

[Psalter] *Psalterium davidis cum canticis sacris et selectis aliquot orationibus*

In Latin, uncut Sheets of an illustrated imprint

Antwerp, Plantin-Moretus Press, 1683

25 large sheets plus one half sheet (with the index), now folded in half and paginated 1-26 in modern pencil, top outer corner, each sheet includes one quire of twelve folios (24 pages), except the final half sheet, when folded and cut to form a codex of 616 pages: 606 + [9] + [1 blank] pages, 12^o (collation i-xxv¹² xxvi⁸), signed A-Z, Aa, Bb (all in 12), Cc (in 8), each page 125 x 65 mm., printed in Roman type in red and black, ILLUSTRATED TITLE PAGE in red and black with woodcut of David with a harp, SIX WOODCUT INITIALS, handsome printer's mark in red (a hand holding compass, "labore et constantia," in very good condition, first and last sheets in darkened, many corners folded, and some fraying chipping at edges. Unbound. Dimensions of full sheets 500 x 394 mm.

This is a complete set of the original unfolded sheets for an elegant Psalter printed by the Plantin-Moretus press in 1683. Hand-press books were printed in large sheets, which were then folded and cut to form the volume's quires or gatherings. Unfolded (and uncut) sheets rarely survive, and most surviving examples are fragments of a single sheet. This example of a complete seventeenth-century book as unfolded sheets is an important artifact that provides almost unparalleled opportunities for teaching and collections devoted to the material history of the book.

PROVENANCE

1. Uncut and unfolded sheets from a Psalter printed by the Plantin-Moretus Press in Antwerp in 1683; the head of the press at that time was Balthasar III Moretus (1674-1696) (Voet, 1969, vol. 1, pp. 228-237). Hand-press books were printed in large sheets, which were then folded and cut to form the volume's quires or gatherings. Unfolded (and uncut) sheets survive occasionally, usually as single sheets or parts of a single sheet that were discarded for some reason and reused as binding material or flyleaves (see Kwakkel, Online Resources for an example). Here in contrast we have a very rare example of the complete set of the original unfolded sheets for this elegant Psalter.

The history of the Plantin-Moretus Press begins with its founder, Christopher Plantin (1520-1589), who created one of the most successful publishing and printing establishments of all times. The permanent home for the press dates from 1564, when Plantin established it at the sign of *De Gulden Passer* ("The Golden Compasses"), which became the model for his printer's mark – found in this edition -- showing a compass, with the motto *Labore et Constantia* ("By Labor and Constancy"). Antwerp was an established center of printing woodcuts, engravings and books, and with the success of the Plantin press, became one of the centers of the international booktrade.

Plantin died in July of 1589, leaving the business to his son-in-law and long-time business partner Jan Moretus (1543-1610). The descendants of Plantin and Moretus continued as printers and publishers under the Plantin name until 1867. Jan Moretus

II (d. 1618) and Balthasar Moretus I (d. 1641) became the great printers of the Counter Reformation in the Southern Netherlands. By the time of Balthasar Moretus II (1615-1674), the press's production was focused mainly on liturgical books. This trend that continued under Balthasar Moretus III (1646-Antwerp, 8 July 1696) when Breviaries, Missals, Books of Hours, and other liturgical books formed most of the press's production, thanks in particular to the lucrative Spanish market (Sabbe, 1929, mentioning this edition, p. 120).

TEXT

Title page: PSALTERIUM/ DAVIDIS,/ Cum CANTICIS sacris/ & selectis aliquot/ ORATIONIBVS:/ Serenissimorum Belgicae Principum/ mandato excusum/ ANTVERPIAE,/ EX OFFICINA PLANTINIANA/ BALTHASARIS MORETI./ M. DC. LXXXIII;

pp. 3-606, pp. 3-502, Psalms and Canticles; p. 503, Litany; p. 519, *Orationes et Meditationes de Passione Domini*; *Quindecim deuotae et piissimae Orationes S. Birgittae*. . . ; p. 540, *Triginta tres Petitiones per merita triginta trium annorum vite Chrstii*, p. 545, *Messis Myrrhae et aromatum ex L. [quinguaginta] mysteriis dominicae passionis*, *Collecta* . . . ; pp. 572-606, [Prayers], *Oratio de S. Cruce* . . . ;

[nine unnumbered pages], Index, (listing both the number of the psalm and the page number "primus numerus psalmum, secundus paginam"); *Approbatio*, dated MDCX, and printer's mark.

Psalterium Davidis, cum canticis sacris & selectis aliquot orationibus (Psalter of David with Sacred Canticles and Select Prayers); printed in Antwerp, 1683; *Bibliotheca Catholica Neerlandica* (BCNI), no. 14270; Short Title Catalogue Flanders (STCV), no. 6899212, listing seven copies: Antwerp, Erfgoedbibliotheek Hendrik Conscience; Leuven, Centrale Bibliotheek, and Maurits Sabbe Library; Antwerp, Plantin Moretus Museum (two copies), Limbourg, Provinciale Bibliotheek, and Ghent, Universiteitsbibliotheek; there is also copy at the British Library.

ILLUSTRATIONS

The volume includes an illustrated title page in red and black with a woodcut of David with a harp, and six woodcut initials (some now difficult to interpret): p. 471, Ascension or Pentecost?; p. 503, decorative foliage; p. 519, Holy family?; p. 545, Virgin and Child; p. 572, Trinity with God the Father holding the dead body of Christ, with the Dove above; and a the handsome printer's mark of the Plantin Press in red: a hand holding compass, lettered "labore et constantia" (By labor and constancy).

The Short Title Catalogue, Flanders (STVC) attributes the illustrations to Christophe Jegher (1618-1666), a prolific illustrator (STVC lists 257 volumes illustrated by him), who was involved in the illustration of numerous volumes for the Plantin-Moretus press. Earlier woodblocks were often re-used for subsequent editions.

These sheets are an example of a book in a form that was never meant to circulate, and are thus a remarkable, and rare, survival. To understand how they originated, one must first understand that early printed books, like manuscripts, were not made from single pages, but rather from quires or gatherings, made up of leaves folded in half to form two folios or four pages stacked one inside the other, which were later sewn together in sequence to form a codex, and then bound.

Generally speaking, each quire began with one large sheet of paper (or parchment), that was folded multiple times. Folding a sheet in half produced what is known as a folio (with two leaves

and four pages); folding it in half again and cutting along the original fold produced a quarto with four leaves/eight pages; folding it in half again, produced an octavo with eight leaves/sixteen pages, and so forth. Interestingly, the evidence now strongly suggests that this procedure was not invented for printed books; not only were quires constructed in this fashion when making manuscripts, but many manuscripts (at least later in the Middle Ages, and in the case of small format books) may even have been copied on unfolded sheets (see Bischoff, 1990, p. 21, and notes 8-10, citing numerous articles).

This is an example of a sheet folded in duodecimo or 12° format, which is somewhat more complicated, and could be achieved in several different ways, all involving folding the sheet first into thirds. The rather tall and narrow aspect of the pages of this volume is a result of the way in which the sheets were folded (see Voet, 1969-72, vol. 2, pp. 160-162, and appendix 8, figs. 6-8, for duodecimo folding). Printers using a hand-press from the late fifteenth century were able to print a full sheet at one time, with each sheet including all the pages necessary to form one quire or gathering.

The survival of these sheets allows us to see this Psalter as its birth, so to speak, just as it emerged from the printing press in 1683. Normally each sheet would have been folded to form the quires of a volume, and the quires would have then been sewn together and either sent to a binder for a permanent cover, or loosely stitched together so a customer could later have the volume bound as he or she preferred. Books may have been proofed at the press while still in whole sheets such as these, although there are no corrections on this example. Books were also sometimes exported as piles of unfolded sheets – perhaps explaining the origin of this example.

LITERATURE

Bibliotheca Catholica Neerlandica, impressa 1500-1727, The Hague, M. Nijhoff, 1954 (=BCNI; also available online, see below).

Bischoff, Bernhard. *Latin Palaeography: Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, translated by Dáibhí ó Cróinín and David Ganz, Cambridge and New York, 1990.

Bowen, Karen Lee and Dirk Imhof. *Christopher Plantin and Engraved Book Illustrations in Sixteenth-Century*, Cambridge and New York, 2008.

Gaskell, Philip. *A New Introduction to Bibliography*, New York (discussing imposition, pp. 78-117).

Imhof, D., ed. *The Illustration of Books Published by the Moretuses*, with contributions by K. L. Bowen, et al., Antwerp, Plantin-Moretus Museum, 1996.

Sabbe, Maurice. "Démêlés des Moretus avec les R. P. Jérmîtes de l'Escuria au xvii siècle," *De Gulden passer* 7 (1929), pp. 119-145, at p. 120.

Voet, Léon. *The Golden Compasses. A History and Evaluation of the Printing and Publishing Activities of the Officina Plantiniana at Antwerp*, Amsterdam, Van Gendt and New York, Abner Schram, 1969-1972; available online at http://www.dbnl.org/tekst/voet004gold01_01

ONLINE RESOURCES

Christopher Plantin

http://spcoll.library.uvic.ca/Digit/physiologum/commentary/bio_plantin.htm

BCNI, electronic version, UB Nijmegen
<http://helikon.ubn.ru.nl/anon/b/biblcanei/>

STCV (Short-title Catalogue Flanders), 6899212
<http://anet.ua.ac.be/record/stcvopac/c:stcv:6899212/E>

Douglas Cockerell, *Bookbinding, and the Care of Books* (with a chapter describing how a book is printed in sheets, how it is sent to the binder, and how to fold the quires, fig. 4 is a diagram of a 12mo sheet)
<http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/c/cockerell/douglas/bookbinding/chapter2.html#section3>

E. Kenneth Giese, "Format: an example of common duodecimo with an uncommon frontispiece," at Mapping Special Collections, Goucher College
<http://mappinghiddencollections.wordpress.com/2010/01/28/format-an-example-of-common-duodecimo-with-an-uncommon-frontispiece-2/>

Erik Kwakkel (unfolded sheet at Folger Library)
<http://erikkwakkel.tumblr.com/post/61021070022/stop-the-press-this-object-is-both-very-odd-and>

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