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Drach, Prüss, and the Fifteenth-Century Book Trade

The development of the printing press in the mid-fifteenth century led to the rise of a new industry, the manufacture and trade of books. Before this, written works came in the form of handwritten manuscripts done by scribes. The creation of these manuscripts was both time-consuming and expensive. Additionally, this made mass production an impossible task. It took some time for the production of the printers to overtake that of the scribes, but this was the case by 1472. (Flood, 139) The printing press allowed the production of works such as the second-edition *Malleus maleficarum*, printed by Peter Drach in 1490, and the *Fasciculus temporum*, printed by Johan Prüss in about 1490, contained within Portland State University's codex, to be done in a significantly more efficient manner.

Those who joined the new printing industry took a massive financial risk. The startup costs for a printer were quite high. It was difficult, if not impossible, for anyone but the wealthy to establish themselves in this industry without significant financial backing. (Bühler, 51-52) Because this was a new industry based around new technology, there was no existing infrastructure for printers to fall back on. As such, early printers often left behind careers they had spent years training for to establish themselves in this new industry. (Bühler, 48)

By today's standards, the production volume of fifteenth-century printers was actually quite low. Looking at Strasbourg, we see that even the most productive of the printers in this era often only produced a few hundred works in their lifetime. Prüss himself may have only produced copies of 177 different works in his thirty-year career as a printer. (Chrisman, 4)

Printing was difficult and expensive, so in general it was important to only print items which were either commissioned or that the printer believed would sell well. To be reckless and do otherwise by printing something that generated no interest could ruin a printer financially.

Just as production volume and efficiency were lower than they are today, so too was the size of the book-buying market. The small size of this market, coupled with the high cost of doing business, added to the risk these printers faced when they went into business. In the fifteenth century, literacy rates in Europe were lower than they are today, although this was beginning to change as an increasing number of trades required at least some form of basic literacy. (Bühler, 43) As a result, the market in this era, for the most part, consisted of the wealthy and literate. (Rautenberg, 146)

Trying to only print items which would sell to this small market did not always work out for the printer, of course. It was not uncommon for printers to make an incorrect assessment as to what works may be in demand. This could be particularly damaging as the effort required to get to this point was so great. (Flood, 141-142) Even Johann Gutenberg was unable to overcome the many risks that came along with this profession. Over time, he took out more loans than he could pay back, which resulted in the seizure of his equipment and books. (Chappell and Bringhurst, 67) Compounding this risk was the flood of printed books made possible by the printing press, which resulted in a market collapse in the 1470s. Crashes like this left printers with inventories of works that they could not sell. This was the case with Conrad Sweynheym and Arnold Pannartz, two German printers working in Italy. As a result of the market crash, they sought help from Pope Sixtus IV to deal with their inventory of over 12,000 unbound and unsold books. (Roover, 223)

Printers in the fifteenth century would often attempt to mitigate these potential risks by specializing in printing works of a specific topic. (Flood, 143) Both Peter Drach and Johann Prüss seem to have settled for the most part on producing theological works throughout their careers. This appears to have paid off for the both of them, as they each had long careers. In the case of Prüss, his shop continued operating long after his death in 1510, with his daughter Margarethe taking over. (Chrisman, 16) It is worth looking at what we know of Peter Drach and Johann Prüss in order to better understand their careers and who they generally printed for, and in doing so perhaps find out why it is that their copies of the *Malleus maleficarum* and *Fasciculus temporum* wound up bound together in our codex.

Peter Drach, printer of our edition of the *Malleus maleficarum*, inherited his father's printing shop upon his death around 1480, rather than leaving his previous profession as many had done before. As a result, he was able to avoid the start-up risks others faced in the previous decades when the industry was still so new. Inheritance of an established printing business was a more common occurrence by the end of the century, as the industry became more established with shops and equipment was handed down to heirs who had been trained as printers. Like many printers of this era, Peter Drach focused his shop's production on printing theological works meant for the clergy. (Pettegree, 39) Many of his early printed works were indulgences and breviaries for the Church. He printed breviaries meant for Trier, Basel, Worms, and Utrecht, among others. (ISTC, ib01186200, ib01149500, ib01187410, ib01183970) Drach was the first to print the *Malleus maleficarum*, in late 1486 or 1487. It must have been quite a financial success for him, as he continued printing editions of the book for the next decade. His final known printed edition of the book was in 1495. (ISTC, ii00167300)

There are some notable similarities between the careers of Peter Drach and Johann Prüss. Prüss established himself as a printer in Strasbourg around 1480, the same time Drach inherited his shop in Speyer. Unlike Drach, however, Prüss did not inherit his shop. Instead, he spent his first few years struggling to build his business into the productive enterprise that it would become by the end of the century. His earliest printings included a number of more secular works such as a calendar in 1483 and his first almanac the next year. (ISTC, ik00002500, ia00505200) Quite a few of the works he printed prior to 1490 were by religious figures, such as *Epistola de gubernatione rei familiaris* by the twelfth-century French abbot Bernard of Clairvaux, or the *Rationale divinorum officiorum* by Guillaume Durand, a thirteenth-century bishop of Mende. (ISTC, ib00377800, id00431000)

Johann Prüss would come to develop a reputation as a printer of missals for the Catholic Church, particularly for dioceses in the east. He printed numerous missals for the dioceses of what is now Poland (Chrisman 1988, 88), including, among others, missals for the dioceses of Wrocław, Gniezno, and Cracow. (Duggan, 19) His reputation as a reliable printer of missals likely played a part in his business becoming profitable enough, that by 1498 he came to require a second press so that he could deal with the demand his shop was now facing. (Chrisman, 16) It was around the same time that Peter Drach began producing copies of the *Malleus maleficarum* that Prüss began printing copies of the *Fasciculus temporum*. Just as the *Malleus* seems to have been a success for Drach, printing the *Fasciculus* appears to have worked out well for Prüss. He printed editions of this work multiple times over the course of at least the next seven years. His printing seems to have slowed down a bit in the final decade of his life compared to how productive he was in the 1490s.

These two printers got their starts around the same time, and both focused on the printing of religious texts. It is possible, then, that there may have been some connection between the two which could help explain the production of our codex. The two were in communication with each other in 1490, around the time of production for our codex. (ISTC, im00661500). This does not prove that they collaborated in order to create our codex, of course, but it certainly opens the door to this as a possibility. It is interesting to note that there is an early edition of the *Fasciculus temporum* printed in November of 1477 attributed to Peter Drach the Younger. ("*Fasciculus temporum omnes antiquiorum cronica complectens*") However, as this was three years before he inherited his business it does seem possible that this could be a mistake and that the actual printer was instead his father, Peter Drach the Elder. For whatever reason, Drach did not produce another edition of the *Fasciculus* after 1477. As Prüss had already been printing this book for a few years, it could be that the two collaborated in order to produce the two works together.

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