

Ulrich Molitor

Tractatus de lamiis et pythonicis

Référence : GEJ-10

Paris, apud Gilles Corrozet, 1561, [1], 40, [1] pp, 8°. Book in Latin.

RARE AND UNCOMMON ON THE MARKET FIRST PARISIAN PRINTING!

17/18 century full calf binding, gold lettered spine, marbled endpapers, owner's ex libris of Emeric Bigot (?) on title page.

Good antiquarian condition, woodcut printers device to title, woodcut initials. Few stains and discolorations. Complete.

Published in Paris by Gilles Corrozet in 1561, this rare edition of Ulrich Molitor's *Tractatus de lamiis et pythonicis* stands as a definitive cornerstone of early occult literature and a fascinating, skeptical counterpoint to fanatical witch-hunting manuals like the *Malleus Maleficarum*. Written by a prominent German jurist, the treatise is historically significant for its early skepticism, as Molitor boldly argued that supernatural acts like shape-shifting or flying to sabbaths were merely illusions and dreams induced by the Devil rather than physical realities. This text is equally famous for containing the earliest printed depictions of witches, establishing the modern iconography of the occult through striking woodcut imagery that includes scenes of witches brewing storms in cauldrons, a wizard riding a wolf, and the Devil corrupting a woman.

Composed as a direct response to Europe's rising witchcraft hysteria, this treatise introduces cold legal logic and canonical jurisprudence into a debate previously dominated by religious fanaticism. Moving away from dry academic lecturing, the text adopts the dynamic structure of a scholarly dialogue between three real historical figures: Archduke Sigismund of Austria, the ruler of Tyrol, who acts as the voice of skepticism by raising logical doubts and challenging the validity of witch trials; Conrad Schatz, the magistrate of Constance, who champions the strict, traditional view by defending the physical reality of witchcraft and demanding harsh punishments; and Ulrich Molitor himself, the author, who serves as the impartial arbiter utilizing Roman and Canon law to systematically resolve the disagreements between his interlocutors.

Ulrich Molitor (c. 1442–1507) was a pioneering German jurist, humanist, and diplomat who shaped early modern legal thought. After studying humanities in Basel, he earned a prestigious doctorate in civil and canon law from the University of Pavia, positioning him at the forefront of Renaissance jurisprudence. He spent the pinnacle of his career as a trusted legal advisor to Archduke Sigismund of Austria in Innsbruck and later served as chancellor to the Bishop of Worms. Molitor's enduring legacy is his 1489 masterpiece, *Tractatus de lamiis et pythonicis*, which stands as one of history's earliest legal critiques of witch-hunt fanaticism. By utilizing rigorous Roman and Canon law to argue that witchcraft was largely a demonic illusion, he became a vehement opponent of judicial torture, forever marking his place as a trailblazer of European rationalism.

Provenance: Emeric Bigot (?) - Ex Libris: Emeric Bigot (1626–1689) was a prominent French humanist, bibliophile, and a central figure in the 17th-century European intellectual network known as the *Respublica Literaria* (Republic of

Letters). Born and based in Rouen, he used his substantial wealth to amass one of the most legendary private libraries in Europe, renowned for its rare Greek and Latin manuscripts and early printed books. Though he published little under his own name—focusing primarily on editing early Christian texts—Bigot served as an indispensable international scholarly coordinator. He maintained a vast correspondence with major thinkers like John Milton and Nicolas Heinsius, utilizing his unparalleled bibliographic expertise to source texts, verify translations, and generously assist scholars across the continent in preparing their own monumental works for print.

Bibliography: Herbert M. Adams, M 1573; USTC, 153205; Pettegree i Walsby, 153205, only found in one US institution (Yale University, Beinecke Library), Not in VD 16, Yve-Plessis, Dorbon-Aîné and Bibliotheca Esoterica; Caillet, II, 7641; Grässe, p. 55; Bibliotheca Daemonologica (Robbins).

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