The Shaping of German Identity, 361.
455 Glacken, Traces on the Rhodian Shore, 93.
One of the most important German receptions of the Ancient natural philosophical tradition was Das Buch der Natur written by Conrad of Megenberg around the year 1349. We know that Emperor Maximilian I had at least nine copies of this work (two manuscripts and seven incunabules) in his library.\textsuperscript{457} According to Megenberg, men of hot full-blooded temperament have red or reddish skin; the skin color of men with a moderate amount of heat and blood is between red and white; men with the skin of “flaming red color” are choleric. At the same time, men of warm temperament have heavier beards than men of “colder nature.”\textsuperscript{458} The temperament defines character: thus choleric men with “flaming red skin” are fickle, while men with light delicate skin are naturally bashful.\textsuperscript{459}

The characteristics of the French in the German sources do not coalesce into a uniform image. A testament to this nonuniformity is a collection of epithets used by poetry students all around Europe, Specimen Epithetorum (1518), written by the French humanist Jean Tixier (also known as Ravisius Textor). Tixier’s work was popular not only in his native France, but also in the German lands, with several editions in Basel and Cologne.\textsuperscript{460} His work contains lists of epithets arranged alphabetically which were meant to serve as inspiration for poets and students of rhetoric. Tixier’s main goal was to include as many epithets as possible, thus sometimes words with opposing meanings were listed under one entry. The 1540 edition of Specimen Epithetorum, for example, suggests using both arnipotens and impotens in relation

\textsuperscript{457} Ulrike Spyra, Das "Buch der Natur" Konrads von Mengenberg: die illustrierten Handschriften und Inkunabeln (Cologne: Böhlau, 2005), 244-45.
\textsuperscript{458} Konrad von Megenberg, Das Buch der Natur: Die erste Naturgeschichte in deutscher Sprache, ed. Hugo Schulz (Greifswald: Verlag und Druch von Julius Abel, 1897), 9: “Männer von hitzigem Temperament haben einen stärkeren Bart als kältere Naturen...”
\textsuperscript{459} Ibid., 34: “Rothe oder röthliche Färbung der Haut weist auf eine hitzige vollblütige Natur, wogegen eine zwischen roth und weiss liegende Mittelfärbe ein gleichmässiges Temperament sowie nicht zuviel noch zu wenig Hitze und Blut anzeigen, vorausgesetzt, dass die Haut nicht sehr haarig ist. Leute mit feuriger, flammendrother Hautfarbe sind unbeständig und leicht aufbrausend, helle, zarte Röthe ist schamhaften Naturen eigen.”
to “Gallia.” Due to the compilatory nature of the work, the same epithets were listed under different entries. For example, the lists of “catchwords” for Germania and Gallia are almost identical.

In his Noticia seculi (1288), a collection of pro-imperial verses, Alexander of Roes wrote that each nation is characterized by three types of qualities: mores boni, mali and medii. According to him, the good characteristics of the Germans are largesse, frankness, resistance to evil and care for the poor (magnamitas, liberalitas, malis resistere et miseris misereri), whereas their bad qualities are “barbarity, rapacity, boorishness, and antagonism” (crudelitas, rapacitas, inurbanitas, discordia). The positive attributes of the French are justice, moderation, amity, and sophistication (iustitia, temperantia, concordia, urbanitas), whereas their negative traits are pride, sumptuousness, noisiness, chatiness, inconstancy, self-admiration and hatred of others (superbia, luxuria, clamor, garrulitas inconstantia, se ipsos amare et omnere despicere). However, the bad qualities are more widespread:

But since, however, mankind tends to evil, and because there are more people who follow the wrong path of life, than those who follow the path of virtue, those aforementioned provinces are ascribed more often bad qualities than good and for Italy these are greed and envy, for Germany rapacity and discord, and for France arrogance and sumptuousness.

Negative images of the French and positive German auto-images were axiologically dichotomic (the French are effeminate/the Germans are manly; the French are inconstant/the Germans are steady, etc.). This dichotomic structure was imbued not only in the images of the French and the Germans—often “negative” images of the contemporary Germans were set against “positive” images of ancient Germans in an attempt to criticize the existing order of

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462 Ibid., 253, 259.
things and highlight a desired reality. The French disease was associated with the negative characteristics commonly attributed to the French such as sumptuousness, effeminacy, and lack of moderation, and, as such, was set as an antithesis to the German inborn innocence and moderation. In the writings I deal with below morbus gallicus was presented as a metaphor for the corruption of German morals and a result of the use of foreign goods and practice of foreign habits.

**Innocent Germans, luxurious others**

“The Germani themselves are indigenous, I believe, and have in no way been mixed by the arrivals and alliances of other peoples… Who would abandon Asia or Africa or Italy and seek out Germania, with its unlovely landscape and harsh climate, dreary to inhabit and behold, if it were not one’s native land.”

(Tacitus)

In his book *The Origins of Nationalism* Caspar Hirschi offers a new definition of the contested notion of “nation” in which he stresses the importance of competition between “communities of the same category” (e. g., nations), at the center of which “lies the concept of national honour and national shame, in which all members of the community are supposed to have a share, according to individual status and merit.” The derivative of the word “shame”

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466 Hirschi, *The Origins of Nationalism*, 47.
or pudor, that is, pudicitia or chastity, was essential for the German self-fashioning in the Later Middle Ages. It came into focus with the rediscovery of Tacitus’s *Germania* (*De origine et situ Germanorum liber*), which provided the German polemicists with the necessary classical authority to claim their exceptional chastity.

The history of the *Germania*’s reappearance and influence on the German late medieval national discourse has been told numerous times and it will suffice to give only a brief account of the history of its rediscovery here. Written in 98 CE the *Germania* remained almost unknown throughout much of Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages and survived in only one ninth-century copy in Germany. In 1457-1458, Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini, the future Pope Pius II, published a three volume treatise *De ritu, situ, moribus et conditione Germaniae descriptio* which consisted of a description of contemporary Germany and its ancient past, the latter being largely based on Tacitus’ *Germania*. The work was presented by Piccolomini as an answer to a letter written to him earlier by Martin Mayer, the bishop of Mainz. The letter survived only in a copy written by Piccolomini himself. In it, Mayer, unwilling to pay papal taxes, described anti-Roman sentiments in the German lands, drained by high taxes imposed on the empire by the Roman Curia. In his three-volume treatise Piccolomini attempted to

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defend the role of the papal seat in the development of the German lands. He juxtaposed the barbaric past of illiterate Germani with contemporary Allemania where cities, arts, science and literature were flourishing. It was thanks to Rome that an ancient barbaric people had managed to reach such great achievements in all spheres of life. In describing the ancient past, Pius II drew his information largely from Tacitus’s work. Despite its rhetorical objective, Piccolomini’s Germania became very popular in the German lands with its first German edition in Leipzig published in 1496 and spurred great interest in the original – Tacitus’ work.\textsuperscript{468}

One of the major characteristics of the ancient Germans in Germania is their intrinsic chastity, which allowed the German humanists to proclaim the Germans of the past and present “the paragons of virtue.”\textsuperscript{469} Tacitus wrote that the ancient Germans held marriage in great respect and rarely committed adultery and that those who did were punished severely: “For no one there is amused at vice, nor calls the corruption of others and oneself ‘modern life’.”\textsuperscript{470} Men usually have only one wife, but those who are rich sometimes take multiple wives – not out of lust, but to give them financial protection. They are “neither clever nor cunning,” but impulsive and honest with each other.\textsuperscript{471} They eat simple food “and they satisfy hunger without fancy dishes and seasonings,” only in order to satisfy hunger.\textsuperscript{472} “As for thirst, they lack the same restraint” and drinking is their only weakness.\textsuperscript{473}

The image of the ancient Germans in the Germania is a “Sittenspiegel,” a mirror in which the readers of Tacitus were expected to recognize the inversion of their vices. Jones poetically reflects on the portrayal of non-Roman peoples in classical sources in a positive

\textsuperscript{468} A German language edition did not appear until 1526, but a number of Latin editions circulated before that. See Stephanie Leitch, \textit{Mapping Ethnography in Early Modern Germany: New Worlds in Print Culture} (Basingstoke, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 200-201, n. 31.

\textsuperscript{469} P. Ridé, \textit{L'image du Germain}, vol. 2, 1167ff.

\textsuperscript{470} Tacitus, \textit{Germania}. “De origine et sitv Germanorvm liber,” chapter 19: “nemo enim illic vitia ridet, nec corrupmere et corrumpi saeculum vocatur.”

\textsuperscript{471} Ibid., chapter 22.

\textsuperscript{472} Ibid., chapter 23: “Cibi simplices… Sine apparatu, sine blandimentis, expellunt famem.”

\textsuperscript{473} Ibid.: “Adversus sitim non eadem temperantia.”
light: “Despite occasional efforts to idealize the barbarian and to extoll his real or supposed virtues, his civilized admirers were usually just applauding in him what they imagined to be their own lost innocence – those pristine qualities abandoned by their ancestors in their journey from simplicity and purity toward the delicious vices of civilization.”

German humanists eagerly adopted Tacitus’s strategy to show the superiority of Germans above the decadent Latinate peoples, as well as to critique the German society for the obliteration of positive characteristics once described by Tacitus. The positive image created by Tacitus was turned into the basis for late medieval German self-fashioning.

Jacob Wimpfeling encapsulated the German virtues in the epilogue to his *Epitome rerum Germanicarum*:

… We do not doubt that it is evident that in the whole world Germany surpasses all the other nations in the mightiness of men, chastity of women, excellence of dukes and princes, their sincere and pure nobleness, the strength of the soldiers and the eminence of the communal freedom, faith, soundness, kindness, and constancy, and the particular talent of artists, the greatness of bishops, the number and size of cities and communities, as well as the most devoted restoration of churches, obedience to the Roman See, generosity in offering alms and tithes, the decency of dress, and even in the salubrious [geographical] position and most agreeable climate.

Johann Boehme in his cosmography of Europe, Asia, and Africa entitled *Omnium Gentium Mores, Leges et Ritus*, published for the first time in 1520 and translated and reprinted

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475 The virtues that Tacitus attributed to the Germanic tribes were succinctly summarized in an early 16th-century poem: “Good manners to the German / count more than laws to Rome. / Not fraud, nor guile, nor usury / find place in German home. / Adultery and whoredom are / unknown in the German’s life. / He covets no man’s woman / but honors his proper wife. / He knows neither gold, nor profit, / nor any such form of greed. / But takes the produce from the land / and thus satisfies his need. / He never eats or drinks too much; / he’s modest in his dress. / When he says “no,” he means it, / and “yes,” when he says “yes.” / To self and friends, / he’s always true, / and likewise to his mate. / All his life he lives, you see, / In a pure and simple state.” Translated in Kelly, “Tacitus Noster,” 152-153.

forty times before 1620, following Tacitus, wrote that the ancient Germans living in the South and the East were content with only one wife and rarely engaged in adultery: “Those who dwelt in the East and North contented themselves with one wife... The looks of women were modest; there were no banquets or feasts to give reason for allurement. Adultery was rare, although the nation was very numerous.” The German humanist and publicist Sebastian Franck (1499-1543) in his Weltbuch (1534) included a similar passage: “These people did not purposefully seek lust, delicacies, etc. Their women were of wonderful chastity. No lust or lasciviousness could one sense in [their] words, eyes, dress, or movements.” Late medieval German women remained as chaste, as they used to be: “The women are dressed so decently, so comely that there is nothing they could be reprimanded for, except for some women with cleavages that are too low.”

The information in cosmographies such as Omnium Gentium Mores, Leges et Ritus and Weltbuch constituted “an ostentatious part of the mental furniture of all educated men,” to quote McLean. Drawing on Strabo, Caesar’s De Bello Gallico, Tacitus’s Germania and other classical and medieval authorities, cosmographies played the role of universal compendiums of knowledge. One of their distinctive characteristics is the combination of positive as well as negative images of the French. This is not surprising, since, just like the collections of epithets, they fulfilled the function of repositories of all popular textual traditions.

477 Johann Boehme, Repertorium Librorvm Trivm Ioannis Boemi de Omnivm Gentivm Ritibvs: Item index rerum scitd digniorum in eosdem (Augsburg: Sigmund and Wirsung Grimm, Marx, 1520), fol. 54 r: “qui ad septentrionem et ortum habitant soli vnica vxore contenti ab initio fuere...Mira in foeminis pudicitia, nulla spectandi fuit illecebra, nulla conuiuiorum ratione: rara in tam numerosa gente adulteria...”

478 Sebastian Franck, Weltbuch spiegel vn[d] bildnmß des gantzen erdbodens (Tübingen: Morhart, 1534), fol. 43 v: “Diß volck süchet nicht sunderlich geschmuck wollust etc ein wunderbarliche keüschheit erfand sich bey yrn weibern / kein vnzuchts oder geylheit mocht man weder in worten / augen / kleydung oder wandel spüren.”

479 Johann Boehme, De Omnium Gentium Ritibus, fol. 55 v: “Satis honestus hodie foeminarum uestitus est, satis decorus, nihil haberet quod merito reprehendere quis posset, si a quibusdam superne nimium non excuaaretur.”

480 Initially planned as a supplement to Franck’s Chronica, published in 1531, Weltbuch was published only in 1534. For the history of its publication, see Patrick Hayden-Roy, The Inner Word and the Outer World: A Biography of Sebastian Franck (New York: Peter Lang, 1994), 99-101.

481 McLean, Cosmographia of Sebastian Münster, 87.

482 For the history of cosmography as a genre, see: Matthew McLean, Cosmographia of Sebastian Münster: Describing the World in the Reformation (Aldershot, Burlington: Ashgate, 2007), 45-142.
According to the poem *Dyonisius* by the Italian Carmelite, humanist, and poet Baptista Mantuanus (1447-1516), printed for the first time in 1506, the French are “of fiery mind … Cheerful and gleeful, they rejoice in games, poetry, and songs. They are prone in Venus and in banquets.” The country is ruled by the “Wild Goat” (Capricorne), through whose influence they have a wavering heart and a soul thirsty for all things new. This poem gained particular popularity in the sixteenth century and was quoted by a number of humanists in the German lands and in France, including Jacob Wimpfeling, Johann Boehme, and Jean Bodin.

In his *On the Vanity of Arts and Sciences*, printed for the first time in Antwerp in 1530, the famous German humanist Agrippa of Nettesheim (1486-1535) collected all sorts of commonplaces, including those about peoples and countries. A chapter entitled “On the Moral of Philosophy” reads that the Germans are “coarse” (duri) and “simple” (semplice) while the French are “proud” (superbi). In another chapter, with the title “On the Art of Courtesans,” Agrippa writes that the art of love depends on sex, age, and nation. According to his taxonomy of national characters in love, the Germans are “cold” (frigidus) and “slowly inflammable” (lente inardeicit) while the French “lustful” (lascivus).

The lack of interest in love affairs is a characteristic that betokens the profile of the phlegmatic temperament, whereas lasciviousness fits the sanguine or choleric temperament.

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484 Ibid., D v: “Ignea mens Gallis … Læti, alacres, lusu, choreis et carmine gaudent: in venerem proni, proni in convivia.”
485 Ibid., D 2 v: “Aegoceros genti dominans: si credimus astris; / Si damus hoc ceelo arbitrium: cito mobile pectus / Corda largitus, rerum sitibunda novarum.”
486 Wimpfeling, *Epitome rerum Germanicarum*, H6v- H7r.
487 Johann Boehme, *De Omnium Gentium Ritibus*, fol. 45 r.
488 Jean Bodin, *Jo. Bodini Andeguensis De republica libri sex, Latine ab autore redditi, multo quam antea locupletiores* (Lyon: Jacob du Puys, 1586), 520.
490 Ibid.: “Gallos cognoscimus ab incessu moderato, gestu molli, uultu bla[n]do, voce dulcisona, sermone facili, moribus modestis, habitu laxo.”
491 Ibid., *De incertitudine et vanitate*, N6 r.
As the second chapter demonstrates, the sanguine and choleric temperaments were considered more prone to the French disease, than others – an understanding used by Grünpeck and Brant to support their theories that the disease occurred for the first time among the French people.

These associations were made popular through the “Regimen sanitatis Salernitanum,” a twelfth-century text which had been edited and expanded throughout the centuries in Latin and various other languages and is extant in more than one hundred manuscripts and several hundred printed editions. In the fourteenth century, the German medical writer Konrad of Eichstätt produced a new edition of the poem in Latin, which had a particular influence on fourteenth- and fifteenth-century German and Latin editions. Christa Hagenmeyer counted nearly 10,000 copies of various vernacular editions based on Eichstätt’s text, with “Ordnung der Gesundheit” as the closest to the original. In the text it is stated that people with sanguine complexion are “unchaste and have many desires, because they are hot and moist,” the choleric temperament makes people unchaste but lacking in desire, whereas the phlegmatic temperament is characterized by a lack of interest in sex and matters of love.

As Weeda shows in her dissertation, there were no firm associations between temperaments and peoples in Later Middle Ages. The sixteenth century did not produce any well-defined taxonomies either. Thus, Franciscus Irenicus, referring to Albertus Magnus,

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494 *Dis biechlin sagt wie sich ein yegklich mensch hal=ten sol durch das gantz jar/ mit essen/ trincken/ schlaffen/ wachen vnnnd baden. Als das beschreyben Auicenna/ Galienus/ Almansor etc. Gar nutzlich dẽ menschen zu wisenn (Freiburg: Johann Wörlin, 1523), B 3 v: “er ist unkeüsch vn[d] begert sein vil / wan[n] er ist warm vn[d] feücht…” Also see Walter, *Unkeuschheit und Werke der Liebe*, 324.

495 Ibid.: “Er begert vil unkeüscheit vnd mag doch wenig”

496 Ibid., B4 r: “begert nit vil zǔ unkeüschen vnmn mag sein auch nit vil.”

497 Weeda, “Images of Ethnicity,” 100.
seems to describe the Germans as phlegmatic, but the German people at the same time were also traditionally regarded as hot-blooded, due to their continuous exposure to cold climates. It is safe to say, however, that when the German writers assigned the hot element to the French, they often did so with the intention of evoking the connection between the hot element and proneness in sexual matters.

Side by side with the “proneness in Venus” was inconstancy. The fifteenth-century proverb reads “Polish bridge, Austrian soldiers, Italian devotion, German temperance, Bohemian monks, Swabian nuns, Prussian religion, French constancy, nothing costs everything.” Surviving in various forms and languages, this topsy-turvy proverb ridiculed the absence of the qualities or phenomena attributed to the named countries. Thus, *Gallorum constantia* was an obvious oxymoron, reinforcing the staple association between the French and fickleness. As I show above, already in the thirteenth century Alexander of Roes had claimed that *inconstantia* was among their main negative traits. The proverbial inconstancy of the French, juxtaposed to the German constancy, became to be associated with their behavior in the matters of love. Thus, Martin Luther stated in the *Tischreden* that the French were to be regarded as air-headed, while the Germans were ambitious. Sebastian Münster in his *Cosmographia universalis* (1544) wrote that the French were to be considered fickle (*nachlässig*), while Scaliger (1561) described them as frivolous (*leichtsinnig*).

500 Weiler in his study of an 18th-century *Völkertafel* lists several late antique and medieval sources (including a Byzantine source) referring to the French as hot-blooded: Weiler, “Ethnographische Typisierungen.”
503 Ibid., 51.
504 Quoted in Edward Reichel, “‘Heimath der Schaullust, der Eitelkeit, der Moden und Novitäten’ – Frankreich und der Franzose,” in *Europäischer Völkerspiegel*, 175.
In his study of nationalism and morality in the eighteenth century through the early twentieth century, George L. Mosse highlighted that the pattern of representing other races as morally corrupt was integral to nationalistic feelings. He argued that this dynamic did not manifest itself prior to the eighteenth century, and found its basis in the movement of pietism among the modern European bourgeoisie. However, studies of Antiquity and the Middle Ages show that the pattern of labeling others as morally deviant emerged much earlier than that and did not necessarily apply to “inferior races.” As Zorach and Puff have demonstrated, non-normative sexual behavior was often attributed to countries that were perceived as culturally superior. Thus, for Germans, all the nations south of the Alps were morally corrupt, while for the French Italy represented the harbor of all the vices.

One of Mosse’s many interesting insights about the self-fashioning as morally superior is the juxtaposition of manly “self” to effeminate “other.” Masculinity is often connected to a nation’s virility and therefore considered essential to its vitality. The stereotype of the fierce character of the Germans is developed in Tacitus’s *Germania*, but predates its rediscovery.

Thus, Isidore of Seville wrote:

> The Germanic nations are so called because they are immense in body, and they are savage tribes hardened by very severe cold. They took their behavior from that same severity of climate – fiercely courageous and ever indomitable, living by raiding and hunting.

Conrad of Megenberg in his *Planctus ecclesiae in Germaniam* characterized the German soldiers as manly and strong. In his *Yconomica*, he argued that the Germans were the best

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505 George L. Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality: Respectability and Abnormal Sexuality in Modern Europe* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1985), 134: “The stereotype of the so-called inferior race filled with lust was a staple of racism, part of the inversion of accepted values characteristic of the ‘outsider,’ who at one and the same time threatened society and by his very existence confirmed his standards of behavior.”


warriors based on their physique – “thus, it follows that the Germans are the best warriors in the world. And I say this, because it is so due to the bodily disposition. In fact, they have beautiful and very durable bodies.”511 He refers to the passage from Aristotle’s Politics that I quote at the beginning of this chapter to state: “People far from the sun lack prudence and have excessive courage because of the abundance of blood in them. People who are close to the sun abound in sagacity and prudence, but lack courage and animosity, because, naturally, when they have little blood, they are afraid to spill or lose their blood.”512 He then notes that even though the Germans (as people living far from the sun) are not born precautious, they become prudent as a result of constant military training and the turmoil of war. Therefore, as the Greeks in the writings of Aristotle, the Germans are both prudent and courageous.513

In this passage, Conrad of Megenberg is engaging with the classical stereotype of furor Teutonicus, an epithet of Lucan, which was turned into a stereotype in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.514 Weeda shows in her PhD thesis how in the Late Middle Ages the image of ruthless German soldiers, uncontrollable in their furry and drunkenness, was successfully negotiated against the image of the French preudomme.515 The rediscovery of Tacitus’s Germania allowed German humanists to use the negative rhetoric surrounding German military in a positive light, as an antithesis to decadent Latin vices.516

Through the association with the Frankish origins myth, the French, in the German sources, are often described as “fierce” and “brave.” However, when necessary, they are

513 Ibid., 201: “Teutonici non habent a circumstanciis sue nativitas, quinymmo per armorum exercitacionem et per bellorum continuas volutaciones.”
presented as “effeminate,” to create a contrast to the German manliness. At the beginning of
the thirteenth century, Jacques of Vitry wrote in his Historia Occidentalis that the French are
seen as “proud, effeminate and carefully adorned like women” in contrast to the “ferocious”
Germans.517 Conrad of Megenberg mocked the French for being too effeminate to be good
soldiers and claimed that they chose their best clothing for the battle, as if to attend a
wedding.518 Conrad Celtis, in the verse “De situ Germaniae et moribus” of his Germania
generalis, wrote that their voice did not at all sound feminine, but very masculine instead.519
The humanists evoked Caesar as the authority on the effeminacy of the French warriors.
Franciscus Irenicus remarked in a similar fashion:

They [the Gauls] avoid wars, while the Germans are indeed the first [at it],
according to the authors Caesar and Tacitus, for just as the soul of the Gauls is
eager and ready to wage wars, their mind is gentle and has little resistance to
endure calamities, Caesar says in Book I of Bello Gallico. Florus likewise says
that at the beginning of the war the Gauls are more like men and at the end they
are more like women.520

The German humanist Heinrich Bebel (1472-1518),521 professor of rhetoric and poetry at the
University of Tübingen, in an oration composed on his coronation as poet laureate refers to the
same passage from Caesar522

Caesar also says that the habits of the German and Gallic soldiers are different...
Moreover, he says that the Gauls are gentle. For (he says) that although the soul

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518 Quoted in Moeglin, Kaisertum und allerchristlicher König, 294.
519 Conrad Celtis, De Situ et Moribus Germaniae Additiones ('Germania Generalis'), ed. Centre Traditio
Litterarum Occidentalium (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2010), carmen 2, 16-17: “Vox habitum mentis cum
gestu & pectora prodit / Vox quae nil muliebre sonat: sed tota virili.” Also cited in Boehme,
De Omnium
Gentium Ritibus, fol. 53 r.
520 Irenicus, Germaniae exegeseos, 22 r: “... illi absunt bello, hi v[er]o germanor[um] primi su[n]t, Caesare,
Tacito aut[orib][us], ut Galloru[m] anim[us] ad suscipienda bella alacer & pro[m]ptus est, ita mollis & minime
resiste[n], ad calamitates p[er]ferendas mens eoru[m] est, ait Caesar lib. i. belli gallici. Florus q[uo]q[ue]
Gallos ininito pugnae, plusq[uam] viros, in fine plusq[uam] foeminas dixit...”
521 Flood, “Heinrich Bebel” in Poets Laureate, 141-145. Also see Marcel Angres, Triumphus Veneris: Ein
522 C. Iuli Caesaris De Bello Gallico Commentarius Tertius
animus, sic mollis ac minime resistens ad calamitates ferendas mens eorum est.”
of the Gauls is eager and ready to wage wars, their mind is gentle and has little resistance to endure calamities.\textsuperscript{523} Reconciling the image of innocent ancient Germans with the image of erudite contemporary Germans, advanced in arts, literature, and sciences, presented a major challenge to German humanists. Anxieties associated with the perceived superiority of the Latinate peoples are voiced in Franck’s \textit{Weltchronik}: “Germania once was a rough, stagnant, infertile land, as Cornelius Tacitus wrote, populated by coarse people… But now it is so adorned with such strong cities, castles, and powerful warlike people, who have become so fluent and talented in all languages and arts that they are not inferior neither to the French, nor to the Italians and Spaniards.”\textsuperscript{524}

Conrad Celtis (1459-1508), the first German poet laureate, was the author of one of the most consistent programs of how to balance German simplicity with cultural sophistication. In his famous “Oration delivered publicly in the University of Ingolstadt” (1492), Celtis offered a concept for combining the German simplicity with learning:

Noble men, emulate the ancient Roman nobility who, after they had taken over the empire of the Greeks, combined all their wisdom and eloquence so that it is a question as to whether they equaled or actually surpassed all the Greek faculty of invention and apparatus of learning. So you, too, having taken over the rule of the Italians and having cast off your vile barbarity, must strive after the Roman arts.\textsuperscript{525}

\textbf{Foreign goods, vices, and diseases}

The virtuousness of the German past and present was often contrasted with the French shortcomings and vices. The latter were seen as threatening to corrupt the German-ness of the


\textsuperscript{524} Franck, \textit{Weltbuch} 42 r: “\text{Germania ist etwan gewesen ein rauch vnbeuwig fruchtloß land / als Cornelius Tacitus schreibt / mit grobem volck besetzt... Nun ist es aber also zügericht / mit notfisten / stetten / schloßern / starckem streitbare[n] volck darzü in allerley sprach vnd künsten / so sin[n]reich vbd fürtreffenlich worden / dz sy weder den Frantzosen / Wahlen oder Hispaniern weichen.”

\textsuperscript{525} Conrad Celtis, “Oration delivered publicly in the University of Ingolstadt,” in \textit{Humanism and the Northern Renaissance}, ed. Kenneth R. Bartlett and Margaret McGlynn (Toronto: Canadian Scholars’ Press, 2000), 77.
German people, and commerce was at the heart of this corruption. According to Tacitus, the ancient Germans had not known the value of money. Following this tradition, Boehme wrote that his ancestors had had no interest in it in the past: “They did not use gold or silver, and did not count the silver, which was given to their ambassadors or sent to their princes by foreign rulers, holding it in the same contempt as pottery.” With the absence of money came moderation: “On regular days, in their food and clothing almost all Germans were very frugal and simple.”

_Die Welsch-Gattung_ (“The Welsch Kind”), an anonymous work printed in 1513 in Strasbourg, gives a detailed account of a crisis in the German lands caused by the Welsch and adoption of their habits. In this poem “Welsch” is associated mostly with Italy. However, all throughout the Middle Ages “welschen” or “walschen” and “whalen” often stood for France and even Spain. The narrator finds himself in a forest in search of shade, pondering over all the terrible things happening in the world, when he is captured by a Wild Man and brought in front of a council of twelve elders. They ask him to give them a truthful portrayal of the present time. In his reply to the elders, the narrator plunges into a lengthy discussion of everything that is wrong in the world. The crisis is caused by a number of things, including major constellations, but it is “Welschland” and its corrupting habits that the narrator focuses on. The poem is centered on the idea that only the imperial power can solve all the existing problems in the world described in the poem. Only when all the countries recognize the authority of the German emperor, will mankind be able to live in peace.

Among the corrupting effects of Italy, the poem lists the “Welsch” money:

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526 Boehme, _De Omnium Gentium Ritibus_, fol. 43 r-v: “Auri & argenti his olim usus nullus. Argentea uasa eorum legatis data, aut principibus muneris missa, non minori contemptu quam fictilia tractabant.”
527 Boehme, _De Omnium Gentium Ritibus_, fol. 45 v: “Victu, uestituque priuatis diebus fere omnes Germani admodum frugali et simplici utuntur.”
Germany, that loves too much the Italian gold,
Beware that this money
Does not bring you bad earnings
Watch out, German nation
Of the wind that comes from the south
It is not healthy, as people say.  

Air, as I discuss in the first and second chapters, was commonly believed to be the source of contagion. In these verses the author seems to present money as a metaphor for plague, brought to the German lands with the corrupting southern winds blowing from Italy. Later on, the author again warns Germany of using Italian goods: “Therefore, Germany, I warn you, / Do not love now the Italian goods too much... Watch out, let the wind pass by!”

Along with the purity of German men and women, the salubrity of the German air is a topos in German Renaissance literature. Thus, Franciscus Irenicus dedicated a whole chapter to the purity of the air in the German lands in his *Germaniae exegeseos*. In his words, “the air of Germany is the most salubrious, as Dracontius holds. It is even thicker than in other regions, particularly in the Alpine regions...” He draws a connection between the salubrious and cold qualities of the air and the longevity of the Germans as well as their seriousness.

Since the Germans had started to use money, they became subjected to foreign goods. They now often change their dress and look up to foreign fashion: “Now they find great pleasure in new types of clothing, Italian and especially French, from whom in the past years the men have gotten broad nosed shoes and their coats with wide sleeves and woven caps which are called “pyretia’.” Johannes Aventinus (1477-1534), the author of the eight-volume

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531 Ibid., vv. 166-171: “Teutschland, die liebt zů ser welsch gold, / Sih, das dir nit derselbig sold / Werd bringen einen bößen lon, / Hütt dich in Teütscher nation / Recht von dem wind auß dem mittag: / Er ist nit gsund nach gmainer sag!”

532 Ibid., vv. 354-349: “Darumb, Teütschla[n]d, hab dich jn hůt, / Hab nit zů lieb yetz das welsch gůt, ... Hůt dich, laß wetter vber gann!”


534 Ibid.: “Unde sit, ut illic crassior aer est, qui multum ingenii optimis co[n]fert, dicente Iuvenale satyra decima secundum Heracliti ac Democriti sententiam. Cuius prudentia monstrat / Summos posse viros, & magna exempla daturos.”

ancient history of Germany, the *Annals of Bavaria* included a passage in which Charlemagne criticizes French fashion and the German fondness for it and issues a decree prohibiting to trade and wear French clothing in the German lands.\footnote{Quoted in Hirschi, *Wettkampf der Nationen*, 318 and translated in Idem, *The Origins of Nationalism*, 176: “Oh, you Germans and free Franks, you are so imprudent and inconstant! It is not a good sign that you are adopting the dresses of those whom you vanquished and fought and whose masters you are: if take their clothes, they will take your hearts. What is the point of these Latin (Wälsche) clothes and cuts? They do not cover your body, leave it half naked, are neither good for cold nor heat, for rain nor wind; and when someone has to do their business in the field (to put it politely), it does not cover them and their legs freeze.’ Charlemagne then sent out a messanger so that these French clothes were neither bought nor sold in Germany.”}

The importance of clothing for one’s identity was apparent throughout the Middle Ages and Early Modern times and was codified with the help of sumptuary legislation, which made sure that distinctions between different social classes remained in place. In the words of Gerhard Jaritz, “‘the language of dress’ was a language of law, of order, of creating differences, of classification and of signification.”\footnote{Gerhard Jaritz, “Images, Urban Space, and the Language and Grammar of Elite Dress (Central Europe, fifteenth century),” in *Le verbe, l’image et les représentations de la société urbaine au Moyen-Age*, ed. Marc Boone, Elodie Lecuppre-Desjardin and Jean-Pierre Sosson (Antwerp, Apeldoorn: Garant, 2002), 220. Also see Idem, “Kleidung und Prestige-Konkurrenz. Unterschiedliche Identitäten in der städtischen Gesellschaft unter Normierungszwängen,” *Saeculum* 44/1 (March 1993): 8-31; Idem, “Ira Dei, Material Culture, and Behavior in the Late Middle Ages: Evidence from German-speaking Regions,” *Essays in Medieval Studies* 18 (2001): 53-66.} As Jones and Stallybrass point out, the modern understanding of the word “fashion” differs from what it meant in the past. In the Middle Ages clothing constituted the “fashioning” of the person and was intrinsic to one’s personality.\footnote{Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).} Banishing the French fashion from the court, Aventinus’s Charlemagne thus attempted to “fashion” his subjects as proper “Germans.”

Johann Cochlaeus (1479-1552), in his edition of the cosmography of Pomponius Mela published in 1512, included a description of German history and customs, *Brevis Germaniae descriptio*. In it he notes that the Germans have everything they need in their land and require neither foreign clothing nor food. The rare items they buy from Italy (spices, for examples) are
part of a mutually beneficial commerce, in which the Germans sell to Italy their man-made goods.539

Wine was considered an intrinsically foreign commodity as well. Two classical works helped to substantiate this claim: Caesar’s De Bello Gallico and Tacitus’s Germania. Caesar writes that the ancient Germans had dealings with merchants only in order to sell them war booty and never bought foreign goods from them. Moreover, “they forbid the import of wine altogether, believing that it makes men weak and womanish in their capacity for exertion.”540 According to Tacitus, the ancient Germans produced their own beer, but bought wine from their neighbors on the Rhine: “As a drink they use the sap from barley or wheat, fermented into something like wine; the tribes next to the rivers also buy wine in trade.”541

Franck evokes the passage from Tacitus in his Weltbuch (1534) marked by a marginal note, “On crapulence widespread in the German lands in the past and today.”542 Franck dedicated one of his first printed works to the subject of drinking. According to him, wine had come to the German lands from the French, as the title of his book, published for the first time in 1528, suggests: Vonn dem grewlichen laster der trunkenheit / so in disen letsten zeiten erst schier mit den Frantzosen auffkommen (“On the horrible vice of drunkenness which in the recent times has just emerged here with the French”).543 It is not clear, whether Franck meant that the

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542 Franck, Weltbuch, 43 v: “Es was nit ein hinderlistig volck entdecket sein geheymniß einfeltig einen jeden. Jr trank war auß gersten gemacht wie eingebrochner wein. Die anflussen sassen / hette[n] im brauch etwas frembde zü gefürte wein. Holtzöpfel / gestanden oder gerendte milch / schlechte speiß brauchten sy zur speiß und trank.”

543 I have used the 1531 edition of the work published in Peter Klaus Knauer, Sämtlicher Werke: Kritische Ausgabe mit Kommentar, vol. 1: Frühe Schriften (Bern, Berlin, Frankfurt am Main, New York, Paris, Wien: Peter Lang, 1993), 356-408. On the treatise and how it fit in Franck’s world view, see Patrick Hayden-Roy, The
vice of drunkenness had come from the French people or with the French disease. It is possible, that he implied both. He does not mention beer at all in his work, and it is clear that he refers to drinking wine rather than drinking beer – the only acceptable “German” alcoholic drink. He gives a detailed account of all the diseases that come with wine as well as overall moral corruption.

As Jacques Ridé noted, the stereotype of the love of the Germans of beer “seriously tarnished their [German] reputation of men morally superior than others.” The idea that wine had been imported to the German lands since the ancient times was thus used to support narratives of corruption of the Germans by foreigners and their goods. In *Germaniae Exegesis*, Franciscus Irenicus notes that the ancient Germans had never been good producers of wine and that they in fact had used to “abstain from it.” Compared to the Greeks, Romans, and the French, the Germans are much less given to ebriety, he argues. He adds: “Franciscus Phelphus already spoke about it. He condemned the whole region not because of one or two drunken Germans, but because of the unchastity of the Italians and the treacherousness of the Frenchmen, these great crimes.”

Foreign goods were considered luxury; luxury or *luxuria* and lechery in the Middle Ages being often interchangeable due to the association between luxury, indulgence, lack of self-control, lasciviousness, and unchastity. Thus, foreign commodities were associated with

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544 One chapter is even entitled “Trunckenheyt verderbt den leibe vnd is ein vrsach viler kranckhayt / vnd eins vnzeyttigen tods”: Knauer, *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 1, 371-374.

545 Ridé, *L’Image du Germain*, vol. 2, 1189. For various strategies undertaken by German humanists to combat this stereotype, see Ibid., 1188-1192.


548 Christopher J. Berry, The Idea of Luxury: a Conceptual and Historical Investigation (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 88-89: “Luxury came to take its place as a sin in opposition to sobriety and chastity. These latter virtues were not a major concern of classical/pagan thinkers but it is their heightened position in the Christian pictures that enables luxury to become identified with lechery…. The feminine softness of luxury was associated with indulgence and lack of self-control so that, within this usage, the term *luxuria* was able to combine lasciviousness and luxury.” Also see Ellen Kosmer, “The ‘noyous humoure of lecherie’,” *The Art Bulletin*, 57/1 (1975): 1.
sin and moral perversion. Jones and Stallybrass, for example, note that in sixteenth-century
England the word “to fashion” acquired the meaning of to “counterfeit or pervert.”

“If only we could return to that time when German virtue flourished, the time before
we had the luxury of wealth. Then, our ancestors managed to perform notable deeds; then,
virtue alone was a just cause for action; then, when writers failed to record their feats, the glory
of the German people sank into the waters of Lethe,” exclaims Eobanus Hessus in the
preface to the Arminius of Ulrich von Hutten, a praise of the Germanic ancient “Wild Man.”

Imported foreign commodities brought with them the Italian vice, the French “unreyne
liebe,” and, ultimately, the French disease.

In Ad Elsulam a priscis et sanctis Germaniae moribus degenerantem (“To Elsula,
falling away from the old-time and pure customs of Germany”), one of the verses in the
Quattuor Libri Amorum Conrad Celtis laments the disregard for German ancient habits, and
the corruption of the Germans by all things foreign, manifested in new diseases, as contrasted
with a glorious past:

Rare were diseases and there were no foreign seeds
And avaricious physicians did not drain so much wealth.
There was no such game, the sort of which is now in the region,
Which consumes up to ten thousand leaders a night…
But after luxuria migrated to our shores
Bacchus and Venus inflamed each roof,
Our age is now prone to various diseases,
And thousands are cruelly killed via poisoned air.

Libri quattor amores (1502), together with Germania generalis (1502) comprise the
first part of Celtis’s ambitious Germania illustrata, a description of geography, history and

549 Jones and Stallybrass, Renaissance Clothing, 1.
550 Walker, Ulrich von Hutten’s Arminius, 24.
551 On this subject see Leitch, Mapping Ethnography, chapter 3.
552 See chapter 2, n. 377.
553 Perhaps, a play on the words lues (“plague”) and ludus (“play”).
554 Conrad Celtis, Quattuor libri amorum secundum quattuor latera Germaniae, ed. Centre Traditio Litterarum
Occidentarium (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010): “Rarus erat morbus peregrina que semina nulla / Nec medicus tantas
hausit avarus opes. / Nullus erat talis ludus, nunc qualis in orbe est, / Quis bis denu ducum milia nocte vorat;
/...Sed postquam luxus nostras migravit in oras / Et Venere et Baccho singula tecta calent, / Hinc varios morbos
patitur proclivior aetas / Mille que nunc animas crapula saeva necat.”
customs of the ancient and modern Germans, planned as a response to Flavio Biondo’s *Italia illustrata* (1474). Celtis envisioned it as a collaborative effort of the most prominent German humanists of his time. Even though Celtis’s ambitious project never came to be completed, but had a long-lasting influence on the German nationalist thought.555

Heinrich Bebel uses a similar rhetoric in his allegorical poem *Triumphus Veneris*, a detailed account of moral depravity in the German lands caused by Venus and sumptuousness. “Why do we, O mortals, suffer from previously unknown diseases? From the fatal and other kinds of plagues?” – he exclaims.556 And further on in the poem answers his question in a plea to *Germania*:

I beg you, O Germania, preserve the old customs
And, the most venerable, expel the foreign sumptuousness,
And the great vice unknown to our ancestors!557

The foreign goods make the German body weaker and less “German” and, as a result, subject to foreign diseases. Johannes Agricola laments in his *German Proverbs* that the German people “wear Italian, Spanish and French clothes, have Italian cardinals, French and Spanish diseases and also carry out Italian practices.”558 According to Erasmus, the French disease is just another sign of moral corruptness: “Unless you’re a good dicer, a skillful card player, an unfamous whoremonger, a heavy drinker, a reckless spendthrift, a wastrel and heavily in debt, decorated with the French pox besides, hardly anyone will believe you’re a knight.”559


557 Ibid., 256: “Contineas veteres, precor, o Germania, mores / Atque peregrinum pellas sanctissima luxum / Et vitium ignotum nostris maioribus olim.” A different verse by Bebel on the French disease was printed on the verso of the title page of Fries’s *Epitome opusculi*: “Nil hominum miserans torquebo crimina mundi, / Pestiferum morbum vulgo qui Francica fertur, / In terris mittam, quæ derformare venusta / Corpora consuevit, vel nigra ad tartara mittet / Ulcera cum varijis morbis incognita mittam / Nulla ætas tuta est, sive inmupte que puellæ, / Si vir aut iuvenis furing aut pigra senectur, / Nec infans parvulus, nec præbens ubera mater.”

558 Quoted in Puff, *Sodomy in Reformation Germany*, 134.

559 Erasmus, “The Knight without a Horse, or Faked Nobility,” in *Colloquies*, 884.
Ulrich von Hutten directly linked foreign commodities with diminished “Germanness,” corrupted morals and eventually disease in a number of his works.  

In November 1518, a year before the publication of his treatise on the French disease, he finished his *Febris Prima*, and immediately after the publication of the treatise – *Febris Secunda*. Both dialogues have received considerable attention as early examples of the metaphorical use of disease. The dialogues take place between Hutten and Fever, a trope standing for a number of diseases, including leprosy, gout, and the French disease. In the first dialogue, Hutten asks Fever to leave his quarters, suggesting that she would be better off at the houses of rich people who indulge in gluttony, drunkenness, and expensive goods, and those that have committed crimes. He urges Fever to find home with corrupt monks and clerics and particularly with Cardinal Tommaso Cajetan, who had been sent to the German lands to collect money for a crusade against the Turks. Fever notes that the cardinal is too stingy, and in the end chooses to settle in the quarters of one of the *Curtisani*, a German cleric who spent some time at the court of a Roman prelate. Before making her decision, Fever asks Hutten a series of questions:

> Fever: Does he drink wine?  
> Hutten: He drinks a lot.  
> Fever: Does he use pepper, cinnamon, ginger, and cloves?  
> Hutten: Plenty of it.  
> Fever: Does he have a bed, a tapestry, a mattress well stuffed with feathers, and a silk pillow?  
> Hutten: The best.  
> Fever: Does he also eat fish?  
> Hutten: He guzzles it, but only the best and most expensive, he also likes partridges and pheasants, and when he eats a hare, he thinks of himself as more beautiful. He also says that he is without asparagus during this long winter.  
> Fever: And does he take a bath sometimes?  
> Hutten: With great zeal and often.  
> Fever: Is he however stingy?

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Hutten: He is most generous.
Fever: Does he seek help from the doctors?
Hutten: He hates them bitterly and thinks they must be expelled from Germany.
Fever: Is he clad in skins or is he otherwise well-dressed?
Hutten: Yes, as the one in Martial’s, like Baccara he prays for dark days, wind, and snow, among his six hundred fur mantles.563

After Hutten answers all of Fever’s questions, she chooses the home of a German cleric who has just returned from Rome.

In the second dialogue, Fever is back at Hutten’s door. She escaped the cleric’s house because it had become too crowded with diseases that he had taken in, particularly the French disease.564 The dialogue is full of satire on German clerics and the Roman church and accusations of their voluptuousness. Fever tries to persuade Hutten of positive effects she could have on him, but Hutten convinces her that he has already benefited from her influence and that she should travel to Rome to confront Roman clerics.565

In the longest chapter of his treatise on the French disease, entitled Contra Luxum parsimoniae laus (“On luxury, in praise of temperance”) Ulrich von Hutten makes the same
connection between luxury and disease. However, it is no longer the Church that is the main
target of his critique, but the German nobility. He laments the betrayal of ancient customs
among the nobility and praises his grandfather Laurentius Hutten for leading an exemplary
chaste life, which was marked by active engagement in political affairs and the refusal to allow
such foreign things as pepper, saffron, ginger, or any other exotic spices in his house. Not
only did he not use foreign goods himself, but also scolded his equals for succumbing to foreign
commodities. These days, von Hutten observes, nobility prefers Milesian wool to common
cloth, and foreign ointments and spices to local herbs; they require meats from Italy, wine from
Corsica, and other expensive commodities, the trade of which enriches merchants. By
purchasing fashionable garments, the nobility loses their good fortune and acquires many other
evils or diseases, including the French disease “that cannot live without pepper.” The
voluptuous style is the reason why now one can hardly find a German nobleman who is not
tormented by gout, dropsy, leprosy, or the French pox. It is peculiar, that although opposing
foreign goods, Ulrich von Hutten nevertheless advocates for the use of the guaiac tree in
treating the French disease, arguing that it retains its curative powers even in the German lands
and is good for Germans (as well as people in Italy and France).

About the same time, in September 1518, Ulrich von Hutten published another dialogue
on the vices of nobility (“Aula”) based on the Mainz court. The two main characters in the

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566 Hutten, De guaiaci medicina et morbo gallico liber unus, 461: “Præstabat barbaros et dici et haberi in illis ut
tune sordibus, quam in hac luxuria, hoc dedecore ingeniorum palmam aucupari.”
567 Ibid., 463: “... in suam domum piper, crocum, zinziber et id genus peregrina condimenta nunquam admisit,
ne alio ipse quam ex nostra lana vestimento uti solutus est...”
568 Ibid.: “idque non tantum faciebat ipse, sed magno etiam apud æquales suos convicio mores hominum
insectabatur.”
569 Ibid., 460: “Quid aliud sunt enim ista omnia quam patrimoniorum prius nostrorum dilapidationes, deinde
morborum quoque propagines?”
570 Ibid., 465: “Meum igitur summum votum est, ne unquam podagra, unquam morbo Gallico careant qui pipere
carere non possunt...”
571 Ibid.: 463: “Cum inquam, vix decimus, quisque nunc reperiatur in Germania nobilium, qui non aut podagra
laboret, aut articulari morbo crucietur, aut hydropisi infestetur, ischia, lepra, aut illa maxima secum mala
invehente morbo Gallico divexitur.”
572 Ibid., 439.
573 Klaus Schreiner and Ernst Wenzel, Hofkritik im Licht humanistischer Lebens- und Bildungsideale Enea
Silvio Piccolomini, De miseriis curialium (1444), Über das Elend der Hofleute, und Ulrich de Hütten, Equitis
dialogue are Castus (“Moral”) and Misaulus (“Court contrarian”). Among the signs of decadence at the court, Misaulus highlights the repelling dirtiness: “In the halls there is the dirtiest filth, a remarkable obscenity.”\textsuperscript{574} Meat is spoiled and undercooked, served in dirty dishes, and there is dog excrement everywhere, along with vomit and piss, he writes. Sleep is scarce and is always in dirty beds, which are infested with fleas. Since sheets are rarely washed, beds also harbor diseases, including \textit{morbus gallicus}.\textsuperscript{575}

A popular song from the early sixteenth century also associates the French disease with foreign fashion. \textit{Ain news gedicht von firwicz der welt} (“A new poem on the fallacy of the world”),\textsuperscript{576} printed in 1510, mocks the use of all things foreign and the adoption of foreign habits by the “people of the Upper German language” (\textit{dasz Volck hochtewtscher Zungen}).\textsuperscript{577}

\begin{quote}
Drinking like Westphalians, Poles, Hessians, and also Saxons is done everywhere; eating with no limit, too much and excessively, which we call \textit{gourmandize}. Dancing, gambling, and playing cards like the Flemish, Lombards, and the French...\textsuperscript{578}

People wear \textit{welsch} capons called \textit{kaputz} – a foreign word that everybody uses these days,\textsuperscript{579} and indulge in all sorts of luxuries: “hats, bags, rosaries, cloth, dresses, spurs, swords will cost twice as much every year in this delusion.”\textsuperscript{580} The poem mentions people with a
fondness for fashion, which led them to get *mala franzossen*. The spots from the pants seem to have transferred onto their skin: “Some people wearing brindled pants and dress, and now are bespeckled with spots from the pox that they got ... The French disease / has no regard for embroidered pants.”

A later example of *morbus gallicus* acting as a sign of moral degradation and diminished German-ness is found in the famous adventure novel *Der abenteuerliche Simplicissimus Teutsch* by Hans Jakob Christoph von Grimmelshausen. The first six chapters of Book IV are dedicated to Simplicius’s adventures in Paris and have been in the center of attention of a number of scholars. Simplicius accompanies two French noblemen to Paris. During their journey one of them gives Simplicius French clothing, which marks the beginning of his moral transformation. In France he meets a medical doctor, Monsieur Canard, who takes him into his service. When the king’s master of ceremonies and other people from the royal entourage visit the house of Monsieur Canard, they hear Simplicius play the lute and sing a German song. They become so impressed with his beauty that they invite him to perform in a *comoedia* at the Louvre. Simplicius quickly masters the French pronunciation, and is given the role of Orpheus. On the day of his performance, he is groomed and dressed by his master and other people. With his hair dyed black, wearing clothing that could scarcely hide his body, Simplicius seems to represent an antithesis to normative German-ness. His performance becomes a great success and from that moment on the French begin to call him *Beau Alman*. His new name furthers the transformation, and Simplicius turns into a *Monsieur Alamode* – a

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581 Ibid., lines 151-158: “Das manger gieng geschecket / in hossen vnd in watt / das get er nun geflecket / von platern die er hat / der etwan laut thöt kossen, / Das ligt er yetzund ynn. / die plag mala franzossen / acht nit gestrickter hosen.”


Simplicius soon falls ill, and spends several days sick until he realizes that he got the “liebe Frantzosen.”\footnote{Ibid., 411.} His gradual transformation into someone he was not meant to be, the Frenchified version of himself, a “beau Alman,” ends with him contracting the most French disease imaginable. The next three chapters Simplicius spends covered with spots, becoming the opposite of the “beautiful German” he once was.

In the narrative arc of Grimmelshausen’s novel, the French disease acts a catalyst, which makes Simplicius reconsider his moral choices. It is the purifying arrow sent by the Gods in an attempt to change his ways. As a result, Simplicius repents his past deeds, thinking that the punishment was just. The French disease is represented as the epitome of Simplicius’s “corruption” or his loss of identity preceded by the abandonment of his innate manners and customs. At the end of his moral journey, he finds himself spiritually transformed and back in the Spessart forests, where he grew up. He chooses the hermit’s life that his father led, rejecting vanity by dressing in a simple hermit’s gown. His spiritual journey is complete, when he is
back home, assuming the customs that were bestowed upon him by his father and his surroundings.

These examples demonstrate that the French disease was seen as a punishment for using commodities that were considered foreign and not German enough. Such perception of morbus gallicus was not unique to the German lands. Harris showed, that the French pox in Elizabethan England “was increasingly seen as an exotic if dangerous commodity, shipped into the nation by merchants, soldiers, and other alien migrants.” And Roze Hentschell pointed out that medical and literary works often linked the French disease to the use of luxury goods in early modern England.

According to an anecdote, recounted by Erasmus, it was not uncommon to meet a Frenchman “who out of hatred for the English would rather go naked than be clothed in English cloth, or an Englishman who would rather come to bursting with thirst than drink a French wine.” Commodities had nationalities and so did diseases. Using the things which did not befit the descendants of the Tacitus’s Germani, enfeebled their bodies and made them prone to catching diseases. Nobility from Hutten’s dialogues, as well as Simplicius and the fashionmongers from an anonymous poem alter their German “selves” through the use of foreign goods and commodities, which lead to their moral corruption and bring them disease – the embodiment of this corruption.

Since excessive use of luxury goods caused diseases, merchants, distributing the goods, were often represented as “distributing” or spreading disease. In addition to merchants, people, who regularly crossed borders, and those on the margins of the body politic were feared as transgressors of the boundaries between healthy and unhealthy environments. Delumeau demonstrates that foreigners, travelers, and other marginalized individuals were often treated

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587 Harris, Sick Economies, 17.
588 Hentschell, “Luxury and Lechery.”
with suspicion by authorities during plague epidemics, and Jews and lepers were even accused of poisoning the wells. In the case of the French disease mercenaries and “camp women” were represented as transmitters of *morbus gallicus*.

As the first chapter shows, mercenaries often featured in the stories of origins of the French pox. In his *Chronicle*, published for the first time in 1531, Sebastian Franck writes that the French disease, having originated in France, was carried to the German lands by *Landsknechte*:

> In the year 1495, at the time of Emperor Maximilian, when he waged a war against France with Ludovico Gibboso and with the Venetians, the mercenaries brought with them from France this despicable soiling plague, the French, and it was named “French” after the soldiers, because they had contracted it from the French and became overcome by it in France. This pestilential and terrible disease still holds this name today.

He adds that the mercenary soldiers are just another plague which dates from the time of Emperor Maximilian.

A poem by Johannes Haselberg, *Von den welschen Purpeln* (“On the Welsch Purple”) published in Mainz in 1533 also blames the mercenary soldiers as well as merchants and

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594 Ibid.: “zu dises Keisers zeit seind auch die Landsknecht / das niemandt nutz volck auff kumen / das vngefördert / vngesücht vnmlauft / krieg vn[d] vnglück stucht vnd nachlaufft.”
prostitutes. Haselberg considered himself “a servant of the Habsburg dynasty”596 and wrote a number of works praising the Habsburgs including Des Türkischen Kaysers Heerzug (1530), Der Adler wider den Hanen. Eyn schöner lüstbarlicher Dialogus (1536), and Newe zeitung vnd Kriegshandlung (1537). In the poem, he refers to people suffering from the disease as the brothers of the “Order of the Welsch Purple.” The tone of the poem is moralizing and differs greatly from other encomia to “orders of diseases” widespread at the time.597 There are three characters in the poem: a herald of the French king, a merchant, and a patrician. On the frontispiece of the pamphlet is a male figure representing the herald. He is wearing a surcoat decorated with three lilies, the French royal symbol, and holds a herald’s wand in his hand (Fig. 6). There are two more woodcuts, each depicting the merchant and the patrician demonstrating their ulcers but otherwise covered with clothing (fig. 7 and 8).

Fig. 6. The herald of the king of France. Johannes Haselberg, Wie die Ritterbrüder des Purpelschen ordens mit grossen Schlachten und stürmen ir Ritterschaft erhaltent (Mainz 1533), 6 B r.
Munich: Bayerische Staatsbibliothek
http://daten.digitale-sammlungen.de/bsb00085073/image_9

The merchant is suffering from the “purple” and laments that there is no escape from it: “Clerics, lay people, monks and nuns, / No one escapes the war; / Princes, lords, many men-
at-arms / Are marked by the knighthood, / The ones with silver and gold, / Still have to fight
against the purple.” 598 The merchant heard that the patrician had gotten it too and asks his
advice on how to get rid of it. The patrician tells the merchant: “Had we observed good
regimen, / God would not have sent the plague upon us.” 599 He goes on to state that the
merchant got the disease due to his misbehavior away from home, and therefore has no one to
blame but himself: “You have deserted this world / With mundane goods and disdainful money
/ With pride and arrogance / With greed and usury that do not do good...” 600 The patrician adds,
that the disease appeared for the first time in Naples where it was brought to by men-at-arms.
And from there, “through lasciviousness, I have heard / The purple has come to Germany.” 601
The disease spread to German towns with merchants, Landsknechte, students, and other
traveling folk who engage in adultery (eєbruch) and all sorts of other vices.

*Morbus gallicus and its king*

Haselberg portrays the disease as a ferocious enemy, against which the brothers of the
“Order of the Welsch Purple” have to fight day and night. He extensively uses war-like
metaphors to describe the struggle. His metaphoric language suggests that the brothers of the
Order are fighting the French themselves: “They fight now day and night / Against the French
in the morning and at night.” 602 He goes even further and associates the disease with the King
of France himself:

There is no king in the world,
Who could fight further without money
But this King of France

krieg etrunnen; /Fürsten, herren, manch gwapnet mann / Zyhent mit der ritterschafft dran, / Die selbs haben
silber vnd goldt, / Noch kriegens von den purpeln soldt.”
599 Ibid., 365: “Het wyr gefürt gůt regiment, / So het vns Gott die plag nit gsendt.”
600 Ibid., 368: “Dů bist verlassen inn der welt / Durch zeitlich gütt vnd schnödes gelt, / Durch hoffart vnd durch
übermüt. / Durch geitz vnd wücher, thůt nit gütt.”
601 Ibid., 369: “Vnd durch hůrey, hab ich vernůmmen, / Sey die purpel inn deutschlandt kummen.”
602 Ibid., 364: “Kriegen jetzund tag vnd nacht, / Widern Franzosen frů vnd spath.”
To whom there is no equal on earth;  
Princes, lords far beyond the Rhine  
Must bow to the king:  
As soon as he sends the purple to someone,  
His heart becomes frightened by the Order.  

He refers to the disease as the French king on several occasions. For example, when the 
merchant asks the patrician if he knows the cure for the disease, he says: “I ask you for a 
brotherly council, / If you know something, do not keep it a secret, / So that I could escape /  
From the king of France unscorned.”

Haselberg was not the only one to rhetorically link the French disease to the French 
king. Johannes Agricola included an entry in his edition of German proverbs from 1530 
dedicated to the proverb “Dass dich die Franzosen ankomen” (“French on you!”). An 
equivalent of this saying has survived in the form of a cursing in a number of contemporary 
languages. There is still a similar phrase in English: “Pox on you!” It might be archaic in the 
English language, but, for example, in Hungarian its equivalent is still in common use. The 
entry from Agricola’s *German Proverbs* reads:

This curse is new, and appeared in the times of Emperor Maximilian. Because 
before his time this illness and pox has not been heard of in the German lands. 
But Maximilian and Ludovico Gibboso had a battle against the king of France 
and the Venetians; they brought this pox to us from Lombardy to the German 
lands. Thereof it got its name and even today it is called the French. And one 
battled with the King of France when getting the disease.

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603 Ibid.: “Es ist keyn könig inn der welt, / Der weither krieget sunder gelt,/ Dann dieser könig von Franckreich,  
/Auff ertrich ist nit sein geleich; / Fürsten, herren weith über rhein, / Müsset dem könig ghorsam sein: /So bald  
er eym die purpeln schickt; /Vorm orden jm sein hertz erschrickt.”

604 Ibid., 365: “Mit brüderlichem rath ich bitt, / Weystu etwas, verschweig mirs nit, / Damit ich kem auss disem  
pracht / Vom küng von Franckreich vnveracht.”

605 “(A) francba!” It is often translated as “Go to hell!”

606 Johannes Agricola, *Das ander teyl gemainer Tewtscher Sprichwörter, mit jhrer außlegung hat fünffthalb  
hundert newer Wörtter* (Nuremburg: Stuchs, 1530), M4 v-M5 r: “Dyser fluch ist new / und bey Keyser  
Maximilians zeytten auff kommen / Denn vor dyser zeyt war dysen kranckhayt un[d] plattern vnehöret / ynn  
Teutsch en landen / Do aber Maximilian kriegte mit dem Ludouico Gibboso / König ynn Frankreich / unnd mit  
den Venedigern / brachte[n] die vnsern dysen plattern auß Lombardien ynn Tewtsche land / davon sie auch noch  
hewtiggs tages den namen habent / und hayssenn Frantzosen / Vnnd der hat sich mit dem König von Frankreich  
geschlagen / wenn einer die kranckhayt bekomme[n] hat.”

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In the passage quoted above, as well as in Haselberg’s poem, the French king does not simply act as a participant of the origin story of the pox. He is represented as instrumental and even essential to its spreading throughout the German lands.

In her influential essay “Disease as Political Metaphor,” Sontag argued that “the metaphor implements the way particularly dreaded diseases are envisaged as an alien ‘other,’ as enemies are in modern war.” Incomprehensible, unfathomable diseases are often described with the help of militarized language. Just like Haselberg, Grünpeck also extensively uses the metaphor of war in his treatises on the French disease. He refers to it as an “enemy,” calling it “the most dangerous enemy” (perniciosissimum hostem), “the worst enemy” (deterimum hostem) etc. The militarized language used by Grünpeck to describe the course of illness deserves a longer citation:

As soon as it [the disease] fully establishes itself in this main region of the human body and secures itself from all attacks, it tortures with utmost cruelty and severity with its poison the largest areas, which are closest to the heart – lungs, spleen, and testicles. Having conquered these parts, it directs its terrible tortures towards higher regions, where the reason resides, spares neither veins, nor arteries, nerves, limbs, muscles, joints, bones, and flesh before it inflicts its unbearable yoke on the whole being. After this is accomplished, all internal members obey the enemy.

Grünpeck’s use of war metaphors in relation to the French disease strengthens the perception of morbus gallicus as a foreign element, an enemy to one’s body that, upon entering it, brings decay and corruption. In the imagery of Haselberg and the proverb, the French disease is not anymore an enemy, but the enemy - the French king, the main enemy of the German empire at the time. In this imagery of morbus gallicus, having the French pox is represented as battling the king of France himself, as if the conflict of Maximilian I and Charles VIII was reenacted in the bodies of German citizens every time they contracted morbus gallicus.

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608 Grünpeck, De Mentulagra, 56.
609 Ibid., 52.
610 Ibid., 63.
As this chapter demonstrated the French disease was part of narratives on foreign commodities, practices, and habits corrupting the pure and chaste moral climate of the German lands, which had known neither foreign vices nor foreign diseases in the past. Carried by the transgressors of geographical and social boundaries, it was presented as a morally and geographically foreign commodity and as a direct consequence of the circulation of foreign luxury goods and habits. At the same time, it was metaphorically linked to the king of France, as if he was attacking the body politic of the German empire through *morbus gallicus*. 
CONCLUSION

“Like chickens and eggs, worlds and words make each other what they are in an infinite regress.”

As this thesis has demonstrated, late medieval *morbus gallicus* was much more than a matter of the physical body. Statehood, national identity, perceptions of others, and borders were all part of discussions of its manifold causes and origins. At the center of these narratives stood the name itself. The name, *morbus gallicus* and its vernacular equivalents provided a framework for etymological explorations of its meanings. Musing over the meaning of *morbus gallicus*, German late medieval medical and non-medical authors often connected this disease to Frenchmen and French-ness. These semiotic analyses were reminiscent of etymologies produced by Isidore of Seville, who, for example, concluded that the word “Gallia” originated from the Greek word for “milk” to indicate the exceptionally white skin of the Gauls.

Throughout the late fifteenth century and in the early sixteenth century, *morbus gallicus* was rarely linked to the stereotype of a lascivious Frenchman, contrary to what Florack and Gilman have suggested. Among all the German authors discussed here, only Paracelsus directly associated the origins of the French disease with the sexually corrupt behavior of the French. Grünpeck linked it to another topos of the French character – their excessive pride and arrogance, Otto Raut to their fickleness, Materne Berler to their treacherousness. Such views were influenced by the lack of consensus on the sexual transmission of the disease, and the belief that it came from the air, sweat, and humoral imbalance, and by the relatively low position of sexual vices in the medieval hierarchy of sins. When employed to criticize the

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current situation at home, the German authors described the French disease as a punishment for the use of luxury goods and adoption of new habits, foreign to the German moral climate.

The confrontation of the French King Charles VIII and Emperor Maximilian I permeated discussions of the origins of the French pox. Moreover, it played an important role in the explanations of its causes. A number of authors argued that the French disease was a punishment inflicted upon the French people for their disobedience to the emperor. Throughout the sixteenth century the origins story of the French disease underwent some changes, but the conflict of Charles VIII with the German Emperor over Naples remained at its core. At the same time, religious origins of the French pox were treated as inseparable from Emperor Maximilian’s domestic politics and crusading plans. Thus, the French disease was rhetorically used to gather support from the German princes for Maximilian’s expeditions abroad. Grünpeck, Brant, Ulrich von Hutten, and Erasmus accused the German nobility of failing to contribute to Maximilian’s fight against the infidels and thus causing the wrath of God and inflicting disease upon themselves or the empire in general.

In the introduction to Die Welsch-Gattung (a poem discussed in the third chapter) Friedrich Waga wrote that “the national feeling is expressed in this poem not in the form of national pride, but as a concern for the welfare of the nation, a concern that, to make a comparison, is akin to the advice of an experienced physician on how to prevent contagion from a dangerous pestilence.”613 The dangerous pestilence in the poem is the “welsche” habits and goods that had been infiltrating the German lands. The French disease was seen as the ultimate disease of foreignness, integral to “others,” penetrating both the German body natural and politic through the transgressors of geographic boundaries (merchants and mercenaries), luxury commodities, and habits alien to German-ness.

613 Waga, Die Welsch-Gattung, 18: “Die Nationalgefühl gipfelt also im Gedichte nicht im Nationalstolz, vielmehr in der Sorge um die Wohlfahrt der Nation, einer Sorge, die, um einen Vergleich zu ziehen, dem Rat eines erfahrenen Arztes zu Verhuetung einer Ansteckung durch eine gefährliche Seuche gleichkommt.”
The late medieval history of *morbus gallicus* is a striking case in which religious conceptions, medical theories, astrological ideas, and notions of the “self” and “other” came into sharp relief under the light of the political aspirations of Emperor Maximilian I and an increased interest in the Germanic past among the Northern humanists. Once *morbus gallicus* was recognized as the disease of the French, it joined the “pool” of interconnected and interreflexive perceptions of German-ness and French-ness. As any discursive constructs are, these perceptions were fluid and flexible, and so was *morbus gallicus*. It was precisely this flexibility and multifacetedness that accorded the French pox its lasting presence in the narratives of German national identities.
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