

HANS SACHS, *Disputation zwischen einem Chorherren und Schuchmacher darinn das wort gottes unnd ein recht Christlich wesen verfochten würdt*

In German, imprint on paper with nearly full-page woodcut
Germany (Bamberg), Georg Erlinger, 1524

4o, iii (modern paper) + 12 + iii (modern paper) folios, complete (collation, a¹ b⁴ c⁴ [\$3, -Ai, first leaves signed with a letter only, last folio is an integral blank], catchwords at the end of quires a and b, thirty-four long lines in gothic type, names of speakers set out in larger type, four-line typeset decorative initial, title page with large, nearly full-page woodcut depicting full-length figures of the Shoemaker, Canon, and a female Cook, with traces of old wash color, in near perfect condition apart from very minor soiling and discoloration. Bound in modern blind-tooled brown calf over pasteboard in excellent condition. Dimensions 182 x 146 mm.

In near perfect condition, this is a rare copy of the first edition (first issue) of one of the most important Reformation dialogues, the *Dispute between the Canon and the Shoemaker* by Hans Sachs. The amusing (and instructive) content of this work is amplified by its eye-catching title-page, showing the shoemaker, the canon, and the canon's cook, appealing to Sachs' target audience, common people without knowledge of Latin who were eager to embrace the new message of the Reformation.

PROVENANCE

1. Printed by Georg Erlinger (c. 1485-1541) in Bamberg in 1524; Erlinger was born in Augsburg, where he worked as a *Formschneider* (wood-block cutter). He was active as a printer in Bamberg from 1522, and printed numerous works by Luther and his followers.
2. Private European Collection.

TEXT

f. Ai, title page: *Disputation zwischen einem Chorherren/ Vnd Schuchmacher darin[n] das wort/ gottes vnnd ein recht Christlich/ wesen verfochten würdt/ Hanns Sachs/ MD XXIII/;* [below the woodcut], "Ich sage euch/ wo dise schweygen/ so werde[n] die stein schreyen, luce. 19" [f. A-i verso, blank];

ff. A-ii – C-iii, incipit, "Bonus dies Kochin. KECHIN. Semper quies Seydt wilkum meiser hans. SCHUSTER. Got dannck euch. Wo ist der her? ... CHOR. Ja Schaw dass essen bereit sey," MDXXIII. Philip.3. Ir bauch ir got" [f. C-iv, recto, verso blank].

ILLUSTRATION

Title page with an attractive almost full page woodcut, 120 x 109 mm. depicting the three main characters of the dialogue, the shoemaker, the canon, and his cook; lightly colored.

Hans Sachs, *Disputation zwischen einem Chorherren vnd Schuchmacher darinn das wort gottes vnnd ein recht Christlich wesen verfochten würdt* ("Disputation between a Canon and a Shoemaker wherein the Word of God and the true Christian Character are Maintained"); VD 16 S 221 (VD 16 S 219 and 220 were printed in the same year by George Erlinger in Bamberg, but can be differentiated based

on slight differences in the printing of the title); USTC 638630. The imprint is very rare; listed in VD 16 with two copies, Jena, Thüringer Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek, and Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek; edited in Keller and Goetze, 1964, vol. 22, pp. 6-33. Sachs' works were extremely popular; this dialogue was printed eleven times in 1524 alone (see VD 16 S 213-223). Nonetheless, the survival rate of popular pamphlets, which were issued unbound, is understandably low. The present printing, distinguished by small typological differences in its printed title, is recorded by Keller and Goetze as being the first.

Hans Sachs (1494-1576) was born in Nuremberg in 1494. A cobbler by trade, he was multi-talented – a skilled *Meistersinger* (master singer) and a prolific writer of topical poetry, plays, comedies and music. He was an ardent supporter of the Reformation; one of his most famous poems *Die Wittenbergisch Nachtigall* (The Wittenberg Nightingale), speaks of Luther as a nightingale. His modern fame owes much to Wagner's depiction of him in *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*.

The printing press proved to be crucial in disseminating the message of the early reformers. Pamphlets in dialogue form where important theological ideas could be presented in a popular manner using questions and answered became one of the Reformation's essential tools. Hans Sachs wrote four prose dialogues in support of Reformation ideas in 1524 (his only prose dialogues apart from two later dialogues written in 1546 and 1554). This is his first and most popular dialogue.

In this dialogue a shoemaker (Sachs' own profession) and an Augustinian canon discuss fundamental aspects of Luther's teachings, including the question of whether the laity can seek their own answers in the Bible. Recommending that the canon read "a little book by Martin Luther on Christian Freedom," the humble shoemaker incenses the clergyman, who replies that he would like to see Luther, along with all his books, burned at the stake. Basing his arguments solely upon Scripture, the shoemaker is consistently able to trounce the canon on questions of theology. Question and answer exchanges are a striking element of the dialogue form, and here, in a reversal of customary roles, the canon (now the student) asks questions about the nature of good works, and the shoemaker (now the teacher) answers with the Lutheran teaching that good works are based in faith. In a humorous climax, the shoemaker gains the final upper hand when the embarrassed canon asks his cook to fetch him a copy of the Bible: she returns with a copy of the Decretals – the standard anthology of canon law and as such an emblem of the Church's mindless adherence to tradition. When the correct book finally appears, it is hardly readable for all the dust which has accumulated on it.

Hans Sachs' dialogue should be seen in the context of the many thousands of Reformation pamphlets, or *Flugschriften*, printed in the first half of the sixteenth century. The study of pamphlet literature been one of the most important developments in Reformation historiography since the late 1970s (Köhler, 1978-1987, and 1981; Ozment, 1982). As many as 10,000 pamphlet editions were produced between 1500 and 1530 alone. These short polemical treatises, usually issued unbound, were intended to be inexpensive and distributed in thousands of copies; dialogues (such as Hans Sachs' work described here), drama, theological arguments, historical narratives, polemical diatribes, and satirical lampoons are some examples of the literary forms issued in this populist format. More recent historical studies drawing on pamphlet literature as a principal source include Chrisman, 1996 and Edwards, 1994.

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