

INCUNABULA IN ADELAIDE

ONE RESULT OF THE EARLY IMPRINTS PROJECT has been the creation of a new awareness of holdings of early printed books in institutional libraries. In Adelaide, the State Library of South Australia and the Barr Smith Library of the University of Adelaide have been found to have, respectively, 5,000 and 3,400 pre-1801 volumes. Of these, three in the Barr Smith and eleven in the State Library are examples of incunabula.

While important in the context of the libraries which house them today, these are admittedly tiny collections — after all, it has been estimated that during the forty-five years following the first use of movable type between six and ten million items were printed in Western Europe, representing forty or fifty thousand different editions, approximately three quarters of them books.¹ It would have taken all the scribes in Europe at least ten centuries to have produced the same quantity. By 1500 there were 1,120 printing offices in 260 towns in 17 countries. Not that it was a secure, steady business for everyone who leapt on to the bandwaggon which carried the printing press at such frantic speed to so many places. Alfred Pollard once remarked that 'of upwards of 350 printers who began work before the close of 1480, not more than ten per cent continued in business for as much as twenty years . . . and we find that only about the same proportion of printers are known to have completed 100 books.'²

After its German beginnings the craft spread first, probably, to Holland about 1460, then in 1465 to Italy, to France rather surprisingly not until 1470, about the same time to Basel in Switzerland, to Spain in 1474 and in 1476 to England. It was only in Germany and England that the pioneer printers were natives of the country. Elsewhere it was the Germans who introduced the press.

Fragments of the 42-line Bible are held in the State Libraries of New South Wales and Victoria, but the earliest example of German printing in the State Library of South Australia is the *Dialogues* of Pope Gregory the Great, a folio printed by J. Weiner in Augsburg about 1475. It is clearly printed in gothic letter, with some hand-coloured woodcut initials, others hand-drawn, all in red. Augsburg was an important centre of printing from the time of its introduction there by Günther Zainer in 1468, and was especially notable for its illustrated books. Even though the *Dialogues* was not printed by Zainer, the woodcut initials are a reminder that he was the first printer after Schoeffer's *Psalter* had appeared in 1457 to use specially designed initials instead of leaving blanks to be filled in by the rubricator.

Zainer, who had learnt his printing at Strassburg, was a native of Reutlingen, and by coincidence the State Library has a book printed in 1485 in that town by Johann Otmar, who began his work there in 1479. This is *Postilla Symonis de Cremona*, a folio of 177 leaves printed in Gothic letter in two columns, a beautifully clear copy with manuscript annotations which indicate it has

been studied and its contents thought over. According to Colin Clair,³ Otmar 'was responsible for the first proper title-page in Germany when he printed Gruner, *Officii Missae Sacrique Canonis Expositio*' in 1483; the Simon of Cremona provides an example of his continuing what was to become a standard practice. Otmar stayed in Reutlingen until 1495, when he moved to Tübingen.

The first printer in Cologne, Ulrich Zell, is represented by a leaf from Nicolas de Lyra, *Postilla super totam Bibliam*, printed about 1485. Some 200 books produced between 1465 and 1500 are attributed to Zell, who became a burgher of the city; he was nevertheless one of the multitude of printers who either suffered grievous financial losses or had to give up the business altogether.

The fourth example of German incunabula in the State Library is the most interesting, for it provides a direct link with one of the printers of the 42-line Bible. This is the *Tractatus de Conceptione Marie Virginis* by Petrus Aureoli, Archbishop of Aix, printed at Mainz by Peter Schoeffer. A quarto in Gothic letter, its big characters are those of the 36-line Bible. It was probably printed in 1490 — further research is needed firmly to establish the date. (Hain *2142 gives 1498, but BMC I.38 questions this.)

While Schoeffer remained in Germany many of his fellow craftsmen moved south across the Alps and helped create the glut of books which drove so many printers to the wall. Curt Bühler makes the interesting comment that the successful were exceptions:

The potential output, a practically unlimited one made possible by the new mechanical means, almost immediately fostered the bitterest sort of competition. A flood of books suddenly hit a market whose shortages had previously been a chronic complaint. It has been estimated that Gunther Zainer alone printed some 36,000 books at a time when the entire population of Augsburg amounted to only half that number. In 1471 to 1473 a series of crises in the book industry shook the Italian peninsula. The market was glutted with unsold books. Quite similar to the present-day cycle of boom and bust, their disasters seem to have taught no one a lesson, then any more than now. By 1500, the market was once again saturated.⁴

The undisputed leader in book production, the greatest contributor to the glut, was Venice, responsible for almost one-eighth of all the books printed in the fifteenth century. It is perhaps not surprising then that half of the incunabula in the State Library and the Barr Smith Library were produced there.

The oldest printed book in an Adelaide library, *Leonardi Arretini Epistolarum Familiarum*, may be Venetian, as it was edited and printed in 1472 by 'Antonius Moretus brixienensis: & Hieronymus Alexandrinus' and an 'Antonio Moretto' was printing in Venice in 1480. A boldly printed quarto, it has rubricated initials and several manuscript annotations. A duplicate copy from the

Royal Library in Stuttgart, the Aretino was almost certainly the item included in an exhibition held in Adelaide at the then Public Library in 1929 to illustrate the art of printing from the fifteenth century to the present day: according to a handbill, the display comprised 'a sample of printing for every 10 years since 1472, selected from the Library and from some private collections.' It was bequeathed to the Barr Smith Library in 1971, along with 39 other volumes, by Mrs. Margaret Morris as a memorial to her brother, Rev. John Colville, who had once owned them.

The State Library's oldest printed book was presented to it in 1973 by the Friends of the State Library, five hundred years after it had been printed in Venice. This is a plump vellum-bound volume, part quarto and part folio (leaves 1-33, 39-40 quarto, the rest folio), *Sermones Aurei de Sanctis Fratris Leonardi de Utino*, printed in a small round Gothic letter by two German immigrants, Franciscus Renner of Heilbronn and Nicolaus of Frankfort. Renner worked from 1471 to 1473 on his own but appears to have been one of those who went into partnership to survive, first with the above-mentioned Nicolaus (so that the Utino was probably one of their first joint productions, if not the first) and from 1477 to the end of 1478 with Petrus de Bartua. He printed mainly religious books, including breviaries, missals, another Utino (*Sermones de Legibus*, in 1473), and two works of Aquinas. Of the twenty editions of the Bible printed in Venice (there were only 27 produced in Italy as a whole) Renner appears to have printed four (1475, 1476, 1480, 1483), two more than anyone else.

The Utino is notable for the decoration on its first page, a miniature of the holy father, gazed at from the corners by the symbol of each of the evangelists, and a delicate floral border incorporating the first initial.

An impressive example of Venetian printing came to the Barr Smith Library as one of the 16,000 volumes bequeathed by Sir Samuel J. Way in 1916. This is a copy of Justinian's *Digestum vetus*, which was completed by Johannis Herbort on 9 July 1482. The text, printed in attractive black letter, is surrounded by commentary in smaller type, and the whole work is lavishly rubricated in red and blue. The setting out on the page is admirably balanced.

Herbort, from Seligenstadt, gained a notable reputation after establishing himself at Padua in 1474. When the great Nicolas Jenson died in 1480, the surviving partners of his company apparently invited Herbort to join them, and he printed seven editions with Jenson's type. The partnership was shortlived, however, for after November 1481 he published in his own name and with his own type: the Barr Smith Justinian is from this period. Herbort died in October 1484.

Four months after Herbort completed his *Digest* of Justinian's laws, in the same city Baptista de Tortis completed an edition of the *Heroides* of Ovid, a folio of 73 leaves with an ornately decorated title page, printed in a round Gothic letter.

(In Spain his Gothic characters were so highly regarded that they were called 'letra de Tortis'). For the text itself de Tortis used an attractive roman face. The *Heroides* is in fact a fine example of the work of one of the two most prolific printers of Venice at this time. As a group the 70 editions produced by de Tortis are second only to the 95 of Beneto Locatelli.⁵

Editions of classical authors constitute over a third of Venetian book production before 1500. De Tortis contributed to the number with his first recorded book, Cicero's *Epistolae ad Familiares* (1481), which was the most frequently reprinted book by the most popular author during the incunabula period. An edition of Cicero's *Letters* was the first book to be printed in Venice, by Johann von Speyer in 1469, and 59 more editions appeared during the next thirty years throughout Europe; all but five of these were printed in Italy.⁶ De Tortis's second book was Cicero's *De Oratore* and, after a Roman Missal, he returned to Cicero with *De Officiis*, Juvenal, the Ovid of which the State Library's is a copy, Sallust, and Ovid's *Fasti*, all in 1482. After a brief flirtation with the vernacular in 1484, including an edition of Boccaccio's *Decameron* (one of only two Venetian editions during the period), de Tortis returned to the classics and his third edition of the *Heroides* in 1485, but two years later said farewell to them with two Virgils (a *Works* and a *Minor Poems*), and moved to canon and civil law. He published one more classical author, Suetonius, in 1490, but otherwise concentrated on the judicial and canonical, particularly the laws of Justinian.

In 1490 de Tortis published an edition of Justinian's *Digestum vetus* in 1,300 copies, reprinting it four years later in an edition of 1,500 copies. In 1491 and 1494 he appears to have issued two editions of 2,300 copies each of Gregory IX's *Decretales*. The great popularity of this kind of book can be judged from there having been at least sixteen editions of Gregory's *Decretales* published by nine different printers between 1475 and 1498.

Large volumes of this kind offer a distinct contrast to the next example of Venetian incunabula, the *De Mundi et Sphere* of Caius Julius Hyginus, issued by Erhard Ratdolt in 1485.

As noted above, Ratdolt came from Augsburg, and returned there at the request of the Bishop in 1486. He arrived in Venice in 1476 and formed a partnership with two of his countrymen, and their first book, a calendar with essays by Johann Müller of Königsberg, introduced the title page. This was also the first book to be dated with Arabic numerals and the first to be printed in Italy with woodcut initials instead of blanks left to be filled by the illuminator.

The partnership ended in 1478, but Ratdolt continued alone and, already interested in technical innovation, in 1482 produced one of the most important books ever printed, the *Elementa Geometriae* of Euclid. This was illustrated with 420 woodcuts and some 200 diagrams printed from brass or type-metal rules. In *Printing and the Mind of Man*, John Carter and Percy Muir remark:

The first edition of Euclid's 'Elements' is an outstandingly fine piece of printing, and the care and intelligence with which diagrams are combined with the text made it a model for subsequent mathematical books. It was the first substantial book to be printed with geometrical figures.⁷

The Barr Smith Ratdolt is a quarto of 55 hand-numbered leaves. The typeface is open and attractive, and there are 45 woodcuts of the constellations and 109 decorated capitals, lavishly illuminated, glowing with gold and colour. Evidence of handling includes staining, centuries-old grubbiness on some pages, marginal MS notes and even some splashes of the illuminator's paint.

The University of Adelaide is fortunate to have such an engaging example of the work of a printer so influential and significant. Like the Aretino and the Justinian, the Hyginus was a gift to the collection, having been presented by Dr. H.K. Fry in 1914.

Other Venetian books in the State Library take us towards the end of the fifteenth century. *Sermones de Sanctis Dormi Secure*, a folio in double columns in black letter, was printed by Florentius de Argentina in 1489, one of the many religious works which formed the second largest class of books produced in Venice during our period. The last of the group, a Juvenal printed by Giovanni Tacuino de Tridino, who was among the ten most prolific printers in Venice, is a folio of 206 numbered leaves.

Andreas Portilia, a native of Turin, introduced printing to Parma in 1472. His first book was Plutarch's *De Liberis Educandis*; he moved soon after to Bologna, but returned to Parma in 1478, where two years later he printed a noble edition of Pliny's *Naturalis Historia*, a copy of which is now in the State Library. This is a folio of 284 leaves, the different books which make up the volume numbered by hand, with initials illuminated in blue throughout. The typeface has a particularly clear quality, with something of the strength, though lacking the elegance, of Jenson's. For a moment this book allows us to come into unusually close contact with the printing shop. On folio Y3, on which Book xxi begins, two sets of fingerprints are clearly visible, even to the distinctive (and forensically useful) whorls and loops. The devil who gathered the type, perhaps, had been given the job of picking up the next ream of paper, and left his own personal mark on it for all to see for ever more.

Apart from being an example of early French printing, a small book from the press of Durand Gerlier in Paris has a certain degree of interest in that it came from the collection of E. Angas Johnson, a munificent benefactor to the State Library, and was the first example of incunabula to enter the collection. This is the *Epistole et Orationes* of Robert Gaguin; according to the colophon it was printed in 1497. A handy vellum-bound octavo of 88 leaves, it bears the stamp of the library of S. Vict[or] on its title page. Most bibliographies and catalogues give

1498 as the date of publication, and the Bibliothèque Nationale's copy is of that date. Panzer, however, lists editions for both years, and it seems that 1497 is the more rare.

The one example of English incunabula is small but important, as it is a leaf from Caxton's folio *Canterbury Tales*. The print on the leaf, which contains lines 1330-87 of the Knight's Tale, is fresh and clear, the serifs delicate and sharp, the rubric a strong, firm red. Perhaps of greatest interest is the plainly perceived watermark, a prancing unicorn with a long horn. This may indicate that the paper is that referred to by N.F. Blake as being 'attributed to Essones in Paris'.⁸ Blake accepts the century-old view that *The History of Jason* was the first of the Caxton folios, followed by *Dicts of the Philosophers*, *Moral Proverbs*, *Canterbury Tales* and *Boethius*. This order, however, has now been challenged by Paul Needham on the evidence of the paper used. The issue is complicated by the relationship of the paper stock used for the folios to that of the Caxton quartos printed by 1477 and because fifteen paper stocks are found in the *Tales*, seventeen in the *History of Jason*, and seven in the *Dicts of the Philosophers*, which is dated November 1477. Needham's suggestion of revised dating makes the *Canterbury Tales*, printed in 1476 or 1477 rather than 1478, the first of Caxton's Westminster folios and the *Jason* the second. The significance for this interesting debate of the unicorn watermark of the State Library's leaf has yet to be determined.⁹

In a part of Australia which was colonised by English settlers and owes so much to the later arrival of German immigrants, it was particularly appropriate that this example of the work of the first English printer should have been presented to the State Library in the same year, 1970, as a book printed by Peter Schoeffer, the above-mentioned *Tractatus* of Petrus Aureoli.

The examples of early printing discussed in this paper indicate the way in which printing spread soon after its introduction so changed the life of humankind. They show some of the diversity of subject matter and styles of printing, and allow us to experience at first hand the work of the pioneer craftsmen.

It would not be possible for us to do this were it not for the benefactors who through their generosity have bequeathed, donated or otherwise presented these books to the libraries in whose keeping they now safely reside. It is fitting, therefore, to end with the following words of one of the greatest of British bibliographers, A.W. Pollard, who was at the time Principal Keeper of Printed Books in the British Museum:

It is mainly by the zeal of private collectors that books which would otherwise have perished from neglect are discovered, preserved and made to yield up their secrets, with the result that almost every great library owes more on its historical side to their generosity than to the purchases from its own resources.¹⁰

Alan Brissenden,
Department of English,
The University of Adelaide.

NOTES

¹ See Curt Bühler, *The Fifteenth Century Book*, Philadelphia, 1960, p.144, and James Thorpe, *The Gutenberg Bible*, San Marino, California, 1975, p.4.

² Cited by Bühler, p.143.

³ Colin Clair, *A History of European Printing*, London, 1976, p.34.

⁴ Bühler, p.56.

⁵ C.V. Gerulaitis, *Printing and Publishing in Fifteenth Century Venice*, Chicago, 1976, p.72.

⁶ Gerulaitis, p.76.

⁷ John Carter and Percy Muir, *Printing and the Mind of Man*, London, 1967, p.14.

⁸ N.F. Blake, *Caxton, England's First Publisher*, London, 1976, p.66.

⁹ Paul Needham, 'Bibliographical Evidence from the paper stocks of English Incunabula', *Buch und Text in 15. Jahrhundert/Book and Text in the Fifteenth Century*, Proceedings of a Conference held in the Herzog August Bibliothek, Wolfenbüttel, March 1-3, 1978, ed. Lotte Hellinga and Helmar Hartel, Hamburg, 1981, pp.83-5, and Alan Brissenden, 'Early Printed Books in Two Adelaide Collections', in *Innovation No Stranger, essays in Australian Librarianship in honour of Ira Raymond*, ed. Margy Burn and Christobel Palmer, Adelaide, 1982.

¹⁰ Cited by Alan G. Thomas, *Great Books and Book Collectors*, London, 1975, p.271.

Copyright of Full Text rests with the original copyright owner and, except as permitted under the Copyright Act 1968, copying this copyright material is prohibited without the permission of the owner or its exclusive licensee or agent or by way of a license from Copyright Agency Limited. For information about such licences contact Copyright Agency Limited on (02) 93947600 (ph) or (02) 93947601 (fax)