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### **A Biographical Dictionary**

Containing An Historical Account Of All The Engravers, From The Earliest Period Of The Art Of Engraving To The Present Time; And A Short List Of Their Most Esteemed Works. ... To Which Is Prefixed, an Essay On The Rise And Progress Of The Art Of Engraving, Both On Copper And On Wood. ...

**Strutt, Joseph**

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Chap. V. a short Essay upon the art of Engraving on Wood.

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the depth of the engraving, But from the application of the word *SIGNET* in several instances, there is great reason to believe, that it was also given to a stamp or brand. In this sense it seems particularly to be used by St. John, in the Apocalypse, where he speaks of sealing the foreheads of the elect, as intimating thereby, that some peculiar mark was set upon them, as we find it was upon the worshippers of the beast.

That stamps or brands, every way proper for the purpose of marking such things as required distinction, were actually in being at that time, is positively certain; and I have given the representation of six of them upon the fifth plate in this volume. The originals are in the British Museum; and were, with many others, brought from Italy by Sir William Hamilton. They were found in the ruins of Herculaneum and Pompeii; and some of them bear the marks of great antiquity. I have given two representations of those marked, I. II. IV. V. and VI. The last of these stamps, the handle of which is broken, differs from all the rest. The letters, and the ornamental line of the edge, are hollowed from the surface; and the impression it makes upon the paper is directly contrary to that of any one of the others, the letters being white, and the ground black. I have given the impression of No. I. marked A. and of No. VI. marked B. at the top of the plate. The original stamps are of the same size with the representations upon the plate; and are hollowed out from the surface of the letters and ornaments, an eighth of an inch, and sometimes more. No. I. is a rude attempt at the form of a fish. No. III. is in the form of a shield; and No. VI. is in the form of the bottom of a sandal. The letters are reversed upon the stamp, of course, that they might appear the right way in the impressions, as represented A. B. at the top of the plate. The Greek word ΠΑΝΦΙΑΙ is very legible upon No. I. The other inscriptions, except that of No. V. are not so easily decyphered. The impressions from No. V. were, I apprehend, considered as an amulet, or charm, to secure the wearers of it from certain diseases, or dangers, to which they were exposed. The inscription is evidently FELICIS AMVLLI GEMELÆ. There is a variety of forms among the other stamps at the Museum; particularly one of a *ship*, with the word ASPER upon it. Another in the form of a *heart*, with this inscription, BASILEI SEXIS TERT. Another as a tablet, in the middle of which is a representation, nearly obliterated, of an animal, inscribed LEONTI VINCAS. Another small one, in the shape of a tablet, on which is inscribed C + PVB + IANVARI. Some have inscriptions at full length; others again have only monograms, as No. II. They have all the appearance of being first cast, and afterwards repaired with the chisel. They are made of a kind of mixed metal, resembling brass.

Whatever may have been the purpose, to which these curious relics of antiquity were applied, we cannot but wonder, that, having so nearly, nay, we may say, actually discovered the art of printing, in a small degree, they did not gradually appropriate it to more extensive purposes; especially as we see they had, in one instance, No. V. produced three lines following each other.

## C H A P. V.

### *A short Essay upon the Art of Engraving on Wood.*

**I**T is generally allowed by the best authors upon the subject of printing, that prior to the invention of moveable types, there were books, consisting of rude delineations cut on wood, with short explanations of the subjects, contrived for the convenience of those, who could not afford to purchase manuscript copies of the Old and New Testament, from whence these short mementos were chiefly taken. Of this species are the books entitled, *Historia Sancti Johannis Evangelistae, ejusque Visiones Apocalyplicae*, or, *the History of St. John the Evangelist, and his Apocalypitical Visions*; and *Historia Veteris et Novi*



*Novi Testamenti*, or, *the Histories of the Old and New Testament*, commonly known by the appellation of the *Poor Man's Bible*. These are ranked among the earliest productions of this kind; but from their having no date, or any indication of the year, in which they were printed, the difficulty of affixing the exact period of their appearance is insurmountable. They are small folio volumes. A single block of wood was appropriated to each leaf, which was printed only on one side; and two of these leaves being pasted together had the appearance of a single one, printed on both sides. Besides the two above-mentioned books, there are several others, printed in the same manner: namely, *Historia beatae Mariae Virginis*, *The History of the blessed Virgin Mary*. *Ars Memorandi*, or, *an Assistant to the Memory*. *Ars Moriendi*, or, *the Art of Dying*. *Speculum Humanæ Salvationis*, or, *the Mirror of Human Salvation*. But none of these are so ancient, as the two before mentioned. I have therefore chosen from them the specimens, which accompany this essay.

Papillon indeed tells us of eight engravings on wood, the account of which was given to him by a Swiss officer. These must have been considerably more ancient, than any thing now known; and upon which a decided opinion may be given, with respect to the date. The title, according to that author, ran thus, *Les Chevalereux faits en figures du grand & Magnanime Macedonian Roi, le preux & Vaillant Alexandre, dedie, &c.* "A representation of the Warlike Actions of the great and magnanimous Macedonian King, the bold and valiant Alexander, dedicated, presented, and humbly offered to the Most Holy Father, Pope Honorius IV. the glory and support of the church; and to our illustrious and generous Father and Mother, by us, Alexander-Alberic Cunio, Chevalier, and Isabella Cunio, twin brother and sister: first reduced, imagined; and attempted to be executed in relief, with a small knife, on blocks of wood, made even and polished by this learned and dear sister, continued and finished together at Ravenna, from eight pictures of our invention, painted six times larger than here presented; engraved, explained by verses, and marked upon the paper, to perpetuate the number, and to enable us to give them to our relations and friends, in remembrance of friendship and affection. These were compleatly finished by us both, at the age of sixteen only."

If this story be true, and such engravings with the foregoing title ever did exist, they must have been executed in the years 1284, or 1285; for Honorius IV. to whom the work is dedicated, sat only those two years in the Papal Chair. But as Papillon gives this story upon the sole evidence of the Swiss officer, and had never seen any part of the engravings, the generality of authors have not been inclined to give much credit to the fact, which at best is exceedingly doubtful.

The most probable conjectures, concerning the origin of this species of engraving, is, that it was introduced into Germany by the *briefmalers*, or painters of the playing-cards, who cut the outlines of the figures on wood, and stamped them upon the paper, to save the trouble of making a separate drawing for every card; and afterwards coloured them by hand. In this manner precisely were executed the blocks for the cuts, in the edition of the Apocalypse, which is now preserved in the Bodleian library at Oxford; part of one of which is very faithfully copied plate VI. of this volume.

Baron Heineken asserts, that cards for playing were invented in Germany, where they were in use as early as the year 1376, though the reason he gives is not, by any means, conclusive: *parce qu'on les connoissoit vers ce tems en France*, "because they were known about this time in France." Other authors, with Bullet at their head, as confidently assert, that they were invented in France. The disputes upon this subject serve only to prove the difficulty, if not the impossibility of ascertaining the æra of the invention of cards, or the country in which they were first produced. This, however, is of no consequence to the present enquiry, unless it could also be proved that a part of them was printed on blocks of wood, at the time of their first invention. There seems to be very little doubt, but that they were drawn and painted by hand.

These card makers did not entirely confine themselves to the printing and painting





of cards, they also produced subjects of a more devout nature. "We find," says Baron Heineken, "in the library of Wolfenbittel, a variety of prints, representing different subjects, taken from holy writ, and devotional compositions, with the explanatory text facing the figures; the whole engraved on wood. These prints are precisely of the size with our playing cards; that is, a little above three inches high, by two inches and a quarter in width. There are also in the same library, five prints, at the end of a book entitled, *Ars Moriendi*, representing different figures of angels, devils, dying persons, and saints. They are of the same size with the playing cards; and each print is marked with a letter of the alphabet." He adds further, "that they engraved the same sort of images upon a larger scale; and that, in a convent at Buxheim, near Memmingen, he saw a print representing *St. Christopher, carrying the infant Jesus over the sea*. Facing the saint is represented the figure of a hermit, holding up his lanthorn to give them light; and behind him a peasant, climbing to the top of a mountain, with a bag at his back. This print," continues my author, "is of a folio size, engraved on wood, and illuminated in the same manner as the playing cards are done. At the bottom is this inscription, *Cristoferi faciam, die quaque cinque tueris. Illa nempe die morte mala non morieris. Millefimo cccc° xx° tercio*. This print proves at least, that the images of saints, with letters, were engraved on wood, as early as the year 1423. It is pasted upon the inside of the cover of an old book, probably by some religious person of the convent, in order to preserve it."

The same author informs us, that in visiting the convents, monasteries, and other religious houses, he frequently found specimens of this kind, pasted into books of the fifteenth century; "which," says he, "confirmed me in my opinion, that the first experiments of engraving on wood, after those of the playing cards, were the images of saints, and devotional subjects; which, being dispersed among the laity, were lost by degrees; and those which were preserved, were such only, as the monks and other ecclesiastics pasted into the early printed books, which ornamented their libraries."

These images of saints, and other devotional subjects, being first produced, sets of subjects with the letters of the alphabet followed; and these were taken from the bible, or legendary histories, which in former times were considered of almost equal consequence with the bible, and the prints were constantly accompanied by inscriptions, either for instructions, or the exciting of devotion, in the manner of the Apocalypse, and the Poor Man's Bible, &c.

The next dated work of this kind is the *Chiromancy* of Dr. Hartlieb, consisting of twelve leaves, printed on both sides, the first and last pages only, which are blank, forming three divisions, marked at the bottom *a. b. c.* each division consisting of eight pages; to which may be added two leaves more, the one for the title, and the other for the conclusion, both of them inscribed *Die Kunst Cyromantia*, upon the top of an ornamented square border. At the beginning of this curious book, which is in small folio, is a large vignette, representing Dr. Hartlieb kneeling, and presenting it to the Princess Anne, who is seated upon her throne; and the names of these two personages are engraved at the bottom of their portraits. The prints in this book are exceedingly rude; but have not, as far as one can judge from the copy of one of them, given in the *Idée generale d'une Collection complete d'estampes*, the appearance of being so ancient, as those in the Apocalypse, or the Poor Man's Bible. This curious compilation is dated 1448; and the name of *Jörg Schapff in Augspurg*, the artist, who is supposed to have performed the engravings, appears upon the fourth page.

I had intended to examine the claim, which the Dutch have laid to the invention of this species of engraving; but, on consideration, I find it is entirely useless, on the present occasion, to enter into that controversy; and particularly, as the matter has been so fully treated by Baron Heineken, in the book above-mentioned; and also in a late publication, by an author of our own country. In these works all the evidences, which





are given by the Dutch in support of Laurence Coster, are carefully examined; and as strongly refuted by the Baron, as they are supported by the English author. But the arguments of the former are, in my opinion, much more powerful, than those of the latter.

After the invention of moveable types, the *bricmalers* continued to vend their publications for a considerable time; but when the engravings on wood were annexed to the books, printed with the moveable types, they were gradually discontinued. However, the art of engraving itself continued in an improving state; and towards the conclusion of the fifteenth century, there were several artists of great reputation, who seem to have been principally employed by the printers to ornament their publications.

In 1493, appeared at Nuremberg, the folio Chronicle by Schedel, ornamented with a large number of engravings on wood, greatly superior to any thing, which had appeared before that time. They were executed by William Pleydenwurff and Michael Wolgemut. The latter of these artists was the tutor of Albert Durer, whose admirable performances, in this style of engraving, are justly held in the highest esteem. From the time of Albert Durer, it became customary for almost every one of the German engravers on copper, to engrave on wood also; and the works of many of them were better on wood, than on copper; for example, those of Albert Altdorfer, Hisbel Pen, Virgil Solis, &c.

Many excellent engravings on wood were produced by the German artists; but none more extraordinary than the *dance of Death*, by Hans, or John Holbein the younger, which, for the freedom and delicacy of execution, has hardly been equalled, but never surpassed, by any artist ancient or modern. Italy, France, and Holland, have produced many capital artists of this kind, whose names may be found in the body of the work, and, of course, need not be repeated here. But, for boldness and spirit, we must see the prints of Christopher Jegher, who worked under the direction of Rubens, and was, without doubt, assisted by that great artist. Among the moderns, Papillon may certainly be considered as an excellent artist. He published at Paris two volumes, and in them he gives a full explanation of the manner in which the engravings on wood of every species are performed, with a history of the art itself, deduced from the earliest æra of its appearance to his own time, together with an account of all the artists, and their works. And these volumes are replete with his performances, which do him great honour.

Before I quit the present subject, it is necessary that I should give some short account of another branch of this art, namely, that species of engraving on wood, which is distinguished by the appellation of *chiaro-scuro*. And first, with respect to the invention of it, which is claimed by the Germans, and by the Italians. The latter assert, that, soon after the commencement of the sixteenth century, Ugo da Carpi, a man of great ingenuity, discovered a mode of imitating slight drawings by the means of different blocks of wood. The Germans, on the other hand, produce several engravings by Mair, which are dated 1499, and one by Lucas Cranach, dated 1500, which are prior to the time, affixed by the Italians for the invention by da Carpi. This circumstance, even if we should suppose, that the prints by Mair are the first attempts in this style of engraving, is sufficient to prove the priority of the exercise of it in Germany. Baron Heineken is of opinion that the works of John Ulric are still more ancient than those by Mair; but I think the appearance of the prints themselves, which are admirable specimens of the art, do not by any means justify the assertion.

There is, however, a material difference between the *chiaro-scuro*'s of the old German masters, and those of the Italians. Mair and Cranach engraved the outlines and deep shadows upon the copper. The impression taken in this state was tinted over, by the means of a single block of wood, with those parts hollowed out, which were designed to be left quite white upon the print. On the contrary, the mode of engraving, adopted by Ugo da Carpi, was to cut the outlines on one block of wood; the dark shadows upon a second; and the light shadows or half tint upon a third. The first being impressed

