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A Book from the Library of Christoph Scheurl (1481-1542)

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A Book from the Library of Christoph Scheurl (1481–1542)

BY GAIL P. HUETING

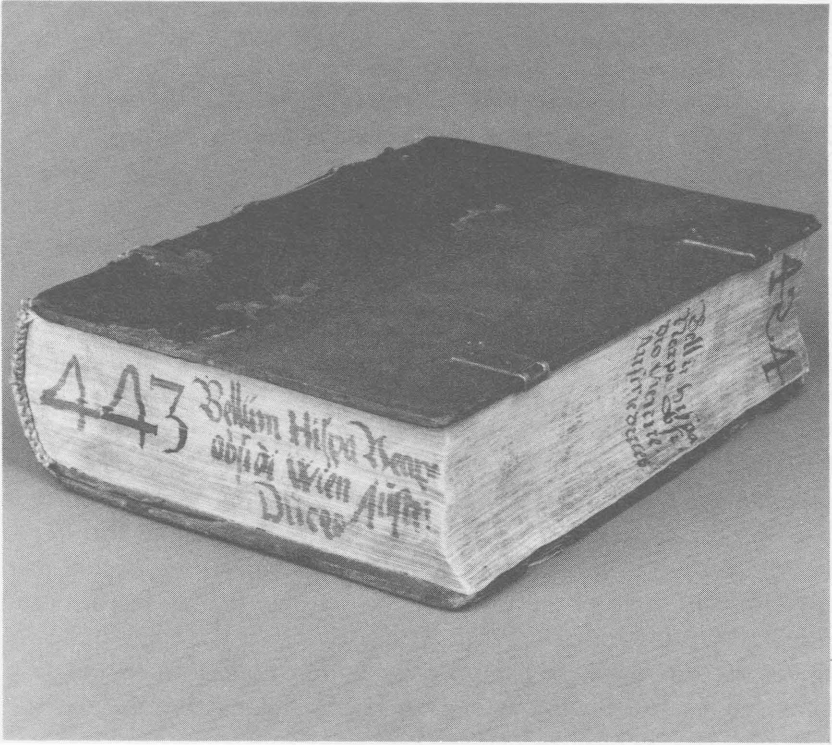
Among the historical works in the Leopold von Ranke Library at Syracuse University is a thick volume containing nine titles printed in 1530. It is bound in half-tooled leather on thick boards of beech wood that have been left uncovered. Two metal clasps secure the fore edge. Because the cords that held the spine and front cover together are frayed, the book is now kept in a protective case that has been made to measure. There is no title stamped on the spine, but the bottom edge and fore edge bear the handwritten overall title derived from three of the works in the volume: *Bellum hispa. neap. obsidio Viennae Austriae duces*. The lettering on the edges indicates that the book was kept flat on a shelf. The collection to which it belonged was rearranged as it grew larger; the number 424 on the fore edge has become 443 on the bottom edge.

Neither the style of binding nor the fact that the volume contains multiple works is remarkable. Bindings with bare wood boards are not rare, and the Ranke library has many books that contain three or more titles. Their original owners had them bound together because the contents were related or because they were acquired in the usual unbound state (common in books until the nineteenth century) at about the same time. What sets this book apart is that its first owner can be identified. He not only pasted a large bookplate inside the front cover but also wrote his name on the first title page and made annotations throughout the book. He was Christoph Scheurl of Nuremberg.*

Scheurl was a jurist and a writer on historical and legal topics.¹

*I would like to thank Paul Schrodt for his extensive help in describing the contents of the works contained within this volume from Scheurl's library.

1. Wilhelm Graf, *Doktor Christoph Scheurl von Nürnberg*, Beiträge zur Kulturgeschichte des Mittelalters und der Renaissance, Bd. 43 (Leipzig, Berlin: Teubner, 1930), is the longest biography of Scheurl. Maria Grossmann, "Bibliographie der



Scheurl's book.

He lived during Nuremberg's most influential period as a Free Imperial City. In accordance with his parents' wishes, he prepared himself for a scholarly career. After beginning his studies in Heidelberg, he spent the years 1498 to 1507 in Bologna, then a center for the study of law that attracted many German students. During these years he traveled extensively in Italy and began to buy books. He also had printed some of the speeches he had given on academic occasions at the University of Bologna. From 1507 to 1512 Scheurl was a professor of law at the University of Wittenberg (founded in 1502) and performed various legal and diplomatic services for Elector Frederick the Wise of Saxony. In 1512 the Nuremberg City Council named

Werke Christoph Scheurls", *Archiv für Geschichte des Buchwesens* 10 (1969), col. 371-96 is a complete list of his writings, whether printed in his lifetime or rediscovered centuries later.

him legal advisor (*Ratskonsulent*), the post he held for thirty years. This position entailed much diplomatic activity and travel in the interests of the city, including trips to the imperial court in Spain in 1519–20 and 1523. A copper engraving published by the Nuremberg City Library shows Scheurl as a thin-faced, serious man in a rich-looking, fur-trimmed coat.²

Like his better-known contemporary Willibald Pirckheimer (1470–1530), Scheurl carried on a voluminous correspondence and collected a substantial library. His correspondents included many humanists and figures involved on both sides in the Protestant Reformation.³ At first Scheurl was supportive of Martin Luther and his reforms. For a time in 1519, he attempted to mediate between Luther and one of his most eloquent critics, Johann Eck. However, as the break with the Catholic Church became irreconcilable, Scheurl remained loyal to the Catholic side and steadfastly defended Eck.

In contrast to the more open and outgoing Pirckheimer, Scheurl was characterized by the historian Ernst Mummenhoff as “pliant, courtierlike, indecisive in his whole manner, reserved and cool, and not a little vain”.⁴ Dietmar Pfister, on the other hand, described him as follows:

One can count among the main character traits of this man: modesty, unpretentiousness, religious feeling free of superstition, gratefulness, a temperament inclined to reconciliation, a sense of charity, and wise moderation coupled with caution.⁵

Scheurl’s library grew over many years. He bought large numbers of books in Italy, both during his student days and on an extended trip

2. Stadtbibliothek Nürnberg, *Willibald Pirckheimer 1470–1970: Eine Dokumentation in der Stadtbibliothek Nürnberg* (Nürnberg: Stadtbibliothek, 1970), catalog no. 88.

3. Many of his letters were published from copies he made or had made in *Christoph Scheurls Briefbuch: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Reformation und ihrer Zeit*, ed. Franz von Soden and J. K. F. Knaake (reprint, Aalen: Zeller, 1962).

4. Ernst Mummenhoff, “Christoph Scheurl”, *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie*, 31: 150. Author’s translation.

5. Dietmar Pfister, “Pirckheimers Zeit- und Gesinnungsgenossen in Nürnberg”, *Willibald Pirckheimer 1470/1970: Dokumente, Studien, Perspektiven*, ed. Willibald-Pirckheimer-Kuratorium (Nürnberg: Glock und Lutz, 1970), 34. Author’s translation.

there in 1510.⁶ He continued to acquire books throughout his life, and he must have received many from his correspondents, perhaps in exchange for books he sent them. Wilhelm Graf, Scheurl's biographer, wrote:

He negotiates with Spalatin the purchase of Regiomontanus' library. In general Scheurl knew the new books of his time and developments in the book market quite well because he had a lot to do with booksellers, of whom Johannes Koberger was the most famous.⁷

According to Friedrich Warnecke, Scheurl had a number of bookplates designed with his family coat of arms. The woodcut design he used the most and had printed in various sizes was drawn by Albrecht Dürer or by an artist in Dürer's studio.⁸ Bookplates are known almost from the earliest days of printing, and German heraldic bookplates, those displaying the owner's coat of arms, reached a high point in the early sixteenth century, when some of the most notable artists (Dürer, Lukas Cranach, Jost Amann) designed them.⁹ The bookplates of this period are wood engravings. The coats of arms themselves are traditional and relatively simple, but the crests and border decorations provided many opportunities for flourishes. Scheurl's coat of arms, as depicted on his bookplate, has a crest with a helmet, many feathers (including peacock feathers at the top), a crown, horns, and a gryphon. The circular border consists of a wreath of leaves and berries, and there is a ribbon with tassels in each of the four corners.

The bookplate in Ranke's library is of this design, but at 19.5 by

6. Graf, 44–45 gives examples of Scheurl's passion for buying books.

7. Graf, 69. Author's translation. Georg Spalatin was the chaplain and private secretary of Elector Frederick of Saxony; Regiomontanus was a fifteenth-century German astronomer and mathematician.

8. Friedrich Warnecke, *Die Deutschen Bücherzeichen (Ex-libris) von ihrem Ursprunge bis zur Gegenwart* (Berlin: Stargardt, 1890), 181–82. Scheurl's descendants were still using a similar design about one hundred years later; it is shown in Karl Emich, *German Book-Plates: An Illustrated Handbook of German & Austrian Exlibris*, trans. G. Ravenscroft Dennis (London: George Bell & Sons, 1901), 183.

9. Some examples are shown in the most recent book on German bookplates, Anneliese Schmitt, *Deutsche Exlibris: Eine kleine Geschichte von den Ursprüngen bis zum Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Leipzig: Koehler & Amelang, 1986), ill. no. 6–14.



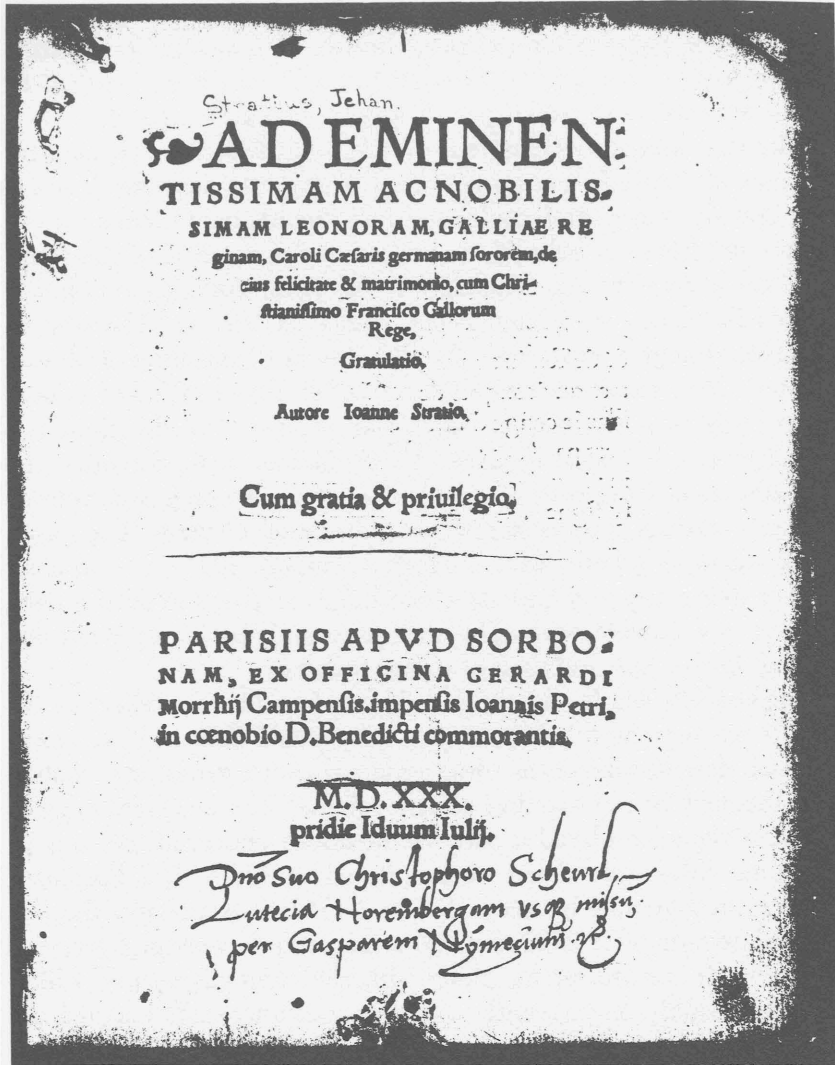
Bookplate of Christoph Scheurl of Nuremberg, as it appears in the volume discussed in this article.

14.7 centimeters it is larger than the ones Warnecke lists. Often a design cut for another use had an appropriate printed line about the owner added to it to make it usable as a bookplate. Thus at the bottom of this plate is the legend in Latin, “A book of Christoph Scheurl J.U.D., who was born 11 November 1481”. (Juris Utriusque

Doctor means “doctor of both laws”; that is, both civil and canon law.) Another line mentions Scheurl’s two sons and their birth dates. Although the design may have been printed earlier, the dates allow the bookplate to be pinned down rather precisely—between 1535, when the younger son was born, and 1542, when Scheurl himself died. Around the coat of arms are printed nine Biblical verses (from Genesis, the Psalms, Proverbs, Job, and Luke).

What were the books that Scheurl collected and had bound together during the 1530s? They are a strange combination—titles on history, theology, and even medicine—and yet each work reflects something of what is known of Scheurl’s interests and activities. All but one are in Latin. Those books that are dated were printed in 1530, and probably only one was printed several years earlier. The first is a congratulatory piece, fourteen pages long, addressed by the author, Joannes Stratius, to Eleanor on the occasion of her marriage to Francis I of France. Scheurl had a great respect for royalty (especially for Emperor Charles V, brother of Eleanor) and for court ceremony. Next comes a copy of two historical works printed together, both dealing with the war between Aragon and the Kingdom of Naples from 1459 to 1464; the first is by Jacopo Bracelli and the second by Giovanni Pontano. Scheurl evidently retained an interest in the history of Spain after his trips there. The third work, also a substantial one, is by Hieronymus Gebwiler. *Epitome Regii . . . Ferdinandi . . .* is a genealogical narration on the origins of the Hapsburg monarchs, ending with Ferdinand and Charles V. The work is highly laudatory; it compares the Hapsburg lineage favorably to such prominent figures of the past as Alexander the Great and Charlemagne. The fourth work, which consists of only fourteen leaves, is a chronology of the principal events in the world from the birth of Christ to the siege of Vienna by the Turks in 1529. No author is named, but it bears the title *Annotatio seu Breviarum Rerum Memorabilium*. . . . Scheurl seems to have appreciated the chronology form; he himself wrote, but did not have printed, a listing of events from 1511 to 1528.¹⁰ The fifth work, also anonymous, is a vivid description of Sultan Suleyman’s unsuccessful battle at Vienna in 1529.

10. This was Christoph Scheurl, “Geschichtbuch der Christenheit von der Iarzahl 1511 bis auf dies gegenwertig achtundzwaintzig Iar”, *Jahrbücher des deutschen Reiches und der deutschen Kirche im Zeitalter der Reformation* (1872): 5–19; cited in Grossmann, col. 385–86.



Title page from the first work.

The sixth work is perhaps the oddest in the volume, for it is in Spanish rather than Latin and deals with a medical subject rather than with history. It has the title *Regimiento Preservativo Cõpuesto por el Doctor Luis Nunex de Anila* and is undated, though the colophon states that it was printed at Worms, Germany by Hans von Erfurt. As records give evidence of this printer having worked in Worms only during 1521–22, one may reasonably conjecture that the date

of this title is considerably earlier than 1530.¹¹ Its six leaves outline rules for the preservation of bodily health. It is similar to a better-known work of the period, *Regimen Sanitatis*, which was printed in many editions. Both works give dietetic advice for a long life.

The last three works represent the Catholic side of the theological disputes of the Reformation period. The seventh, *Repulsio Articulorum Zwinglii*, was written by Johann Eck, the eminent German theologian and friend of Scheurl, and confutes the doctrine of the Swiss reformer Ulrich Zwingli. The eighth work is the *Antilogiarum Martini Lutheri Babylonia*, by Johann Faber, bishop of Vienna. The title of this piece is a play on words—the “Babylon of Illogicalities of Martin Luther”. Was Faber perhaps alluding to the Tower of Babel as well as to Luther’s work on the “Babylonian captivity” of the church—*De Captivitate Babylonia Ecclesiae* (1520)? Whatever his intention, in the substance of his work he merely draws fifty-two propositions from Luther’s writings and systematically refutes each of them. The ninth work, again by Johann Eck, is entitled *Articulos 404* . . . and consists of that many propositions which Eck is prepared to defend publicly at any suitable time. The title page includes blank spaces for writing in the date and time of the next debate.

Viewed as a whole, this book reflects a breadth of intellectual interests not unusual for those times. Why would Scheurl have works on such diverse subjects as royal weddings, wars, genealogy, health, and theology bound together in one volume? The evidence suggests that convenience played a part. As described above, all but one of the nine titles were dated works printed in 1530. The bookplate dates from sometime between 1535 and 1542. It is probable that, at some date soon after 1530, Scheurl arranged to have bound together these newly printed works, along with the older *Regimiento*, which he had possibly only recently acquired, and afterwards inserted the new bookplate.

Not only did Scheurl write on the title page of the first work, he also underlined and annotated passages in several of the works, especially Bracelli’s and Gebwiler’s. Usually his annotations were brief and written in Latin, but together with the underlinings and pointers to highlight certain passages, they leave an impression of the personal stamp of the owner.

11. Joseph Benzing, *Die Buchdrucker des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts im deutschen Sprachgebiet*, Beiträge zum Buch- und Bibliothekswesen, Bd. 12 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1963), 478.