

*Gašper Cerkovnik*

## **SOME OBSERVATIONS ON USE OF BOOK ILLUSTRATIONS FOR POPULAR SOUTH-GERMAN PRAYER BOOKS AS MODELS IN CENTRAL EUROPEAN ART**

### **Zusammenfassung**

Schriftliche Quellen und eine beträchtliche Anzahl von erhaltenen süddeutschen Gebetsbuchillustrationen aus dem Kreis Albrecht Dürers als selbständige Drucke in modernen Grafischen Sammlungen weisen darauf hin, dass es nicht ungewöhnlich war, dass Buchillustrationen dieser Zeit als einzelne Drucke verkauft wurden, unabhängig von ihrer Größe. Dies hat positive und negative Konsequenzen bei der Recherche von

Buchillustrationen als Vorbild für andere Kunstwerke. Positiv zu vermerken ist, dass es ein besseres Verständnis dafür gibt, wie einige Buchillustrationen in teilweise überwiegend Analphabeten und wirtschaftlich schwierigen Umgebungen so populär wurden. Negativ ist, dass wir berücksichtigen müssen, dass diese Drucke vom Künstler und Mäzen möglicherweise nie als spezifische Buchillustrationen erkannt wurden, wodurch ein Teil ihres ursprünglichen Kontexts und ihrer Bedeutung verloren ging.

**Key-words:** prayer book illustrations, South Germany, *Salus animae*, *Hortulus animae*, print market

### **Introduction**

The period around 1500 is marked by one of the greatest flourishings of the fine arts in Central Europe. Images of sacred and increasingly secular nature covered the churches, houses and even streets in the form of altars, pulpits, epitaphs, venerated images, interior and exterior wall paintings, illuminated and printed books, independent prints and pamphlets, decorative arts, and others. The expansion of visual arts was greatly reinforced by printed media such as woodcuts and engravings - older techniques that finally came into their own with the spread

of the printing press and paper mills in the last decades of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Printed media not only distributed knowledge - it was crucial in disseminating artistic style and compositions, which inspired other artists or could be used as models or templates for less imaginative masters. The never-before-seen flourishing of visual arts of the pre-Reformation era was interrupted by the Reformation and later to some extent by the Counter-Reformation in the Catholic lands. The abundance of different artworks was decimated and fragmented by series of subsequent tragic events that dragged into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Many artworks that survived lost their original historical context and,

consequently, all the information about their authors, patrons, dates of completion, functions, and other aspects. Identifying printed models is often the only way to determine when a specific artwork in the form of painting or sculpture was made (in most cases as *terminus post quem*), the meaning it may have had, and the cultural and artistic background of the artists and the patrons. The more artworks we can register as being modelled after prints and the more information we can connect to the used prints, the more we can deduce about the art of the period. Unfortunately, the prints were not immune to later historical events either: some were deliberately destroyed due to their unsuitable or unfashionable content, others by accidental disasters or by otherwise unsuitable environments. Recent studies, such as that of Peter Schmid on printed images in south German manuscripts of the 15<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>1</sup> show the complex use of prints since the beginning of the new media and the problematic legacy of the overly eager systematization of early researchers. Most of the early prints were systematically removed from their historical settings, often cleaned of any additional writing and coloration, and included in specialized print collections. In these regards, printed images produced as illustrations for printed books seem to be a more reliable source – they are usually much easier to date and localize and have an accompanying text explaining their meaning. Nevertheless, a closer inspection of historical sources and preserved examples of book illustrations from this era reveal a more complex situation.

### Printed illustrations for small-format prayer books

It is a long-known fact that major graphic series by Dürer were available as independent prints long before they were published as

book illustrations.<sup>2</sup> For artists and to some extent collectors, separately printed woodcuts or engravings were probably more desirable, since the image was not disturbed by print on the opposite side. Buying separate prints and not the whole book was also a reasonable choice from the financial point of view.<sup>3</sup> Somewhat more surprising is the fact that the similar was true for the group of small woodcut illustrations from southern Germany. Of special interest are several woodcut series of modest size but relatively high artistic and technical value that heavily rely on Dürer's compositions and style, and were made by artists closely connected to the great Nuremberg master. All the series were intended for popular prayer books of the period entitled in Latin *Hortulus animae* (Little Garden of the Soul, *Seelengärtlein* or *Würzgärtlein* in German) and *Salus animae* (The Salvation of the Soul) – later being a Nuremberg version of the first.<sup>4</sup> The most important and problematic is the *Salus animae* series published in Nuremberg in 1503 (with disputed attribution to Dürer himself<sup>5</sup>), followed by several *Hortulus animae* series by Dürer's co-workers: Hans Baldung called Grien's published in 1511 and 1512 in Strasbourg, Erhart Schön's from c. 1515 and Hans Springinklee's series from 1516 and 1518 published in Lyon and Nuremberg. All

1 P. SCHMIDT, *Gedruckte Bilder in handgeschriebenen Büchern: zum Gebrauch von Druckgraphik im 15. Jahrhundert* (Köln – Weimar – Wien: Böhlau Verlag, 2003), 1-17.

2 The most important in this regard are the two woodcut series *The Large Passion* and *The Life of the Virgin* both published in 1511: A. FRÖHLICH, 'Die Große Passion' & A. SCHERBAUM, 'Das Marienleben', in: *Albrecht Dürer: Das druckgraphische Werk: Band II: Holzschnitte und Holzschnittfolgen*, ed. by R. Schoch & M. Mende & A. Scherbaum (München – Berlin – London – New York: Prestel 2002), 176-213, 214-279.

3 For a concise overview of prices of prints from Nuremberg, see: W. SCHMIDT, 'Nürnberger Kunst- und Graphikpreise der Dürerzeit', in: *Anzeiger des Germanischen Nationalmuseums* (2002), 241-252.

4 M. C. OLDENBOURG, *Hortulus animae. [1494]-1523: Bibliographie und Illustration* (Hamburg: Dr. Ernst Hauswedell & Co., 1973).

5 The authorship of *Salus animae* series and the unpublished series depicting Sunday gospels divided Dürer-scholars in two equally prominent groups, the view against Dürer's authorship currently prevailing: A. SCHERBAUM, 'Gebetbuch' and 'Andachtsbuch mit Sonntagsevangelien', in: *Albrecht Dürer: Das druckgraphische Werk: Band III: Buchillustrationen*, ed. by R. Schoch & M. Mende & A. Scherbaum (München – Berlin – London – New York: Prestel 2004), 494-523.

the above-mentioned artists probably had access to Dürer's collection of drawings and prints.<sup>6</sup>

The structure of the prayer book was based on that of Books of Hours, with greater emphasis on mystic texts and specialized prayers that included Indulgences – like in the case of the prayer of St. Gregory the Great and the prayer to St. Anna with Virgin with Child.<sup>7</sup> The prayers to saints were (depending on where they were published) often customized to be better adapted to local traditions – in the case of *Salus animae*, for example, the local St. Sebald received special attention. The popularity and accessibility of these prayer books published not only in Latin but also in various German dialects, French, Czech and Polish, on often low quality and therefore cheaper paper, probably introduced south German graphic art to entirely new and previously inaccessible audiences throughout Central Europe. Research on the impact of these series on other artistic media, primarily painting, to a lesser extent in decorative arts (metal engraving) and sculpture, is scarce in comparison to better-known prints of the leading masters of the period, like Dürer and Cranach, but shows this was considerable.<sup>8</sup> The influence

these series exerted in other fine arts media must be regarded as the consequence of their unique combination of the fashionable Dürer style, highly detailed technical execution, and popular iconographical motifs. The latter was dictated by the form of the prayer book itself. The *Hortulus animae* prayer book (and its variations) included illustrations depicting the life and images of Christ and Mary, and the apostles, as well as images of different saints. This made them a highly useful compendium of Christian narrative scenes and different figures of saints. Furthermore, the standing figures could be remodelled, without much effort, into any saint needed with simple changes of attributes.

The influence of *Hortulus animae* illustration can be easily explained by numerous cheap publications, which is not the case with the *Salus animae* prayer book. The series of 63 small woodcut illustrations (each measuring 61 × 41 mm) was created for a pocket-sized prayer book with the full title of *Salus animae, dos ist der selen hayl wirt gena[nn]t*, published in Nuremberg on October 18<sup>th</sup> 1503 by Hieronymus Hölzel. The booklet has 288 sheets and 65 illustrations, the illustrations with St. Hieronymus and St. Sebald being duplicated. This prayer book is quite rare, with only six copies known world-wide (the most complete copy is in the Library of Congress, Washington DC).<sup>9</sup> The unusually high quality of illustrations for this type of book in this early period and the fact most of the surviving copies are printed on parchment, coloured, and even illuminated suggests Hölzel's initial target audience was wealthy Nuremberg patricians. We do not know precisely what happened to the woodcut plates – although some were used as book illustrations later, we should seriously consider that most of

6 Baldung, Springinklee and Schön at different periods collaborated with Dürer; *Meister um Albrecht Dürer. Ausstellung im Germanischen National-Museum vom 4. Juli bis 17. September*, ed. by P. Strieder and others (Nürnberg: Germanisches Nationalmuseum: Anzeiger Germanischen Nationalmuseums, 1961). For a critical review of Dürer's workshop and his relationship to other artists, see: A. GREBE, 'Maister nach Dürer. Überlegungen zur Dürerwerkstatt', in: *Das Dürer-Haus. Neue Ergebnisse der Forschung*, ed. by U. Großmann and F. Sonnenberger (Nürnberg: Germanisches Nationalmuseum 2007), 121-140.

7 F. X. HAIMERL, *Mittelalterliche Frömmigkeit im Spiegel der Gebetbuchliteratur Süddeutschlands*, (München: Münchener theologische Studien. Abt. 1. Bd. 4., 1952), 123-149.

8 K. LÖCHER, 'Zur Nachwirkung der Druckgraphik von Hans Baldung Grien. Das Straßburger Gebetbuch von 1511', in: *Pinxit, sculpsit, fecit. Kunsthistorische Studien. Festschrift für Bruno Bushart*, ed. by B. Hamacher & C. Karnehm (München: Deutscher Kunstverlag 1994) 51-58; J. HÖFLER, *Die Tafelmalerei der Dürerzeit in Kärnten (1500-1530)* (Klagenfurt: Verlag des Geschichtsvereines für Kärnten 1998) 28; G. CERKOVNIK, 'Lesorezne ilustracije nemških tiskanih molitvenikov poznega 15. in zgodnjega 16. stoletja: pomen in vpliv v drugih likovnih medijih' [Woodcut Illustrations of the German Printed Prayer Books of the Late 15<sup>th</sup> and Early 16<sup>th</sup> Centuries:

Their Meaning and Influence in Other Fine Arts Media] (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Ljubljana, 2010); G. CERKOVNIK, 'Eine Gruppe von Tafelbildern aus dem Anfang des 16. Jahrhunderts in der Abtei Lichtenthal, Baden-Baden, und deren graphische Vorlagen', in: *Zeitschrift für die Geschichte des Oberrheins*, 162 (2014), 209-230.

9 SCHERBAUM, note 5, 494.



them were at least for some period primarily used to print separate prints for artists and collectors. This is indicated by the circumstances in which the series was introduced to art history.

### Historical sources on print production and distribution

In 1909, the British art historian Campbell Dodgson (at the time the librarian at the British Museum and later keeper of Prints and Drawings) – not yet aware of the published prayer book – reconstructed the whole series with a large quantity of separate prints of equal measurements and styles in several European print collections.<sup>10</sup> The prints printed only on one side of the paper sheet are often dismissed as proof prints (“Probedrucke” in German). Proof prints were made during the preparation of a matrix (wooden or metal) by artists or specialized print artisans to test the print. However, many of the *Salus animae* separate prints show no signs of being proof prints; they all show the final state, which supports the thesis they were readily available as independent prints. Furthermore, some show damage from heavy use that (according to our knowledge) cannot be explained with their use in books (Fig. 1).

The practice of book illustrations being printed and sold separately in Nuremberg is supported by two written sources from the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. The first can be found in the records of Sebald Schreyer, Nuremberg humanist, merchant, publisher, and Dürer’s neighbour, who undertook a very ambitious book project in the last decade of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. He was preparing the publication of an extensive text by German humanist Peter Danhauser entitled *Archetypus triumphantis Romae*. The project was never finished and the manuscript lost, but with the

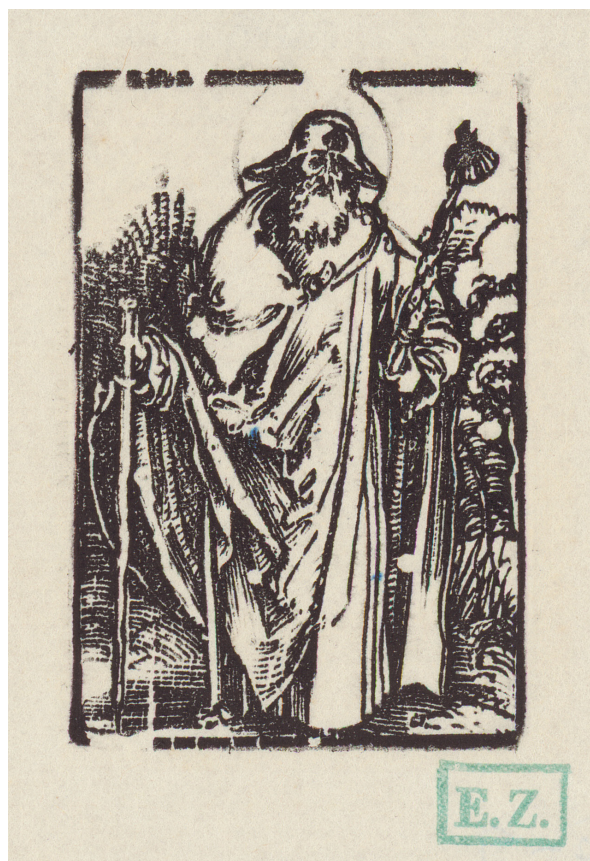


Fig. 1: Albrecht Dürer (?),  
Saint James the Great, *Salus animae*, 1503  
(The Art Gallery of Ernest Zmeták, Nové Zámky).  
Source: [https://www.webumenia.sk/en/dielo/SVK:GNZ.G\\_563..](https://www.webumenia.sk/en/dielo/SVK:GNZ.G_563..)

help of surviving illustrations we can with some certainty presume it was some sort of humanist encyclopaedia. Fortunately, Schreyer kept a memorial book (“Memorialbuch”, now in the library of Germanisches Nationalmuseum), which contains several contracts and cost accounts with the author and with the woodcutter Sebald Gallensdorfer between the years 1493 and 1497, which give us some glimpse in production of prints of the time. From the beginning, the illustrations were considered an indispensable part of the project. Danhauser committed himself to provide the needed models for illustrations that were then transferred to wood blocks by painters. Some composition had to be made anew by local painters; according to the style of several illustrations kept as separate prints, Schreyer chose the workshop of Dürer’s teacher Michael Wolgemut. Blocks were cut by Gallensdorfer

<sup>10</sup> C. DODGSON, *Holzschnitte zu zwei nürnbergischen Andachtsbüchern aus dem Anfange des XVI. Jahrhunderts*, (Berlin: Graphische Gesellschaft 1909).

afterwards. The accounts reveal how much the work of different professionals in this process was valued at the time. The highest payment was received by the woodcutter Gallensdorfer, followed by the author Danhauser, the anonymous transfer-painters and the painter-inventor. According to the contract, Schreyer expected much from Gallensdorfer: he had to commit entirely to the project, not taking any other jobs, and he was not allowed to sell separate prints or even talk about them or show anybody what he was doing. Schreyer's strict demand that Gallensdorfer not be allowed to sell illustrations as separate prints suggests that this was a common practice at the time.

The second written source that supports this practice and even describes in what form the small prayer book illustrations were sold on the market dates from a couple of decades later. In the winter of 1520/1521, Ferdinand Columbus, son of Christopher Columbus and a high dignitary in the Spanish court, visited Germany and the Netherlands, spending much time and money on buying books and prints. His inventory describes over one hundred small illustrations with Christian motifs intended for prayer books, often a group of them being printed on one sheet of paper that could be cut later.<sup>11</sup>

The abovementioned written sources and the considerable number of surviving prayer book illustrations from the circle of Albrecht Dürer as separate prints in modern prints collections indicate it was not uncommon for book illustrations of this period to be sold as individual prints, regardless of their size. This has positive and negative consequences when researching book illustrations as models for other artworks. On a positive note, it allows for a better understanding of how some book illustrations became so popular in sometimes predominately illiterate and economically

challenged environments. However, it must be taken into account that these prints may have never been recognized as specific book illustrations by the artist and patron, thus losing some of their original context and meaning.<sup>12</sup>

#### **Gašper CERKOVNIK**

Department of Art History, Faculty of Arts,  
Aškerčeva cesta 2, SI - 1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia  
gasper.cerkovnik@ff.uni-lj.si

11 P. PARSHALL, 'Ferdinand Columbus's Prints after 1500 from the German-Speaking Regions', in: M. P. McDONALD, *The Print Collection of Ferdinand Columbus (1488-1539). A Renaissance Collector in Seville* (London: British Museum Press 2004), 177.

12 Source of illustration: Web umenia, [https://www.webumenia.sk/en/dielo/SVK:GNZ.G\\_563](https://www.webumenia.sk/en/dielo/SVK:GNZ.G_563).