Extraction of 16th Century Calender Fragments

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The extraction of the calendar fragments requires a careful dissection of the old bookbinder’s glue and a meticulous detachment of each calendar leaf. For documentation, each leaf is being photographed by the conservator of Odense City Museums. The 1580 book has an outer cover of parchment made from a reuse and possibly medieval manuscript leaf. The inside of this parchment, containing writing, is being photographed as well. The calendar fragments are made from paper with woodcut illustrations. A well-preserved title leaf makes it possible to easily identify the fragments, whereas other fragments may require extensive use of Big Data and other forms of analysis in order to be identified. Usually, the university library prefers not to remove the fragments from their “fragment carriers.” In order to read fragments that are only partially visible or invisible, x-ray technology may be deployed by the Cultural Heritage & Archaeometric Research Team, SDU. Upon finding medieval manuscript fragments in the university library’s special collections, scholars at the Centre for Medieval Literature are consulted. In most cases, digital pictures of the finds will circulate in the international community of medieval scholars. Thousands of 16th and 17th century books are stored in the University Library of Southern Denmark. One out of five of these books is expected to contain medieval manuscript fragments or fragments of rare prints, e.g. incunabula.

The “fragment carrier”: A relatively small book, bound in parchment, containing a copy of Institutiones Iuris Civilis by Theophylax [et alii], Lyon 1580. Format: 24mo

Dominical letters (Sontags Buchstabe) were assigned every year in the calendar and were used to describe the distribution of Sundays (adj. domenica). Together with the knowledge of the lunar phases, the dominal letters were used to calculate the date of Easter.

The extraction of the calendar fragments made it possible to initiate further analysis, and at the same time make rare material available for historians. In the process, it soon became clear that the German astronomers Regiomontanus and Johannes von Gmunden were not the authors of the calendar in question. As documented by the remains of the calendar’s title leaf, the author is Lucas Botroth (the younger) of Phalzburg. He was a follower of the works of Renaissance philosopher, physician and astronomer, Paracelsus (Theophrastus Bombast von Hohenheim, 1493-1541). Lucas Batthodius was famous for his astrological and prognostic works in the second half of the 16th Century, using the following epithets: „Medicus & Astronomiae Studiosus zu Pfalzburg“ & „Fürstlicher Plattengräfflicher Medicus zu Simmers“. This was in accordance with the ancient belief of the microcosm connected with the macrocosm.

CONCLUSIONS

The extraction of rare Schreibtalike fragments clearly demonstrates the great potential of finding other well preserved astronomical/astrological works inside the binding of 16th and 17th century books. In this case, the 1580 book seems to have been repaired, possibly shortly after 1590, by using the calendar pages to stiffen the perris. A bookbinder’s repair would explain why the fragments are younger than their carrier. From a historical perspective, the university library fragments may shed new light upon the details of Lucas Batthodius’ calendar production (as far as we know, starting 1544 for the year 1585) at the publisher Nicolaus Wald am Kornmark in Strasbourg. The fragments may constitute the oldest known version in existence of the Schreibtalike in the 16mo format. Lucas Batthodius Argentinensis provided the users of his work with a practical tool for writing daily observations and/or noting events of cyclical importance. One can assume, that such calendars were published for the literate elite in society. In particular, the prognostic and medical elements of the calendar were meant to guide the reader and help them take necessary precautions throughout the year of 1591.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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