But in the experience which is gained from every universal that reposes in the soul—the experience of the One alongside the many, which although it is in everything nevertheless remains One—lies the beginning of art and of knowledge.1

INTRODUCTION

In 1251/52, in his commentary on the Physics, Albert the Great proposed as a larger project an explanation of the contents and methods of the entire Corpus Aristotelicum.2 In the framework of this project, which includes inter alia the sphere of material philosophy (whose object is based in things),3 he commented on natural philosophy, whose objects are inseparable from matter and movement both with regard to their Being and with regard to their definition.4 He began with the study of natural philosophy because, according to Aristotle, this deals with inanimate and animate nature, as well as with psychology.5 Albert’s commentary on the pseudo-Aristotelian work De plantis belongs to this category,6 since he regards botany as belonging to natural philosophy. This is why he integrated it into his scientific system, which found its orientation in Aristotle, and made it an essential component of the comprehensive oeuvre in which he sought to make accessible the totality of reality that can be experienced.

3 Ibid., 1, lns. 44–6.
4 Ibid., 1, ln. 49–p. 2, ln. 50.
and grasped by thought. He undertook this enormous project when his confreres requested from him a book about natural philosophy, so that they too could understand Aristotle’s writings on this subject.\textsuperscript{7}

The outcome of Albert’s endeavors was an extraordinary encyclopedic collection that contains almost all the knowledge of that period. The uniqueness and originality of the writings of Albert the Great are based on the adoption, the processing, and the mediation of the body of Greek and Arabic–Jewish knowledge that was available to him in Latin at that time.\textsuperscript{8}

**Methodology**

In his commentary on the *Physics*, Albert also describes the methodology he employs when he comments on Aristotle’s writings.\textsuperscript{9} This methodology corresponds to the form of a “paraphrase”. This can mean that he first follows the meaning and the structure of the text on which he is commenting, without directly referring to it, and then in a second step introduces words or phrases when required by the explanation or by his reasoning, or else he expands his presentation by means of “digressions”\textsuperscript{10} that expound upon questions that have arisen. This procedure enables him to deal with the subject more freely, adding new chapters, inserting sentences, or giving a more detailed exposition of what he has already discussed. He also expands the original texts in order to enrich and complete them, by adding material from other authors.\textsuperscript{11}

**The Manuscripts and Printed Editions of the *De vegetabilibus***

Eight manuscripts were discovered and described by Ernst H.F. Meyer and Karl Jessen in the context of their edition,\textsuperscript{12} but one of these perished in


\textsuperscript{9} Alb., *Phys. 1.1.1*, 1, Ins. 23–36.

\textsuperscript{10} Alb., *Liber de causis et processu universitatis a prima causa/Buch über die Ursachen und den Hervorgang von allem aus der ersten Ursache*, xix–xxii.


\textsuperscript{12} Alb., *De veget.,* ed. Ernestus Meyer and Carolus Jessen (Berlin: 1867), 663–667 (*Appendices editorum*).