

WALDEMAR GRACZYK*
WNHiS UKSW, Warszawa

THE 15TH CENTURY BOOK IN THE PRESENT COLLECTION OF THE LIBRARY OF SEMINARY IN PŁOCK

Until World War II, the seminar Library in Płock had about 400 incunabula. The collection was large and valuable. The entire collection was transported by the Germans to Königsberg. Until now, no incunabulum has returned to its rightful owner. The currently stored collection is not uniform in terms of provenance. The books in part went from Sandomierz to Płock in the years 1947-1948. It was there that the local Seminary kept the books from the male and female monasteries of the Kingdom of Poland dissolved in the 19th century. Part of the collection and doublets were handed over to the Seminary Library in Płock after 1945 due to the kindness of seminary authorities. It is a small collection but it is interesting in many aspects. It regards both the authors of the works, the field of knowledge they represent, provenance entries, marginal glosses or finally binding. In total, the Library has twelve bibliographic items in ten volumes:

1. Statius Publius Papinius, *Opera*, from the Venetian typography of Octavian Scotus, printed on 2 December 1483¹;
2. *Postilla super totam Bibliam, cum expositionibus Guillelmi Britonis et additionibus Pauli Burgensis replicisque Mattiae Doering*, of Nicholas of Lyra printed by Ulrich Zella in Cologne around 1485²;
3. *Sermones Thesauri novi de sanctis*, of Peter de Palude, printed in 1486 in Strasbourg in the Typographus Paludani printing house³.
4. *Liber primus fratris Thomae de Kempis canonici regularis ordinis sancti Aug. De imitatione xpi et de temptum omni vanitatu mundi*, printed in Strasbourg in 1487 in the Martin Flach printing house⁴.
5. adl 1. Textor Guilielmus – *Sermo de passione Christi*⁵;
6. a fragment of Aristotle's *Opera*, possibly *Logica vetus, cum commento: Copulata veteris Artis Aristotelis*, printed in Cologne by Henri Quentell on 13 August 1488⁶.

* Translated by Spektra Sp. z o.o.

¹ *Inkunabuly w Bibliotekach Polskich* (dalej IBP), ed. A. Kawecka-Gryczowa, devel. M. Bohonos, E. Szandorowska, vol. 1, Warszawa 1970, item. 5077 (def.), p. 863; BSemPl., Inc. sygn. 1.

² The plock collection contains only the second part of this work. Cf. BSemPl., Inc. sygn. 2.

³ IBP, vol. 1, item 4370, p. 735; BSemPl., Inc. sygn. 3.

⁴ IBP, vol. 1, poz. 3035, p. 502; BSemPl., Inc. sygn.

⁵ BSemPl., Inc. sygn. 4, adl 1

⁶ BSemPl., Inc. sygn. 5.

7. *The Bible* printed in 1489 in Strasbourg by Jan Pruss⁷;
8. *Sermones de laudibus Sanctorum*, printed on 23 February 1490 in Augsburg by Antoni Sorg⁸;
9. *De consolatione philosophie* – of Boethius, printed on 31 October 1493 in Cologne in Henri Quentell's typography⁹;
10. Seneca Lucius Annaeus Iun. – *Opera Philosophica et Epistolae*, printed on 31 October 1492 in Venice in the Bernardine de Choris printing house¹⁰;
11. adl. 1. Seneca – *Tragoediae, cum commentis Gelli Bernardini Marmitae et Danielis Caietani*¹¹;
12. *Compendium iuris canonici*, printed in Strasbourg on 9 February 1499 by a typographer Iordani – Ge. Hausner¹²;

The map of printing centres which may be determined on the basis of the Płock collection of incunabula, includes only two countries of contemporary Europe, where the art printing developed the fastest and at a very high level. Those were: Germany and Italy. German and Italian printing belonged to the most resilient crafts in the 15th century Europe. The Płock collection includes two Venetian works, three published in Cologne and four in Strasbourg and one in Augsburg. Summing up, it is worth noting that typographical provenances of Płock incunabula are the work of printing workshops located in four urban centres in the territory of the aforementioned countries.

A common feature of all the 15th century prints under discussion, included in the Płock collections, is the fact that all of them were printed in Latin, which is fully understandable at that time since only after the Reformation will there arise the need to publish in national languages, especially in the field of religious literature.

Although the resource is small, its content is interesting, including the great richness and diversity of the theological 'creativity' of the epoch. It is obvious that church libraries collected, first of all, books related to the Liturgy of the Holy Mass, indispensable for the performance of the Divine Service, i.e. Holy Scriptures, its numerous commentaries, writings of the Fathers of the Church and preaching works. It is especially true about the rich medieval literature where the boundaries of the division into individual disciplines are completely blurred. In the widely understood history of church libraries (cathedral, collegiate, canonic or monastic), the Bible as a source of revealed science was always the most important and undoubtedly the most popular book treated with deep and due respect. There won't be any exaggeration in the statement that the Bible has been considered the most important book in our culture for centuries. Local ecclesiastical communities have attached great importance to the fact that the clergymen of a given particular church were relatively well acquainted with biblical issues. No wonder, then, that upon the invention of printing, the Bible was the first book to print¹³. The aforementioned collection includes one copy of the *Bible*, published in

⁷ IBP, vol. 1, item 1027, p. 169; BSemPł, Inc. sygn. 6.

⁸ IBP, vol. 1, item 1411, p. 238; BSemPł, Inc. sygn. 7.

⁹ IBP, vol. 1, item 1108, p. 183; BSemPł, Inc. Sygn..8.

¹⁰ IBP, vol. 1, item 4970, p. 842; BSemPł, Inc. sygn. 9.

¹¹ BSemPł, Inc. sygn. 9, adl 1.

¹² BP, vol. 1, item 1666, p. 279; BSemPł, Inc. sygn. 10

¹³ W. Graczyk, *Kulturowo-religijna rola bibliotek kościelnych*, „Archiwa Biblioteki i Muzea Kościelne”, 83/2005, pp. 23-24.

1489, in Strasbourg by Jan Pruss¹⁴. One of the main tendencies typical for the Middle Ages was, inter alia, bringing the 'world of the Bible' closer to man and the surrounding world as well as making it easier for him to understand and assimilate its content, for the achievement of which science called exegesis was used. It is noteworthy that the collection discussed did not lack the most popular medieval glossator, Franciscan and Professor of Holy Scriptures at the University in Paris, Nicholas of Lyra. *Postilla* – is his commentary to the *Bible*, the text of Vulgate with the Hebrew text and Latin commentaries taken into account. The Płock collection includes only the second part of the work, namely *Postilla magistri nicolai de Lira super Parabolas Salomonis, prophetas maiores et minores et libros Machabeorum*¹⁵.

In addition to the Bible and the commentary, the Płock resource includes the work representing the preaching tendency. It is the *Sermones Thesauri novi de sanctis*, of Peter de Palude, printed in 1486, in Strasbourg¹⁶. It contains sermons on the feasts of the liturgical year. The indicated work was very popular in Poland, hence its presence in many ecclesiastical libraries. It is worth underlining that this type of books performed a practical function, i.e. they were used to facilitate Christian ministry, including the preaching of sermons. The copy stored in the Płock book collection, apart from the fact that it had many owners over the centuries, was also willingly used, as evidenced by the numerous marginal notes and underlining applied in the entire fragments of the text.

A section of theology called ascetic and mystical theology emerged from the dogmatic and moral theology. The theological-ascetic school of St. Bernard of Clairvaux is the home of Jan Gerson, a leading figure in the French mysticism of the Middle Ages, one of the eminent theologians and philosophers of the time, commonly known as the *doctor christianissimus*¹⁷. Additionally, Thomas a Kempis is included in the indicated trend of religious writing. The work thereof which played an enormous role in the development of Catholic spirituality to this day can be found in the Płock collection of incunabula. The authorship of the aforementioned work is eloquently evidenced by the following incipit notation: *Liber primus fratris Thomae de Kempis canonici regularis ordinis sancti Aug. De imitatione xpi et de temptum omni vanitatu mundi*¹⁸. It is important inasmuch as in the older historiography, the authorship of *De imitatione Christi* was attributed to Jan Gerson.

The two sections discussed above (preaching and asceticism) were linked by the work *Sermo de passione Christi*¹⁹. It includes the *Dialogues* of St. Anselm of Canterbury (*Dialogus de passione Christi*) and the work *De planctu Beatae Mariae Virginis*, attributed to St. Bernard of Clairvaux. The lack of certainty as to the author of the work results in referring to him as Pseudo-Bernardus Claravalensis in the literature on the subject. The copy was frequently used which is evidenced by numerous underlining of text fragments and a lot of marginal glosses.

There are three works from the field of philosophy which should be noted in the collection under analysis. It is inasmuch understandable as the books collected in the past by various ecclesiastical institutions were deemed to perform primarily the formative and priestly

¹⁴ BSemPl, Inc. sygn. 6.

¹⁵ BSemPl., Inc. sygn. 2.

¹⁶ BSemPl., Inc. sygn. 3.

¹⁷ S. Wielgus, *Gerson Jean*, in: *Encyklopedia Katolicka*, vol. 5, Lublin 1989, col. 1018-1020.

¹⁸ BSemPl, Inc. sygn. 4.

¹⁹ BSemPl, Inc. sygn. 4, adl 1.

function. Most often, the treatises of ancient and medieval philosophers were collected by academic libraries. The most outstanding philosopher of antiquity, willingly commented on by thinkers of the Middle Ages was Aristotle. There is a fragment (17 cards) of incunabulum in the seminar library which was used in the past by a bookbinder as a recycled material for the cladding of one of the volumes of *the Acts of the Plock from the years 1562-1570*. There is a name of Gilberti Porretani on card number 132, and the heading *Sex Principia* on the back. That is why one may suppose that it is probably a fragment of the Aristotle's Opera, perhaps *Logica vetus, cum commento: Copulata veteris Artis Aristotelis*, published in Cologne by Henri Quentell on 13 August 1488²⁰. Boethius whose life falls on the borderline period between ancient times and the Middle Ages (ca.480- ca.524), is the author of the work distributed in the Middle Ages called *De consolatione philosophiae*, written by him in prison where he was sent as a suspect of conspiracy activities against the Ostrogoth king, and where he was waiting for the sentence. In the indicated work, Boethius formulated a definition of philosophy and, on the basis of various classes of beings, presented a classification of sciences subordinate to philosophy. He made the order of things dependent on the providential action of the Perfect Being. The library in questions keeps one copy, printed on 31 October 1493 in Cologne in Henri Quentell's typography²¹. The work of Seneka *Opera Philosophica et Epistolae*²² belongs to the borderline between philosophy and epistolography. The works of the same author: *Tragoediae, cum commentis Gelli Bernardini Marmitae et Danielis Caietani*²³ are included in the collective edition of the so-called 'publishing block'.

One of the stored incunabula concerns the field of church law. It should be stressed the various ecclesiastical institutions had complete collections as well as individual parts of canonical and civil law. The knowledge of legal issues concerning mainly ecclesiastical law was indispensable for the priestly work. The library in Plock has the *Compendium iuris canonici*, published in Strasbourg on 9 February 1499. This work performs the function of a dictionary explaining various issues from the field of canon law.

Therefore, the small resource covers several areas of knowledge: Biblical studies, preaching, asceticism, philosophy and law.

The incunabula currently stored in the Library collections of the Higher Seminary in Plock are not a consistent set of books in terms of provenance. The books come from church institutions and individual persons, including priests. No records have been preserved on some of them due to which it would be possible to identify their previous owners. In total, ownership records have been preserved on five volumes. Sometimes they are so precise that it is possible to recreate the distance covered by the book over the centuries. An example of that could be *Sermones Thesauri novi de sanctis*, of Peter de Palude, which first belonged to the parish priest in Jadamów, Fr. Wojciech Okręglicki. The fact of possessing the book was noted by himself: *Sum Alberti Okręglicij parochi in Jadamow Anno Dni 1549*. Probably with a testamentary legacies he gave them to Melchior of Żywiec: *Possesor Melchior Żywiecz A.D. 1600*, while in 1643 he gave them to Valentin, the provost of St Anne's Hospital. The last documented owner was Fr. Christopher of Staszów: *Ex libris iohannis Christophori de*

²⁰ BSemPl, Inc. sygn. 5.

²¹ BSemPl, Inc. sygn. 8.

²² BSemPl, Inc. sygn. 9.

²³ BSemPl, Inc. sygn. 9, adl 1.

Staszow actu praesbiteris. It can be said with a high degree of probability that it was sent from Staszów to Sandomierz and from there after 1945 to Płock.

The second incunabulum, where one can indicate previous owners is *Sermones de laudibus Sanctorum*. The book remained the property of Dominicans, as evidenced by the records: (1) *iste [...] donatus est fr[at]ri Alexio [Zincid?...] a fr[at]re Florianio Posnanensi*; (2) *Fr[ater] vero Alexius donavit conventui Plocensi sub A.D. 1606*. Probably after the dissolution of the Dominican monastery in Płock in the early 19th century, the book was moved to the nearby cathedral and from there in the 20th century to the newly built library building on the premises of the seminary. Hence there may be an answer to the question why the work survived and was not among the items taken to Königsberg? For sure, it was not physically present in the collection at that time. Probably, a clergyman who used it unintentionally saved it from disposal.

The third book in which the owner is mentioned by name is *De consolatione philosophie of Boethius*. It formerly belonged to a closer unknown Andrew, which is evidenced by the entry *Andreas Meinreus*, made with little precision, placed under a woodcut on the lower margin of the title page. We can definitely say more about the previous owners of the next incunabulum, *Opera Philosophica et Epistolae*. The book was formerly the property of the Bernardines in Przasnysz (the monastery founded at the end of the 16th century), which is confirmed by the entry on the title page: *Loci Prasnensis 20 Aprilis 1604* and the later inventory record VII 9.2., placed above it. The aforementioned book was one of the first works creating the nucleus of the monastery library. Probably all the time – until the dissolution of the monastery in the middle of the 19th century, it was in the monastery, and undoubtedly after the dissolution of the monastery it was transferred to Płock.

And the last book in which the previous owners took note of their ownership of the book is *Compendium iuris canonici*. There are three previous owners noted in it. Those were probably clergymen, for whom the knowledge on ecclesiastical law was indispensable in the pastoral work: *Abraham Sokoliński 1619*; *Anno 1664 die 7 decembris hunc librum posedit ioannes Polański*, and the last one, probably an entry from the 18th century: *Ex libris Alberti Constantini wozniowski praepositi Scavinensis Pl[e]ban[us] Tynecensis*.

A few remarks should also be made on the bindings of the Płock incunabula. The bindings come partly from the printing period of the incunabulum and partly from a later period. In most cases, the binding of incunabula is made of a lime or beech board on which the brown leather is stretched. There are blind stamps with geometric-florature elements (e.g. *Opera of Statius Publius Papinius*) on the surface of many bindings. The leather surface is frequently divided into rectangular fields with a clearly visible blind lily imprint in a rhomboid field on the front face of the binding. Blind stamps of rosettes have been preserved (e.g. *De imitatione Christi*) on the back face of the binding, in an analogous rhomboid field. The front binding is divided into central fields consisting of meandres, with a central floral imprint and fillet divisions and a repetitive row of stamps: round, plant with a lily in an elongated rhombus. There traces of clasps on the front and back boards of the binding (*Sermones de laudibus Sanctorum*).

The decorative pattern visible in the binding of this small unit is constituted by knurled borders surrounding the book cover centre, usually presenting twined plants or arabesque motifs. The decorations of the book binding centre are the imprints of several types of

plaques or blind stamps, the fields of which are filled with symmetrically formed elements of the so-called plant wattle (e.g. *De consolatione philosophie*).

The binding of *Opera Philosophica et Epistolae* is very interesting. There are rich ornaments embossed on both front and back bindings. The upper field of the front binding displays the imprint OPERA SENECAE. The front cover has a triple border, entirely embossed, the outer one, definitely the widest, was divided into rhombuses with a dragon image. A stylised plant ornament is embossed in the corner fields. The second border consists of elements of twined plants; the inner border presents a weave of such a plant twine surrounding the central field, divided into meanders. Two identical patterns, displaying stylised leaves placed alternately one by one, are included in each created space. A meander ornament with a plant imprint inside decorates the back of the four-field block, separated by double ties.

The small collection includes later covers as well. It regards the work *Compendium iuris canonici*. It is constituted by a hardened cardboard, on which light brown leather was stretched. The field of the front and back cover is identically ornamented. The central part contains an oval medallion with deep embossed flourishing in its frame.

Two works from the aforementioned small collection received their binding during the conservation works carried out at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries. These are: a fragment of Aristotle's *Opera* and *the Bible*.

Summing up, it should be stressed that despite the fact that the 15th century Płock book collection is small and inconsistent in terms of provenance, it in a sense reflects the mentality, spiritual culture and intellectual interests of the Polish clergy, both diocesan and monastic. The short review of its content reveals that it was a typical book collection featured by the fact that it satisfied the needs of clergy in the field of education and also was deemed to shape the religious awareness of the faithful, that is, the so-called ministry. The practical function of the book collection referred to that part of theological literature, which went beyond the framework of speculative deliberations and, above all, took into account the practical needs of the faithful. The entire book collection concentrates around the four large content groups: the Holy Scriptures, theology, law and philosophy. The authors of the indicated works were the most outstanding representatives of the medieval science.

The 15th century book in the present collection of the library of seminary in Płock Summary

The kept collection of incunabula is not uniform in terms of their origins. Although this is a small collection, in many ways it is interesting concerning both authors, areas of their knowledge, notes of origin or their binding. The library has in total twelve bibliographical positions in ten volumes. They are the work of workshops located in four urban centres: Venice, Cologne, Strasbourg and Augsburg. All of the collection of books are concentrated around four major groups: Scripture, Theology, law and philosophy. The authors of those works were the most prominent representatives of medieval science. Part of the incunabula's cover are from the period of the book's print (turn of fifteenth and sixteenth century), part of them are from the later period.

Keywords: Płock, library, incunabulas, books

About the author: Fr. prof. zw. dr hab. Waldemar Graczyk, Director of the Faculty of History and Social Sciences at the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw, and Head of the Department of Medieval History at the same Institute. He conducts research on the history of Masovia, Polish monasticism and the book history.