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Modern Album of 22 small prints, including 17 metal cuts previously pasted into a manuscript, some lightly hand-colored

Germany, c.1480-1525(?), previously used to illustrate a manuscript, c.1500-1550; with three prints and two woodcuts from other sources, including two later engravings: Martin Pleginck, Germany, c. 1594; modelled on Hieronymus Wierix, Flanders, c. 1590-1630

Album of 22 folios, modern laid paper with deckle edges (no watermarks), modern foliation in pencil top outer corner recto in arabic numerals, 22 small prints are glued to the album pages (rectos only) with one to a page (except the final woodcut of two identical joined images on one page), including 17 small metal cuts, most roundels, which were formerly glued into one manuscript, now retaining the backing from the manuscript page with text visible on the verso, occasionally with fragments of letters visible around the edges of the print on the recto, text in red and black in a clear hybrida script, most of these were used within reddish-orange initials and are framed in simple reddish-orange borders, in excellent condition. Modern cloth binding, decorated in red, over pasteboard, in excellent condition. Dimensions 162 x 87 mm.

Modern album of prints from several sources, most notably 17 very small metal cuts of more than ordinary interest to print historians and to historians of the book interested in hybrid manuscripts; rare and unstudied (apparently unpublished), they were previously used to illustrate a handwritten manuscript in Latin. The identification of this manuscript, which may survive minus our prints, along with in-depth study of the prints and their makers, constitutes a particularly inviting research project.

PROVENANCE

1. Modern album of early prints with no known provenance, quite pristine, possibly assembled in Belgium. The core of this collection are seventeen metal cuts, most very tiny roundels created by German printmakers in the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century, that were once pasted into the same manuscript as illustrations, probably copied c.1500-1550, most likely in the Low Countries or Germany.

This parent manuscript is unidentified, and it is impossible to say when the prints, now housed in our modern album, were cut out of the manuscript. Although it is possible that they were placed directly into the album after their excision, occasional modern, non-sequential numbers in pencil on the prints perhaps suggest otherwise (f. 12, '28'; f. 14, '4'; f. 17, '3'; f. 18, '5'; f. 20, '7').

The snippets of Latin text from the parent manuscript that remain on the versos of most of these metal cuts have not yet been identified, although they are almost certainly prayers; there are a few rubrics: "precatio" (that is, a prayer) and "a[ntiphon]," and the metal cuts all illustrate scenes that would be appropriate for a prayerbook.

2. Private collection.

ILLUSTRATION

Three later engravings from separate sources:

f. 1, Engraving of eleven animals and monsters, including a basilisk, a leopard, dragon, two snakes, a tortoise, and a lizard, and a salamander, scattered throughout a minimally depicted meadow (a few simple sprigs of grass); oval, 45 x 61 mm., cut in an uneven rectangle larger than the oval plate mark, 45 x 63-60 mm.; glued to the album, slightly damaged upper right corner outside the plate mark;

Martin Pleginck (active 1594), from a series of eight engravings entitled "Das New Thierbüchlein," published by Stephan Hermann (active 1568-1596) in 1594; reverse copy; unsigned. Hollstein, *German engravings, etchings and woodcuts c.1400-1700* (45.II) (Online Resources).

f. 2, Crucifixion, with Mary (a sword through her breast), John, and Mary Magdalene, 62 x 40 mm.; blank on the verso;

f. 3, (later), Virgin on the Cross; 90 x 70 mm. (cross, 62 x 40 mm.; on paper, rectangle, 90 x 70 mm.), glued to the album, browned with small dark stain at the top.

Anonymous, modelled on Hieronymus Wierix (1553-1619), "The Holy Virgin on the cross," c. 1590-1630. Not in Hollstein.

Seventeen prints (the majority metal cuts) excised from a manuscript; most are very small roundels, which were cut out from their original paper sheets as squares, and then glued into a manuscript to serve as historiated initials. Most were printed with a narrow double round border, which was filled in or turned into a reddish-orange initial 'O' by the scribe or rubricator, who also added a narrow frame of the same color along the outer edge surrounding the roundel in a rough square. When they were removed from the manuscript, the excisions were made through the manuscript page, following the outer edge of the paper for the prints, resulting in two-layer cut-outs; script remains on most versos, and in a few cases tiny traces of script are also visible at the edges surrounding the borders around the prints.

f. 4, The Holy Lamb; 25 mm. roundel (cut out as a square, 26 x 26 mm.), within a reddish-orange 'O' and in a narrow reddish-orange frame, pasted on a manuscript page (script visible at the edges and on the verso) trimmed to a slightly larger rectangle; [text], f. 4v, "et voluptate. An/ -cille seruitia in/ -grediendo et animam/ [m]isericorditer ve/ te donate doma/";

f. 5, Christ with Mary and Anne; 25 mm. roundel (cut out as a square 25 x 26 mm.), within a reddish-orange 'O' and in a narrow reddish-orange frame; [text], f. 5v, "/leis separauerit/ suos inveniri/ -suui eis reponi / -ta virgo sacra. A[ntiphona?]. /-reribus ita dig/";

f. 6, Virgin and Child; 25 mm. roundel (cut out as a square 25 x 24 mm.), within a reddish-orange 'O' and in a narrow reddish-orange frame; [text], f. 6v, "-ter misericord-/ versitate ac/ <mi?> meum in/ atque perfectis";

f. 7, Mocking of Christ; 26 mm. roundel (cut out as a square 27 x 27 mm.), with the usual initial and frame; [text], f. 7v, "<octe?> est tribulatus/ iudei tractant/ ...";

f. 8, Man of Sorrows, half-length within the tomb; lacks a printed border (not a roundel), cut out as a c. 15 roundel and pasted into a reddish-orange 'O' (lacks the outer frame); [text], f. 8v, "... contemplatione/ sapientie ...";

f. 9, the Flagellation; 26 mm. roundel (cut out as a square 26 x 26 mm.), within a reddish-orange 'O' with the usual frame; [text], f. 9v, "amori tuo / ...";

f. 10, the Crucifixion; 26 mm. roundel (cut out as a square 27 x 26 mm.), with the usual initial and frame; [text], f. 10v, "/-serorum rogo te as/ ...peccati/";

f. 11, Christ as Man of Sorrows with the Arma Christi; 25 mm. roundel (cut out as a square 26 x 26 mm.), with the usual initial and frame; [text], f. 11v, "amarissimavi /<?>s acerbissimas /...";

f. 12, Salvator Mundi; no printed border, cut out as a 22 mm. circle, and then set within an orange-red 'O'; lacks the outer frame and includes a modern pencil annotation '28'; [text], f. 12v, "... /Precatio,.../ ... religiosus/";

f. 13, Christ as Man of Sorrows with the Arma Christi [different print than f. 11]; 25 mm. roundel (cut out as a square 25 x 25 mm.), within a reddish-orange 'O' and the usual frame; [text], f. 13v, "/illa domini fi/ ivii verbum ca/ ato gaudio quam/ ...";

f. 14, Christ blessing; cut out as a roundel along a single printed border, 21 mm., and set within a large reddish-orange 'P' (lacks usual frame; modern pencil annotation '4'); blank on verso;

f. 15, Lamb of God (different print than f. 4); cut out as a 20 mm. roundel and set within a reddish-orange 'O' (lacks usual frame); [text], f. 15v, "/catio .../.. tuo timore/ ... preceptum/";

f. 16, St. Catherine; 25 mm. roundel (cut out as a square 25 x 25 mm.), within the usual 'O' and frame; [text], f. 16v, ".../ domini/ scripta tecum/ ...";

f. 17, Unidentified saint, half-length, carrying a cross, cut out as a 20 mm. roundel; within a reddish-orange 'O' (lacks usual frame, with modern pencil '3'); [text] f. 17v, "/bruto vilior ac/ ...";

f. 18, St. Paul holding a book and sword; cut out as a 27 mm. roundel, within a reddish-orange 'O' and with a smaller reddish-orange frame (in this case, the initial extends over the frame) (modern pencil '8'); [text], f. 18v, "... petri fide et/ ... amen, Precatio/";

f. 19, a Bishop; rectangular print, 36 x 24 mm., lightly colored and framed in reddish-orange; [text] f. 19v, "Gaude phililp/ -te languores ... / ...";

f. 20, St. Peter, with keys, and St. Paul, with book and sword; rectangular print, 27 x 24 mm., lightly colored and framed in reddish-orange, placed below a reddish-orange 'A' (modern pencil '7'); [text], f. 20v, ".../ vere fidei/ -cti spiritus gratia perlu-/ ... audire merui/ ...que Christus/";

And one additional print likely from another source:

f. 21, Two tiny identical woodcut images of Virgin and Child on the serpent, each 21-20 x 15-14 mm., no initial or frame (mostly glued down and apparently blank on verso); [f. 22rv, blank].

To our knowledge, the core series of prints preserved in this album (ff. 4-21) are not included in Lehrs (1908-1934) or Schreiber (1926) and are unpublished. We have not identified the artists responsible for them (Armin Kunz and Joyce Zelin looked at several examples from the album and neither had seen them in other sources; we thank them both for sharing their expertise). Moreover, although our core group of seventeen prints was certainly once used to illustrate the same manuscript, they are not all by the same artist (perhaps as many as six different sources were used here: ff. 4, 5, 7, 9, and 11; ff. 6, 10(?) 13(?), 16, and 17; ff. 8 and 12; ff. 14, 15, 16, and 17; f. 18; ff. 19, 20). Further research is needed to situate them more firmly in the corpus of work from late fifteenth-century and sixteenth-century printmakers in Germany.

Most of the tiny roundels preserved here were likely originally printed on a sheet that included a group of related roundels. Prints disseminated in this way were intended to be cut apart and used as illustrations within manuscripts and books (perhaps primarily serving in the place of historiated initials), as well as designs for other artisans, including goldsmiths. The most well-known roundels of this type are by Israhel van Meckenem (c. 1445-1503), a German goldsmith and printmaker, whose prints were very widely disseminated. Although the prints preserved in this album are not by Israhel van Meckenem, some of the prints in this album suggest their makers may have known his work. To choose one example, the Holy Lamb (here on f. 4), compares very generally with the roundel of that subject on the sheet by Israhel van Meckenem, "The Lamb of God, St. Veronica, the Symbols of the Evangelists, Autres six sujets dans des ronds" ([L.449], 152 (259), *The Illustrated Bartsch*. Vol. 9, *Early German Artists: Israhel van Meckenem*). Our roundel, however, is much simpler than van Meckenem's composition.

Manuscripts illustrated by woodcuts or engravings are a particularly interesting example of a hybrid book (a term used today for many of the mixed-media volumes produced in the age of printing, including volumes that combine hand-written and printed texts, and printed volumes with illuminations or other decoration done by hand; see Hindman and Farquhar, 1977; Hindman, 2009; Schmidt, 2003; Rudy, 2015 and 2019). Many of the known examples of this practice were made in Germany and in the Dutch-speaking Netherlands where the religious life was strongly influenced by the spiritual movement *Devotio moderna* (the Modern Devotion).

All too often, prints were removed from these hybrid manuscripts by modern collectors and museums (McKitterick, 2004). Thanks to Kathryn Rudy, we now have a detailed study of how one manuscript, a Middle Dutch Prayer Book from c. 1500, made by the beguards in Maastricht and copiously illustrated with printed images (including roundels by Israhel van Meckenem), was disassembled in the modern era, with many of the prints ending up in the print room of the British Museum, and the manuscript (now missing almost all of its images), preserved as British Library, Add. MS 2433. Reading her detailed study that shows the steps by which she was able to uncover how the manuscript was originally made and illustrated, and how it was subsequently it disassembled, provides modern scholars and students with the knowledge they need to tackle the history of our much smaller, but very interesting, modern album of disassembled prints, suggesting the road map by which, one day, someone will be able to reconstruct its history, step by step.

In a related study on the history of collecting manuscript illumination, Hindman et al. (2001, "Remaking the Book: The Formation of the Album," pp. 80-91) have studied the making of albums of manuscript cuttings, tracing the phenomenon back to the sixteenth century but focusing on the varied content and function of such albums for nineteenth-century collectors. It would be useful to compare the phenomena of collecting fragments of prints with fragments of manuscripts. The present album would certainly contribute to such a study.

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ONLINE RESOURCES

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<https://www.metmuseum.org/articles/circles-of-influence>

"Das New Thierbüchlein" (London, Victoria and Albert), plate 1

<https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O783051/das-new-thierb%C3%BChlein-engraving-martin-pleginck/>

Hieronymus Wierix, "Virgin on the crescent moon, crowned by two angels, in the shape of the Cross"

https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1928-1212-133

"The Illustrated Bartsch" (Artstor)

https://www.jstor.org/site/artstor/TheIllustratedBartsch-100141829/?so=item_title_str_asc&searchkey=1710795876737

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