

LIBR 548F: History of the Book

with

Dr. Anne Russell

Mira Calligraphiae Monumenta:

The Holy Roman Emperor, the Kunstammer, the Scribe and the Illuminator

by

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Question 1: Consider a book which has had a significant social, cultural political, religious and/or scientific influence. Discuss the book as a material object (when and how produced, by whom, format, size, how circulated, etc.) and in light of its social implications (readership, how received, influences, unintended consequences).

During the 15th and 16th centuries many members of European royalty embraced the humanistic teachings of the Renaissance and became important patrons of the arts. This interest in humanism and patronage extended to the development the *Kunstammer* and *Wunderkammer* in many royal palaces. The terms *Kunstammer* and *Wunderkammer* translate directly from the German as “cabinets of art and wonder.” Both the *Kunstammer* (“the art cabinet”) and the *Wunderkammer* (“the cabinet of wonders/marvels”) housed the fruits of royal patronage. “The *Kunstammer* displayed an encyclopedic collection of all kinds of objects of dissimilar origin and diverse materials on a universal scale” (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Timeline of Art History “Collecting for the *Kunstammer*.”).

These rooms of fine and decorative arts were the early precursors of the modern museum. Many of the items from Europe’s *Kunstammers* are now housed in the major museums of Europe and North America. The *Kunstammer* tradition of collecting encyclopedic examples of all forms of learning and knowledge is still represented in the collections of the British Museum in London and The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City.

The *Kunstammer* was comprised of three key components: *naturalia* (products of nature), *arteficialia* (products of human endeavors) and *scientifica* (products that testified to the human ability to dominate nature). Typically *naturalia* included shells, eggs, minerals (including

ore, semi-precious stones and gems), fossils, taxidermy specimens of birds and animals, dried plants, etc. Items of *arteficia* included paintings and sculpture, decorative objects and books and manuscripts. *Scientifica* items included inventions that demonstrated human innovations and inventions. These objects included clocks, globes and the various scientific instruments that reflected the explorations and innovations of the Renaissance (Bredekamp 1995, 34). These rooms served as places of study and inspiration to members of the royal household as well as the numerous artists and scientists who worked under the patronage of the royal family.

The most famous *Kunstammer* in Europe belonged to Rudolf II (b.1552- d.1612). Rudolf was a member of the Habsburg family and ruled as king of Hungary and Bohemia and also served as the Holy Roman Emperor from 1576 until his death. Rudolf is considered by many historians to be one of the greatest patrons of the arts during the mid-16th century (Grove Art Online, “Habsburg, Austrian branch, Rudolf II”).

During his life Rudolf created one of Europe’s finest and most comprehensive collections of fine and decorative arts. The Emperor’s *Kunstammer* was comprised of the three key components. Rudolf’s collection of *scientifica* and *naturalia* materials included the usual shells, horns, fossils and specimens of bird and animal life as well as the scientific instruments of astronomers Tycho Brahe and Johann Kepler. Examples of *arteficia* included works of art by some of the leading artists and craftsmen of central Europe. Painters Hans von Aache, Joseph Heintz worked along side the sculptor Adriaen de Vries and goldsmiths Paulus van Vianen and Wenzel Jamnitzer. These artisans created portraits, miniatures, sculptures, jewelry and fanciful decorative objects, as well as books and manuscripts including the famous illuminated manuscript *Mira calligraphiae monumenta* (Grove Art Online, “Rudolf II, Patronage”).

The *Mira calligraphiae monumenta* or Model Book of Calligraphy was created for two separate Holy Roman Emperors by two separate craftsmen. Calligrapher Georg Bocskay combined talents with Joris Hoefnagel, an illuminator and miniaturist. Together the two artists produced one of the finest illuminated manuscripts of the late 16th century. It is a collaboration of superb quality, but it is an unusual artistic creation as the two master craftsmen involved never met.

Georg Bocskay

Georg Bocskay was born in Hungary (date unknown) to a family of noble birth. Little is known of his life prior to 1559, but by the early 1560s Bocskay was engaged in imperial service as a master calligrapher. The manuscript that is now known as the Getty codex or *Mira calligraphiae monumenta* is the earliest surviving work that demonstrates Bocskay's mastery of calligraphy. Bocskay served the Holy Roman Emperors Ferdinand I (reign 1558-1564) and his successor Maximilian II (reign 1564-1576) who was father to Rudolf II. Scholars maintain that the writing model book was commissioned by Emperor Ferdinand I as Bocskay frequently refers to Ferdinand and his patronage in the codex's text (Vignau-Wilberg 1992a, 8).

The calligraphy in the writing book is without compare. Georg Bocskay demonstrated his command of the subject by including both historical and contemporary scripts as well as lavish exhibition scripts and fonts of Bocskay's own creation. Many of the pages are enhanced by Bocskay's use of elaborate flourishes and gold and silver details. A few of the codex's pages are dramatically executed with white text on a painted black/dark blue background. Bocskay included examples of Greek and Hebrew (including a Hebrew alphabet) as well as numerous variations of the Gothic, italic and antiqua fonts. He proclaimed his mastery of almost every font known to scribes. The calligrapher wrote in reverse (text is only readable with a mirror) and

slanted text to the left. Bocskay also included examples of calligrams (in which the text forms a shape or image determined by the text's content). Some folios feature fonts so small they are almost unreadable to the naked eye.

Bocskay demonstrated and proclaimed his prowess in the execution of the model writing book. Many folios feature Georg Bocskay's signature or initials, a not-so-subtle reminder of the individual responsible for the codex. Much of Bocskay work is closely related to drawing. The artist does not write his words so much as he draws the words onto the sheet. The carefully achieved balance of text and flourishes versus blank space is the work of a master designer. See Appendix A for representative examples of Georg Bocskay's work.

By May of 1568 Bocskay had completed his work on the Getty codex and soon after began work on another writing model book. During the years 1571-1573 Bocskay created what is now known as the Vienna writing model book. The calligraphy in the Vienna codex is as elaborate as the Getty codex, but the content differs. The Getty codex contains a greater number of religious scripts while the codex produced in Vienna is more secular in nature. The Getty and Vienna writing books mark the end of the calligrapher's career as Georg Bocskay died in March or April of 1575 (Vignau-Wilberg 1992a, 10-11).

Joris Hoefnagel

The Getty codex was illuminated by Joris Hoefnagel during the last ten years of the artist's life. The illustrations are the capstone of Hoefnagel's long and productive career. Joris (sometimes referred to as Joseph) Hoefnagel was born in 1542 in Antwerp to a wealthy merchant family. As a young man Joris lived in France where he studied at the universities in Orleans and Bourges. During the years 1563-1567 Hoefnagel traveled extensively in Spain where he sketched landscapes, exotic plants and animals. After 1567 Hoefnagel lived in Antwerp but later traveled

to London and Italy. By 1573 Hoefnagel was installed as the court painter in Munich where he worked until 1591. The artist then served the Holy Roman Emperor Rudolf II as a “painter under court protection.” In the mid-1590s Hoefnagel began the process of adding illuminations to Bocskay’s calligraphic masterpiece (Vignau-Wilberg 1992b, 16-18).

Hoefnagel’s task was formidable. When Hoefnagel began the task of adding illuminations to the codex, the writing model book had rested undisturbed in Emperor Rudolf’s *Kunstkammer* for almost thirty years. The melding of work by two individuals is not always an easy task, but Hoefnagel’s contributions are as masterful as the original calligraphy. Hoefnagel subtly created a tension between the original calligraphy and the new illuminations. While executing the calligraphy Bocskay had declared himself the master scribe of his age and peppered his work with references to himself and his abilities. Hoefnagel added no such marks to his illuminations, but made his presence known nonetheless. Hoefnagel’s illuminations re-focused the reader’s attention. The two art forms simultaneously compete and compliment each other.

Hoefnagel’s illuminations transcend the reader’s expectations of 16th century illuminations. His work moves beyond the two dimensional quality of many early illuminations and is almost trompe l’oeil in its effectiveness. Cut flower stems pierce some of the pages and as a result, the stems are visible from both the recto and verso of the folio. All of Hoefnagel’s vignettes are carefully shadowed from a single light source. These artistic techniques are matched with an amazing range of subject matter. Hoefnagel’s subjects included native flowers and plants as well as more exotic bulb flowers such as lilies. Hoefnagel also highlighted botanical oddities and rarities including a double core apple, a tomato (a recent import from North America) and several examples of the much-sought after tulip. This combination of the

mundane and the exotic reflects both the *Kunstammer's* interest in all things exotic and unusual as well as the Renaissance obsession with recording and documenting knowledge.

Joris Hoefnagel's illuminations are reminiscent of later botanical art and still life painting. Some scholars, including Lee Hendrix and Thea Vignau-Wilberg, have maintained that Hoefnagel's work serves as an important bridge to Dutch still life painting. Hoefnagel included much of the classic imagery of Dutch genre painting in his illuminations - including cut flowers, fruit and vegetables, nuts, shells, insects and butterflies, as well as small animals both living and dead. It is interesting to note that much of the components of Dutch still life painting mirror the contents of the *Kunstammer* (especially the naturalia items). Hoefnagel's work also shows the influence of his friend Carolus Clusius, the famed Renaissance botanist and early proponent of floriculture (Hendrix 1992, 39). Hoefnagel died shortly after the completion of the illuminations in roughly circa 1600.

The Getty Codex

Bocskay's created the model writing book on fine white vellum with slightly heavier vellum used for the alphabets bound at the end of the manuscript. The curatorial staff in the manuscripts department at the John Paul Getty Museum (Los Angeles, California U.S.A.) noted that Georg Bocskay used a wide variety of colored inks "including brown, carbon black, and blue, with old and silver leaf and painted gold" (Hendrix and Vignau-Wilberg, 411-412). Hoefnagel's illuminations were executed in a combination of watercolor and gouache with the addition of gold and silver paint details. A substantial number of the pages that Hoefnagel illuminated are decorated on both the recto and verso surfaces.

The original codex measures 16.6 by 12.4 centimeters (approximately 6 ½ x 5 inches). Paper experts at the Getty noted that the original manuscript was trimmed both horizontally and

vertically at some point in its life. It has been speculated that the codex's height was originally at least 17 cm. The facsimile edition produced by the John Paul Getty Museum measures 18.5 x 13 cm (7 ¼ x 5 inches). The slightly larger size enabled the book designer to float the codex pages within the facsimile and thereby define the edges of the original (Hendrix and Vignau-Wilberg, 411-412).

The completed work remained in Emperor Rudolf's *Kunstammer* until his death in 1612. The contents of Rudolf's *Kunstammer* were then dispersed to other royal collections in Europe. The Getty codex was removed from Rudolf's collection sometime after 1612 but its history is unknown. The codex did not reappear until the 19th century when it re-surfaced in a private European collection. Today the original manuscript is the collection of the John Paul Getty Museum's Manuscript Collection. The manuscript was acquired under the direction of the institution's manuscripts curator in 1986. The copy I used for study is a facsimile copy first produced for the Getty Museum in 1992 and printed in Lausanne, Switzerland.

The Legacy of *Mira Calligraphiae Monumenta*

Upon its completion *The Model Book of Calligraphy* was received as a masterpiece by members of Rudolf's court. Hoefnagel seamlessly blended his illuminations to fit within Bockskay's calligraphy and the final product almost appears to be the work of one hand, one mind and one designer. The codex's unique blend of art forms made it a perfect occupant within Rudolf's *Kunstammer* where all things unique and fantastic were valued.

Initially the readership of the codex was limited to the select members of Rudolf's court circle. The *Kunstammer* preserved the book but it certainly did not enable its wide circulation. The Getty's facsimile has provided the codex with its widest readership in its history. It is interesting to note that this is due in part to the world of the printing press. The facsimile edition

is available world-wide and the codex is available at the Getty Museum for the enjoyment of museum visitors, researchers and scholars.

The Getty codex's influence is difficult to measure. During Rudolf's lifetime the codex certainly had an impact on other artists and calligraphers while it remained in the Emperor's collection. Since the codex lived much of its life in private collections after Rudolf's death (and was largely unavailable to researchers), it is difficult to gauge what impact it had after 1612 but the impact and influence of the codex's two artists can be discussed.

Georg Bocskay's virtuoso calligraphic fonts helped elevate calligraphy to an art form. With the advent of the printing press and cast type, calligraphy was no longer the primary means of recording communication and information. As the printing press became the primary means of disseminating knowledge, calligraphy was increasingly viewed as a form of artistic expression. Master scribes like Georg Bocskay offered readers a level of aesthetic sophistication in their lettering that printing would not be able to achieve for a number of decades. When comparing the gracefulness of Bocskay's lines to printed books of the same time period it is apparent that Bocskay's work enjoyed a freedom and purity of line that cast type had yet to achieve.

The importance of the work Joris Hoefnagel was twofold. Hoefnagel documented the rich historic tradition of illumination, a practice that would eventually become extinct, but his work also heralded the beginning of a new art form in the still life paintings of the 17th century. Hoefnagel was one of the first artists to use botanical art in a still life format.

The Getty codex has enjoyed a most remarkable life. The manuscript was created jointly by two artists unknown to each other for two separate Holy Roman Emperors. It fell into obscurity after the death of Rudolf II and disappeared from the public view. The codex resurfaced more than two hundred years later and eventually joined one of the finest manuscripts

collections in the world, a modern *Kunstammer* of sorts. The *Mira calligraphiae monumenta* codex is an object of both “art and wonder” and is a pristine example of the manuscript process of the late 16th century. Georg Bockskay concluded his work in the writing book with the following passage in Latin:

Fama seu virtutis nomen superses tantum, sed caetera universa mortis erunt.

Translated it reads: Only reputation survives, everything else belongs to death. The writing book outwitted “death” at every turn and now survives as a testament to the reputation of its patrons, the Emperors Frederick and Rudolf as well as its creators, Georg Bockskay and Joris Hoefnagel.

Appendix A

Folio 102

Lilium martagon L.

Martagon lily

Lycopersicon esculentum Mill.

Tomato

Folio 105

Moses Receiving the Ten Commandments
The Israelites Dancing around the Golden Calf

Folio 107

Rosa gallica L.

French rose

Malus domestica Borkh.

Common apple with two cores

Folio 118

Imaginary butterfly (shows characteristics of Lycaenidae and Satyridae)

Probranchia Cassidae Marine mollusk

Pyrus communis L. Common pear

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