

MEMORY OF THE WORLD REGISTER

The *Mainz Psalter* at the Austrian National Library

(Austria)

Ref N° 2010-19

PART A – ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

1. Summary

On 14 August 1457, Peter Schöffer and his partner in business, Johann Fust, completed an edition of the psalms in their printing workshop in Mainz. With regard to its impact on the development of book printing, the *Mainz Psalter* comes a close second to the Gutenberg Bible: it is the earliest document of a printed text featuring multicoloured printed decoration, and the first example of a book produced entirely by means of mechanical methods.

It was also the first time that a printed volume carried a colophon containing the work's title, printer, and date of publication. Moreover, in the present case, it is explicitly mentioned in the colophon that the entire book was produced with the aid of printing methods, including the decoration, which was no longer added by book illuminators. Thus a complex problem with regard to the efficient production of books had been solved: for his printed edition of the Bible, Gutenberg had abandoned initial trials with red print and provided for gaps in the text, such as for headlines and initials, to be later filled by hand. In terms of both aesthetics and technology, the *Mainz Psalter*, being the oldest book that was printed throughout, represents the perfect prototype with regard to the further development of multicolour printing.

Only ten examples of the *Mainz Psalter* have survived worldwide in two variants, all of which are printed on vellum. The copy owned by the Austrian National Library is the only complete example of the larger edition (175 sheets), and it is also the only one in which the colophon contains the combined coat of arms of the Fust and Schöffer Press that was subsequently used in many of the workshop's printed products.

As to both its concept and making, the present Psalter edition, printed in Mainz in 1475, was of eminent importance for the evolution of modern Occidental history in terms of culture, media, and technology at the transition from the Middle Ages to the modern era. Among the material vestiges of this process – the surviving copies of the edition in question – the Vienna example ideally lends itself to research. Once preserved at the Habsburgs' Innsbruck court library as a collectible for bibliophiles, it has never been used in liturgy and has thus been preserved in its entirety and in rarely good condition.

2. Details of the Nominator

2.1.Name

Österreichische Nationalbibliothek (Austrian National Library)

2.2 Relationship to the documentary heritage nominated

Owner

2.3 Contact person

Andreas Fingernagel

2.4 Contact details

Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Sammlung von Handschriften und alten Drucken
(Austrian National Library, Department of Manuscripts and Rare Books)

Josefsplatz 1, 1015 Vienna, Austria

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(andreas.fingernagel@onb.ac.at)

3. Identity and Description of the Documentary Heritage

3.1 Name and identification details of the items being nominated

Psalter. With Ordinarium officii, Cantica, Tedeum, Symbolum Athanasianum, Litany of the Saints, Collectae, and Orationes. Appendix with Office of the Dead and Hymnal.

Mainz: Johann Fust and Peter Schöffer, 14 Aug. 1457

Hain 13479

Austrian National Library, Department of Manuscripts and Rare Books (ÖNB Ink 4.B.1)

3.2 Description

The Vienna copy of the Mainz Psalter consists of 175 vellum sheets in large folio format (408 x 300 mm) bound in gold-embossed red morocco (18th century).

The text is arranged in twenty lines per page, with printed music, initials, and ornamental letters in two sizes, printed in black, red, and blue. Psalter variant b (enlarged edition compared to the one comprising 143 sheets, with Office of the Dead and additional liturgical texts destined for the Mainz diocese).

4. Justification for Inclusion / Assessment against Criteria

4.1 Is authenticity established?

The Psalter's vellum body has entirely survived in its original condition, including the fifteenth-century vellum endpapers at the front and back, which have been incorporated into the eighteenth-century binding. Handwritten entries in Bastarda on the back endpaper suggest that the book was owned by the Benedictine Abbey of Remse in the fifteenth century, before it passed into the ownership of the Habsburg family: it first came to Innsbruck Castle (presumably No. 81 in the Innsbruck inventory), and in 1564, under Archduke Ferdinand of Tyrol, was transferred to Ambras Castle. According to the records kept by Peter Lambeck, the imperial librarian, the book was brought from Ambras to the Imperial Library in Vienna (today's Austrian National Library) in 1665.

4.2 Is world significance, uniqueness and irreplaceability established?

In printing the present Psalter, Peter Schöffer brought the technological and aesthetic possibilities of book production to perfection immediately after Gutenberg's printing of the Bible. Through a certain procedure that still cannot be traced back in all of its steps, Schöffer succeeded in incorporating two-coloured decorative letters printed from metal types into the text. Whereas Gutenberg's copies of the Bible were semi-finished products that still had to pass through the hands of book illuminators, the *Mainz Psalter* was the first book to pave the way for the production of elaborately decorated books exclusively made by mechanical methods.

The Psalter's printed colophon, likewise a novelty, explicitly indicates the workshop and production method and was deliberately included by the workshop for it to obtain further commissions.

All of the ten surviving copies bear testimony to this important step in the development of Occidental book production; the Vienna example, however, is the only complete edition

that has survived in its entirety and the only one carrying the combined coat of arms of the Fust and Schöffer Press in the colophon.

4.3 Is one or more of the criteria of (a) time, (b) place, (c) people, (d) subject and theme, (e) form and style satisfied?

(a) time + (d) subject and theme

The invention of European book printing with movable types, made by Johannes Gutenberg around 1450, was the ingenious response to efforts widely undertaken in the late Middle Ages to render book production more efficient through copying. “The Gutenberg Bible was the first major printed book, and the 1457 Psalter was the first completely-printed book” (Paul Needham). Whereas the Bible remained Gutenberg’s only edition of a printed book, the methods applied for the Psalter three years later led to the further development and improvement of printing, as well as to the employment of new techniques of mechanical book illustration and the integration of the production process into business plan that was to ensure success on a more long-term basis. Throughout the era of incunabula, the Fust and Schöffer Press produced some 250 books and broadsheets. After Schöffer’s death in 1503, his son Johann continued the business. Schöffer’s activities, of which the copies of his edition of the *Mainz Psalter* constitute the earliest documents, demonstrate a new method of book production that was to become a vehicle for the evolution of Occidental civilization and the basis of modern knowledge transfer.

(e) form and style

The *Mainz Psalter* is the first multicoloured printed work in the history of book printing. Whereas Gutenberg did not carry on with his experiments in red print and the individual printed copies of his Bible – “semi-finished products”, so to speak – had to be completed by hand, the Psalter shows red and blue printed initials and decorative letters in various sizes throughout that are accompanied by ornamental motifs in the opposite colour. The production method required for the colouring and combination of letters and ornamental types to be printed in three colours simultaneously, as well as for the types’ re-colouring in order to print the subsequent pages, has continued to be the subject of research to this very date. The surviving copies of the Psalter demonstrate the technologically perfect application of this method, from which resulted aesthetically unique masterpieces. They are all the more precious since due to the great production effort only few such multicoloured prints were made during the period of incunabula, and only a small number of them have come down to us.

The combination of typeset text and metal engraving as a method of letterpress book printing paved the way in terms of printing technology for the later production of illustrated books (primarily such featuring woodcuts).

4.4 Are there issues of rarity, integrity, threat and management that relate to this nomination?

The 1457 *Mainz Psalter*, ten copies of which have survived worldwide in two variants, is much rarer than the Gutenberg Bible (49 copies). From the five copies of the smaller edition (143 sheets), the Ryland copy is complete, while from the five copies of the larger edition (175 sheets), only the Vienna copy has survived in its entirety. The Vienna copy is almost untrimmed and, having been treated as a collectible for bibliophiles by the Habsburg family since the early sixteenth century, seems to have never been used in liturgy. Its excellent condition has been documented internationally (comp. Seymour De Ricci, 1911; Irvine Masson, 1954).

Since 1969, the copy owned by the Austrian National Library (ÖNB Ink 4.B.1) has been available as a facsimile accompanied by a commentary volume by Otto Mazal: *Der Mainzer Psalter von 1457*. Dietikon-Zurich 1968. 175 pages. *Kommentar zum Faksimiledruck von Otto Mazal*. With a preface by Aloys Ruppel. 1969. 90 pages.

5. Legal Information

5.1 Owner of the documentary heritage (name and contact details)

Federal Republic of Austria

Contact:

Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Sammlung von Handschriften und alten Drucken
(Austrian National Library, Department of Manuscripts and Rare Books)

Josefsplatz 1, 1015 Vienna, Austria

Tel.: +43/1/53410/290, Fax: +43/1/53410/296

(andreas.fingernagel@onb.ac.at)

5.2 Custodian of the documentary heritage (name and contact details, if different to the owner)

Dr. Andreas Fingernagel (Head of Department)

5.3. Legal status

(a) Category of ownership

Public

(b) Accessibility

The access for scholars is restricted to the facsimile. In special cases with evidence of scholarly interest access in the Reading Room of the Department of Manuscripts and Rare Books under the supervision of qualified attendants is possible.

(c) Copyright status

Copyright with the owner, the Austrian National Library.

(d) Responsible administration

Sammlung von Handschriften und alten Drucken der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek
(Department of Manuscripts and Rare Books, Austrian National Library)

6. Management Plan

6.1 Is there a management plan on existence for this documentary heritage:

Yes.

The 1457 Mainz Psalter is one of the treasures of the Austrian National Library. There are guidelines that define storage and access in terms of safety and conditions for preservation. The object is stored under climatic conditions in an area secured by an alarm system. In order to avoid damage from overly frequent handling and in consideration of its extreme value both materially and immaterially, access to the original is restricted (see 5.3b).

For the 1457 Mainz Psalter the facsimile serves the demand of reproductions, but there are ektachroms available in the Picture Archives of the Austrian National Library.

7. Consultation

7.1 Provide details of consultation about this nomination with (a) the owner of the heritage (b) the custodian (c) your national or regional Memory of the World committee

The nomination was prepared by the custodian and is lodged by the owner in cooperation with the Austrian National Committee for the Memory of the World Program.

Part B – Subsidiary Information

8. Assessment of Risk

8.1 Detail the nature and scope of threats to this documentary heritage

The 1457 Mainz Psalter is in excellent order and condition. The observation of strict guidelines has kept it from experiencing direct or indirect damages (see 6.1). Apart from normal ageing process, no forthcoming variation of its state has been observed. There are no known unusual occurrences that have caused damages in the past.

9. Assessment of Preservation

9.1 Detail the preservation context of the documentary heritage

The 1457 Mainz Psalter is well preserved and maintained under satisfactory and permanently reviewed conditions in the Department of Manuscripts and Rare Books of the Austrian National Library. The guidelines for its safety (see 6.1.) are strictly observed.