Through the Looking Glass

As the art of the printed book developed in Europe, certain towns became prominent in the industry. In Germany, one of these towns was Strasbourg. During the early years of the sixteenth century, Strasbourg was a wealthy trading town and home to a burgeoning scientific community. A book by Lorenz Fries, *Spiegel der Arztyn*, first printed in 1518, provides a glimpse at the scientific climate of the time.

*Spiegel der Arztyn*, meaning the mirror or looking glass of medicine, focuses on internal medicine, and is notable for an early description of a gastric ulcer as well as an impressive illustration of the thorax and abdomen. Fries’ book was popular, befitting his status as the head of the medical community in Strasbourg. Fries and the book’s printer, Johann Gruninger, were part of a loose affiliation of scientists and physicians in the region who worked in a variety of disciplines. After two editions of *Spiegel der Arztyn* were published, Fries turned away from medicine temporarily to work on a set of maps with the cartographer Martin Waldseemuller, producing a new version of his 1507 map of the world.

Despite ventures into other areas of inquiry, Fries continued to influence the medical community. During the early 1500s, the spread of printing resulted in the rediscovery of classical texts, and doctors hunted for ancient medical books to reissue just as their contemporaries were doing in the humanities. Many physicians argued for a new focus on the classical knowledge of the Greeks over the practice of Arabic medicine, which was the tradition during the medieval era. Fries argued for the physical examination for knowledge of a vigorous latest

The Ebling Library Copy

WZ 240 F912s 1507-19

Our copy of *Spiegel der Arztyn* is the second edition of 1519. It contains many of the features common to books of its time. The typeface is black letter, which developed in the early years of printing to mimic the look of hand copied manuscripts. The primary text is arranged in double columns, also in imitation of manuscript forms. There are many woodcut illustrations throughout the book, which the printer Gruninger frequently used. Woodcut blocks were a commodity, and would often be exchanged among printers. The Ebling Library copy contains many examples of marginalia, the notes and marks written in the margins of the pages by past owners and readers. Marginalia is studied today for evidence of the ways in which the book was used in the past. There are also ownership marks on the title page from previous owners in 1563 and 1592. All of these elements are artifacts of an era with much to teach us about the development of medical knowledge.