

A hand-colored blockbook devoted to the Passion of Christ

Passio Christi. Germany, ca. 1470?. 5 1/2 inches x 3 3/4 inches (140 x 95 mm), 42 pages, hand-colored illustrations throughout.

Blockbooks are illustrated volumes whose pictures and text were printed from carved wooden blocks rather than movable type. Contemporary with the earliest incunables, these were not simply precursors of illustrated books, but were rather a parallel form of publication for a different audience. The readers of blockbooks were accustomed to bold execution and modest production: nonetheless the medium boasts a number of striking works that reflect complex iconographic traditions. Movable type quickly superseded the xylographic medium, making blockbook examples extremely rare today.

The *Passio Christi* (Passion, or Suffering, of Christ) is a private devotional book pairing scenes of the tormented final hours of Jesus of Nazareth with short prayers and meditations. In this book, the text is printed on the verso of the leaf with the corresponding picture, preventing the separation of the image and text. The tale of the Passion is presented in the Catholic, Anglican, Episcopalian, and Lutheran churches as the Stations (or Way) of the Cross; this devotional prayer may be offered at any point in the year, but is ordinarily done during Lent — in particular on Good Friday.

This rarity from the matchless Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection at the Library of Congress is bound along with another blockbook, *Ars moriendi* (Germany, ca. 1475?), and is believed to be the work of an artist from either Ulm or the nearby city of Augsburg. It is in an eighteenth-century red morocco binding with gilt decorations from which arms have been effaced (front and back). The earliest recorded owner of this blockbook was the Russian prince Mikhail Aleksandrovich Golitsyn (1804–60), who described the book in the *Bulletin du Bibliophile* — see vol. 24 (1858) p. 836 and vol. 26 (1859) p. 276. The volume is also described on pp. 31–34 (no. 58) of the *Catalogue des livres de la bibliothèque du prince Michel Golitzin* (Moscow, 1866), a posthumous production by Charles Gunzbourg based on the collector's "notes autographes." It was sold at Sotheby's on 13 April 1931, passing into the hands of James Clark Maquire, at whose sale on 6 August

1937 it was bought by A.S.W. Rosenbach for Lessing J. Rosenwald.

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