

The *editio princeps* of the works of a remarkable tenth-century canoness and “strong voice”

Hrosvitha, *Opera Hrosvite illustris virginis et monialis germane*.
Nuremberg: Conrad Celtis, 1501. 12 3/5 inches x 8 1/2 inches (320 x 216 mm), 164 pages, 8 full-page woodcuts.

Hrotsvit of Gandersheim was a learned and accomplished tenth-century Saxon canoness — not a nun, for Gandersheim was an abbey. The name is derived from the Old Saxon *hruot* (voice) and *suid* (strong): in the introduction to one of her plays, in fact, Hrotsvit describes herself as “clamor validus Gandeshemensis” (the strong voice of Gandersheim). Her work, here first collected in print, consists of a short poem, two epics, six plays, and eight legends. These reveal her to have been a pioneer in a remarkable number of fields and genres. Hrotsvit is the earliest known Christian dramatist, the first female historian in Germany, and the first Saxon poet. Her hexameter epics are the only surviving Latin epics written by a woman.

Hrotsvit’s works remained in manuscript until rediscovered in the late fifteenth century. In 1493, the German poet and humanist Conrad Celtis found the Emmeran Codex (now in the Munich State Library), an incomplete manuscript that was, until 1902, the only known source for Hrotsvit’s writings. His publication of this first edition of her works in 1501 created something of a literary sensation amongst the patriotic Germans, avid to establish an illustrious Teutonic past, a literary link to the Holy Roman Empire. Not only was Hrotsvit a hitherto unknown precursor of much that the Renaissance humanist held valuable, but she provided a distinct — even unique — female approach, being the earliest medieval poet to have broken with the traditional or conventional treatment of women in literature.

This copy from Bridwell Library at Southern Methodist University is bound in old vellum, with contrasting morocco title and date labels. There is a name-stamp on recto of aii: “Ex Bibl. Ios. Ren. Card. Imperialis,” the armorial bookplate of “The Hon. Edward Petrie,” and the circular bookplate of Walter Sneyd, with a note at top of front pastedown “ouvrage très rare” (referring to the [Lomenie] de Brienne copy sold in 1818). The book

also contains some contemporary marginal annotation.

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