An Investigation of a Printer’s Block (Manchester, John Rylands Library, 17252)
The Earliest Extant Woodblock Printing Apparatus or an Eighteenth Century Creation

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1. Introduction

The transmission of the textual and visual elements of the picture-book Apocalypses was relatively static from its emergence in the mid-thirteenth century, witnessed by the circa 1250 Anglo-Norman Paris Apocalypse (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS. fr. 403), a manuscript which is supposed to be the first extant of the illustrated Gothic Apocalypse genre. Closely related in imagery to the Paris Apocalypse, though laid out in double registers and using Latin as the language of transmission, are two slightly later Anglo-Norman Apocalypses (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Auct. D.4.17 and New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, Ms. M. 524) which also align with a Franco-Flemish Apocalypse dated to the third quarter of the fourteenth century (Manchester, John Rylands Library MS. Latin 19). As one of the first genres reproduced via xylographic technique, the manuscript and woodblock Apocalypses, individually and collectively, stand as an important case study for the complicated shift from manuscript-based book production to print-based book production in the fifteenth century. The Schreiber numbered I and IV woodblock Apocalypses correspond to the Manchester Apocalypse as closely as the technological shift from manuscript to print would allow. Thus, a cycle of images ranging from the thirteenth century to the fifteenth century is established and withstands major social, economic, and technological changes. The culture which would have read the Paris Apocalypse was a very different culture that which would have read the Manchester Apocalypse or the blockbook iterations. The spectrum of cultures was divided (in broad strokes and
among other factors) by the effects of the Hundred Years War, the Black Plague, the advent of new printing technology, and the perhaps then-imperceptible waning of the Middle Ages.

Yet, it is possible that this set of images was carried forward past the Reformation, into the eighteenth century by way of a curious item, now housed in the John Rylands Library, in Manchester—a block of wood, carved with the double register representation of one folia of vita of St. John, complete with the Latin text in the banderole. This woodblock (Manchester, John Rylands Library, 17252) [fig. 1] may be the oldest extant printer’s block, or it may be an eighteenth-century creation laden with political and religious implications for England in the early-to-mid eighteenth century. However, the imagery does not exactly match any known printed blockbook Apocalypses, casting doubt on this fifteenth-century authenticity. Letters, dated 1781 and 1799, accompany the object, referring to its location about twenty-five years earlier—thus the provenance is traceable from about 1760 to 1901 (when it became permanently housed in the Rylands Library). But, before the eighteenth century, its provenance is unknown and unverifiable. Given that an earlier date cannot be verified by provenance details, the suggestion that the block was created at its earliest recorded point, in the eighteenth century, must be entertained. Since we do not currently have the scientific evidence—via carbon dating or dendrochronology—to build a definite argument for a fifteenth or eighteenth genesis for this block, my analysis bifurcates to consider the block’s importance in either scenario.
This article does not seek to definitively date this woodblock, nor, indeed, to come down on one side or the other of the dating debate. Rather, I intend to draw attention to this lesser-studied object by providing description and provenance details followed by a basic consideration of its importance as a fifteenth-century object and as an eighteenth-century object equally, in order to see how the two cultures engaged with their medieval antecedent. I will begin my analysis by providing an objective description of the item, to be followed by retrospective examination of the cultural significance of the thirteenth-century image cycle from which it comes. This description will facilitate a précis of the provenance, leading into a brief examination of the men who owned the block before Lord Spencer and ultimately Rylands’ acquisition. Finally, I will look at how the woodblock’s cultural situation in the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries and how modern scholarship can study it.

The dimensions of the woodblock, figured above, are 202 mm x 272 mm. As expected due to the xylographic printing process, only one side of the board is carved and an anopisthographic print would have been produced. The carved side shows two registers. The top shows two figures bringing St. John before the Prefect, who sits on a crocketed throne, a lap dog is perched on an arm of the throne. A fifth figure stands next to the Prefect, hat removed, pointing at John; the artist has placed a tree in the background between this man and John. Above this scene, the description “Trahamus lownem ad prefectum qui ydolorum culturam adniichilait” has been carved into an undulating banderole. The artist has been at pains to create a font that closely resembles the Northern Gothic textualis script of manuscript culture, and the letter forms are an accurate depiction of this script. The bottom panel shows the exile of John, as two men help him into the boat, with two others already in the vessel. The sail of the boat is furled, and the mast tethered by four ropes. There are two trees, and texture indicates the difference between land (with grass) and sea (with waves). Above the panel, a banderole captions the scene: “Sanctus Iohannes mittitur ac domiciano imperatori crudelissimo christianorum persecutori praesentatur”.

Without specialized laboratory analysis, such as that undertaken to identify the wood of the Berlin-housed Albrecht Altdorfer blocks in 1964, it is difficult to definitively make a claim regarding the type of wood used. Boxwood, nut wood, and fruit wood, such as pear, cherry, and apple were popular choices, though the latter was an imported commodity. Landau and Parshall remind us that identifying woods without scientific processes is very difficult. The Altdorfer blocks were, for example, thought to be boxwood until proven to be European maple.

There is almost no evidence of use. The relief is sharp and shows no indication that it underwent the rubbing of early xylography on paper or cloth or the pressure of a press. Though early print was often used for cloth, to create devotional items or for covering church installations, it is unlikely, due to the content and dimensions of this block, that it was used for such cloth. There are some minor areas where the relief has been chipped, possibly due to mishandling at some point rather than regular use, exposing the lighter colored wood. Unfortunately, the block was used in the early twentieth century and the two prints produced from that use are housed along with the block. This modern experiment may have covered or washed any remaining contemporary ink that might have lingered in the crevasses, though it seems that there is no ink on the block. The contemporary ink would have been water based and would have produced brown lines. The twentieth century print [fig. 2] does not correspond to
any known, currently extant blockbooks. That is to say, that though the double paneled image is clearly dependent on early sources, the prints produced by this block are different enough from other woodblock prints that the lines do not overlap. Though the twentieth century print seems to be very close to Oxford, Bodleian Library Auct. M. 3.15 p. 2, detailed scrutiny of the two images show that the block could not have produced the Bodleian’s printing.

Figure 2
Twentieth Century Print Housed with Rylands Block

2. Situating the Rylands Block in the Past and Present

Regardless of whether the block originated in the fifteenth or eighteenth century, it operates to cast a retrospective glance at an earlier stage of the Middle Ages. As an artefact, at the earliest situated on the precipice of the Medieval transitioning into Early Modern (the terms given to these dates by modern, retrospective scholarship), and at the latest situated towards the end of the Early Modern period, the woodblock offers insight into the way the High Medieval was re-cast by later cultures. The woodblock demonstrates the endurance – the postmedieval life – of the thirteenth-century Anglo-Norman Apocalypse image cycle, and offers a site to analyze the change in readerly and cultural reception of this text-image complex. Since the images on the Rylands block (and the related blockbook prints) derive from the earlier manuscript tradition, we must begin our understanding with a look at the image cycle as it was conceived and understood by its original audience.
2.1 Medieval Contextualization of Image

In order to understand the significance of the woodblock as either a late medieval printing apparatus or an eighteenth-century fabrication, the earlier medieval precedent of the image cycle must be established and the cultural reception must be considered. Several book length works have considered the long history of the illustrated Apocalypse genre. Particularly Suzanne Lewis’ work is useful for understanding the thirteenth century cultural context of the Anglo-Norman Apocalypse genre. Lewis’ work, however, remains in the purview of the thirteenth century and in the Anglo-Norman culture. Richard Emmerson’s latest publication provides a solid foundation for understanding the protean cultural context of the Apocalypse genre, but given the breadth of study, he could not devote too much investigation into any single manuscript, or stemma, of manuscripts.

The Gothic, illustrated Apocalypse genre, as it became defined by image cycle and variations text and gloss, began in the mid-thirteenth century in the cultural purview of French-speaking English nobility. The transition from the ecclesiastically or monastically produced and received Latin Apocalypses to the Anglo-French Apocalypses intended for private devotion (or guided readings) for a lay audience maps temporally and culturally on the rise of the post-Conquest vernacular and the courtly/romance literature of Anglo-French culture. Relative to these later Anglo-French Apocalypses, there are only a few extant illustrated Apocalypse manuscripts dating from between 800 and 1250, and even fewer that come from what would become the Francophone region of the Carolingian and Ottonian empires and the post-Conquest British Isles. As previous scholars, such as Lewis and Emmerson, have noted, the Paris Apocalypse is likely based on an earlier, now lost model. We can speculate, but we cannot know, whether there was a slow transition out of the esoteric, that is anagogical, rendering of the Book of Revelation, as seen in the Carolingian Apocalypse cycles, to the more concrete Anglo-French style of imagery, or whether it emerged ex nihilo: the transitional manuscripts, if there ever were any, simply have not survived.

The extant corpus of Anglo-French Apocalypses presents text in Anglo-Norman, Latin, and, in some cases, the text alternates between the two languages. The variation in language, coupled with the relatively static image cycles even outside of the Paris-Morgan-Bodleian-Manchester family, suggests that the patrons and those who may have bought without commissioning the manuscripts were varied in their ability to navigate the Latin of the biblical text and/or gloss. In fact, Lewis pointed out that the Morgan Apocalypses required the ability to read the Latin banderoles in order to fully understand the image panels, implying that the construction of the Paris Apocalypse’s text image complex, which uses Anglo-Norman as the language of transmission, attempts to make the images comprehensible to a reader without Latin. She indicated that the layout of the Paris Apocalypse (single-paneled with extensive Anglo-Norman text below the image) compared to the Morgan (double paneled, with the only text in Latin, incorporated into images) supports this push to make the text image complex more accessible; she used the no longer extant Metz Apocalypse as an example of a single paneled Apocalypse, like the Paris, but in which the text is Latin. That the Paris Apocalypse employs the vernacular while the roughly contemporary Morgan (and later Bodleian and Manchester Apocalypses as well) render the text and glosses in Latin re-enforces the transitional nature of the Paris Apocalypse.
There are twenty-three thirteenth-century Apocalypse manuscripts of English origin and there are only three (extant) thirteenth-century Apocalypse manuscripts of French origin. Of the twenty-three manuscripts of English origin, six have indications that they were owned early on by nunneries, monasteries, and even a pope. The numbers of extant Apocalypses increase in the fourteenth century to twenty-eight which can be localized to England, France, Flanders, and Germany. Between 1250 and 1285 there are a total of eighteen versions of the Apocalypse with stand-alone text. Throughout both centuries, the language of these manuscripts is either Latin or Anglo-Norman French, with some manuscripts, such as the Nuneaton Book, displaying bilingual texts.

Renana Bartal’s study of the fourteenth-century illustrated Apocalypses cited the works of F. D. Klingender, Robert Freyhan, and the facsimile of the Apocalipsis Gulbenkian in order to illustrate three important cultural moments that gave rise to the popularity of the thirteenth-century illustrated Anglo-French Apocalypses. These moments are Joachim de Fiore’s commentary on Revelation; the Fourth Lateran Council of 2015; and the potent entanglement of chivalry and the Crusades. While these events very much influenced the Zeitgeist of the thirteenth century and lingered into the fourteenth, by the advent of xylographic print techniques, a new set of controlling cultural pressures guided book production and reception.

As the numbers of extant manuscripts demonstrate, the Anglo-Norman picture book Apocalypses proliferated, and in the fourteenth century, we have examples of German and Flemish productions using similar image cycles and Latin texts. Examples of these productions include the Manchester Apocalypse, the Wellcome Apocalypse (London, Wellcome Institute, MS. 49), and, London, British Library, Additional 19896. The question modern scholarship must reckon with is if the rate of survival in due to an increased rate of production or if it merely reflects that more books from this century happened to have been preserved without suggesting anything about production numbers. I believe, in the case of the illustrated Apocalypse genre, that the increased rate of survival does correlate to increased production numbers. This is evidenced by the multiple mediums on which these cycles appear (manuscripts, frescos, tapestries, xylographic prints); the conspicuous consumption aspect of having a book with an image cycle also owned by, for example, Charles V; and, the demonstrable endurance of the text-image complex from the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries.

2.2 History of the Woodblock

The woodblock has a well-documented provenance from the current day to the mid-eighteenth century. The block was bought by Enriquetta Rylands (1843-1908) in 1901 and is a part of the Spenser Collection. Before its incorporation into the Rylands collection, Lord George John Spenser, 2nd Earl Spenser (1756-1834), owned the block. A note dated to February 17th, 1799, accompanies the block, explaining a further provenance, tracing the it from Thomas Astle (1735-1803) back to Major Thompson of the Surrey Militia to Sir Peter Thompson (1698-1770) and to its first recorded owner, Joseph Ames (c.1687-1789).

According to Francis Grose, Joseph Ames was “a very little man, of mean aspect, and still meaner abilities.” Ames began his apprenticeship under Thomas Granford as a plane maker in the Joiners’ Company on 7 March 1704; this biographical detail may be a clue about the genesis of the woodcut, though it is a very inconclusive one. We know
that a woodcut must be carved onto “a planed woodblock prepared for drawing... free of knots and splits and properly finished to a very smooth, flat surface”\textsuperscript{27}– which is to say that it is possible, though not probable, that Ames used his training as a joiner to create the plank, if the Rylands block is in fact eighteenth century. Ames, Reverend John Russel, the future Sir Peter Thompson, and John Lewis met around 1720, and they began discussing and encouraging each other’s scholarship on the history of English printing\textsuperscript{28}. Ames’ work granted him fellowship to the Society of Antiquarians (1736), and election to the Royal Society (1743). He visited his friend, Peter Thompson, in Poole (1755) to use his library, as well, of the libraries at Cambridge and Oxford. In 1757, he declined the invitation to become a trustee of the British Museum, in part due to power tensions, and in fact withdrew his intended donation of his collection to the museum\textsuperscript{29}. Ames’ magnum opus, \textit{Typographical antiquities}\textsuperscript{30}, manifested his dedication to the source material as he states that he “did not chuse [sic] to copy into [his] book from catalogues, but from the books themselves”\textsuperscript{31}. Suggesting the possibility of authenticity of the Rylands block, Ames collection did include a "specimen museum" to support his research on the history of print\textsuperscript{32}. This possibility is also supported by Grose’ observation that Ames had collected a considerable number of blockbooks and "other curiosities"\textsuperscript{33}. After his death, Ames’ collection of manuscripts and prints was sold between May 5-10, 1760 by Mr. Langford\textsuperscript{34}. The content of the sale was catalogued\textsuperscript{35}.

16 The Rylands Block, however, came to Sir Peter Thompson, a Hamburgh merchant, who inherited a estate at Poole (1739), where he built his house (1746), retired (1763), and died (Oct. 30, 1770). In 1743, Thompson was elected as a Fellow of the Society of Antiquarians\textsuperscript{36}. He bequeathed his library, including the Block, to Peter Thompson, Esq., who had been a captain in the Surrey Militia (1782)\textsuperscript{37}. In April 29, 1815, Captain Thompson sold many items from the collection\textsuperscript{38}.

17 Thomas Astle was the next owner of the Block. Described as studious and educated, he was most likely on course to study law, until his induction as a Fellow of the Society of Antiquarians (1763) and his patronage by George Grenville, First Lord of the Treasury and Chancellor Exchequer\textsuperscript{39}. In 1775, Astle was appointed as Chief Clerk in the Record Office of the Tower of London, and in 1783 he rose in rank, becoming the Keeper of the Rolls and Records\textsuperscript{40}. Prior to this, in 1761, he indexed the Harley manuscripts for the British Museum and in 1778, he became a trustee of the British Museum\textsuperscript{41}. As a collector himself, he was known to have purchased items such as British Library, Stowe charters 1-42 (pre-Conquest charters), British Library, Stowe Ms 2 (an eleventh-century psalter with Old English Glosses)\textsuperscript{42}. As per his will, upon his death in 1803, George Grenville, first marquess of Buckingham\textsuperscript{43}, was given first refusal rights of his manuscripts, for the sum of £500. Later in 1879, the manuscripts were purchased by Bertram Ashburnham and from there, the manuscripts diffused into the British government’s collection, the Royal Irish Academy, and the British Museum\textsuperscript{44}. In 1784, Astle published \textit{The Origin and Progress of Writing}.

18 In addition to the note from 1799, there is a later-copied note (from the Spencer-era ownership) bearing the text from an earlier document by the art collector Charles Rogers (1711-1784), written on January 15\textsuperscript{th}, 1781, to Thomas Astle\textsuperscript{45}. Rogers’ letter details the scholarly knowledge of the block and woodblock printing current to the late 1700s.
3. The Dual Potentials of the Rylands Block

What remains is speculative, and must remain speculative until scientific research can suggest a date or until a fifteenth-century blockbook is found which that matches the block’s lines exactly – a near impossibility. So we are left with the questions of potential post-medieval significance of this object.

3.1 The Woodblock as a Fifteenth-century Print Apparatus

What is the significance for modern scholarship if the block is an authentic fifteenth-century printer’s apparatus that may have been used in a limited run? While modern scholarship has many exempla of finished and partially finished manuscripts and early print, we lack extant examples of the tools and intermediary stages of production. If the Rylands block is authentic, then it must be compared with later examples of woodcuts to determine how technique may have changed and if it correlates with improvement in the technology. If it is authentic, then its importance lays more within the realm of understanding the history of book production.

Within the sphere of manuscript production, we have an analog example of production translation from template to finished product. Housed in the Bibliothèque Royale in Brussels is a single leaf of a template for an illustrated Apocalypse (Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale [BR], Ms. IV.834), the progeny of which would have been aligned in the same family as this woodblock and with some of the preceding manuscripts in the same family. Comparing the template leaf with extant, finished manuscripts, we can understand what types of decisions were left, or available, to the individual illustrator. These decisions show the variations that could proliferate across multiple copies of a manuscript produced from one template. The BR Apocalypse template implies that there was a great deal of opportunity for texture and artistic flavor. The artists of the various manuscripts choose to texture the locusts – the horse-bodied, human headed figures emerging from the abyss, helpfully labeled locuste in the Morgan, Bodleian, and Manchester versions of this scene – which are otherwise rendered blank in the template. Most of Paris locusts have a C-shaped pattern resembling the armed man’s mail discussed above, whereas only one backgrounded locust in the Morgan has the C-shaped pattern. The foregrounded locust is shaggy and stippled and the other ones are variously scaled or furred. The Bodleian, though slightly closer to the Morgan, confirms the difference in technique of rendering texture. Further, the faces on the template are, as expected, simple.

The block gives modern scholars clues about the process of translating text image complexes from manuscript culture into print. The extant printed blockbooks can be and have been compared with the manuscript tradition within the sphere of reception; with the potential of a fifteenth century woodcut, modern scholars are able to compare production and artistic choices during the nascent stages of print. Further, if this is the earliest known printing apparatus, it may shed light on the debate regarding whether the earliest center for European print lay in the Netherlands or in Germany, depending on localization of the wood, adjacency of both the translation from manuscript to print and the other extant prints, as Schreiber categorized them.
3.2 The Woodblock as an Eighteenth-century Creation

As an eighteenth-century creation, the Rylands block raises many questions which bring to light among other cultural nuances, nascent antiquarianism in England and the continued tensions between Catholicism and Protestantism. During the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, antiquarianism emerged to support swelling claims of national and religious identity. The Middle Ages became “a bric à brac shop from which [the likes of Horace Walpole] could pick out material for an elegant and (inaccurate) historical essay”\textsuperscript{47}. With issues of accuracy or inaccuracy aside, the fact remains that the emergence of eighteenth-century antiquarianism saw a turn from the Renaissance’s dismissal of the Middle Ages, towards a revival of interest in this period. Richard Gough, for example, “deplored the neglect of Gothic architecture”\textsuperscript{48}, which was falling to ruin in England. British antiquarians viewed artefacts, not only as corroborating evidence, but as items that “when properly assembled would yield historical truths which would compensate for the ‘deficiency of antient records’”\textsuperscript{49}.

Just as it stands as an antiquarian item in the eighteenth century, the Rylands Block also stands as a piece of Catholicism in that it harkens back to the Catholic Middle Ages and, rather than featuring an illustration from the orthodox, canonical Book of Revelations, it shows a piece of hagiography. Sandwiched between the anti-Catholic 1698 Popery Act and the Papist Act 1778 and the 1780 Gordon Riots, the perhaps incendiary choice of the hagiographical image and of the Apocalyptic sentiment attached reinforces the link between Catholicism and the Gothic Middle Ages for the English eighteenth century.

Regardless of whether the Rylands Block was created in the eighteenth century for the purpose of objective study and experimentation or subjective steering the understanding of the Catholic Middle Ages, or if it was an authentically medieval object, found and collected by Joseph Ames, it remains a glimpse backwards.

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John Nichols, *Literary Anecdotes of the Eighteenth Century: Comprizing Biographical Memoires of William Bowyer, Printer, F.S.A. and Many of His Learned Friends; An Incidental View of the Progress and Advancement of Literature in this Kingdom During the Last Century and Biographical Anecdotes of a Considerable number of Eminent Writers and Ingenious Artists*. vol. v., printed by Nichols, Son, and Bentley, at Cicero’s Head, Red-Lion-Passage, Fleet Street, 1812.

*Id.*. *Literary Anecdotes of the Eighteenth Century: Comprizing Biographical Memoires of William Bowyer, Printer, F.S.A. and Many of His Learned Friends; An Incidental View of the Progress and Advancement of Literature in this Kingdom During the Last Century and Biographical Anecdotes of a Considerable number...*
NOTES

1. The Paris Apocalypse consists of half-register images, illustrating the narrative of the Book of Revelation, which is situated below the images and married to an Anglo-Norman Berengaudus-derived gloss. In 1901, Paul Meyer and Léopold Delisle examined certain aspects of the Paris Apocalypse, but their lasting contribution was the classification of the related Apocalypses into "families". This stemmatology has remained relatively current for studies of the Anglo-Norman Apocalypses, despite George Henderson's disputation of it. See George Henderson, "Part II: The English Apocalypse: I", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 30, 1967, p. 104-137, p. 106.

Much scholarship on these Apocalypses, in fact, has in the past revolved around issues of stemmatology, neglecting the individual manuscripts within the set in favor of convoluted, and unprovable, hypotheses of primacy and influence.


3. The Manchester Apocalypse, slightly more than a century later than the Morgan and Bodleian Apocalypses, copied their format and text almost exactly, either through direct contact or a secondary medium, like a template, or third, no longer extant, French or Franco-Flemish copy. The Manchester Apocalypse is laid out in double registers, with the Latin text embedded in the banderoles. Of the three "copies", the Manchester is the only complete manuscript.

4. According to Nigel Palmer, the Apocalypse stood alongside the *Biblia pauperum*, the *Ars moriendi*, and the *Canticum canticorum* as standard early blockbook productions. See Nigel Palmer,

5. Similar to Delisle and Meyer’s study of the stemma of Apocalypse manuscripts, Schreiber produced a ‘handlist’ of Apocalypse blockbooks, giving the ‘families’ (i.e. print sets) numbers. See Wilhelm Ludwig Schreiber, Manuel de l’amateur de la gravure sur bois et sur métal au XV siècle. vol. I & II. Berlin, A. Cohn, 1891.

6. Frank Taylor touts it as “the only surviving fifteenth-century block used in this kind of work [xylography], which we are fortunate enough to possess and which shows the same scenes (fol. 2 from an unknown edition). As far as details are concerned the manuscript and the earlier block-book (c. 1440) are more closely allied, as are the block and the later block book (c. 1465) “, see Frank Taylor, “Notes and News”, The Bulletin of the John Rylands Library 50, n°2, Spring 1968, p. 237-246, p. 237. Taylor may be correct about the uniqueness of the object as a fifteenth century woodcut, though there are other examples of Early Modern woodcuts. See David Landau and Peter W. Parshall, The Renaissance Print, 1470-1550, Yale University Press, 1994, p. 376, n. 92, which briefly cite the Derschau collections of mostly sixteenth-century woodcuts housed in the Kupferstichkabinett, Staatlich Museen, Berlin ; the Musée de l’Imprimerie de la Banque, Lyons, containing woodcuts from the sixteenth to eighteenth century; and the Galleria Estense, Modena has 2,600 blocks, some of which appear to be early.


15. Ibid.


24. The note reads: “For an account of this Block, and of the work for which it belonged, see Mr. Astle Publication, on the origin and process of writing p. 216 Note (1) & p. 216 & 7 Note (2). / This Block was formerly the property of Mr. Joseph Ames— afterwards of Sir Peter Thompson Knight[1] from whom it came to his nephew Major Thompson of the Surry Militia, who presented it to Mr. A about 25 years ago. February 17th 1799”.


27. Landau and Parshall, p. 22.


29. Ibid.

30. Full title: Typographical antiquities, being an historical account of printing in England, with some memoirs of our antient printers, and a register of the books printed by them, from the year 1471 to 1600, with an appendix concerning printing in Scotland and Ireland at the same time.


33. Grose, The Olio: being a collection..., op. cit., p. 133. Grose further states that Ames was “totally ignorant of every language but English, which last he did not speak with the greatest purity. He pretended to be a draughtsman – his performances were such as would disgrace a boy of ten years old”.

34. John Nichols. Literary Anecdotes of the Eighteenth Century... vol. v, printed by Nichols, Son, and Bentley, at Cicero’s Head, Red-Lion-Passage, Fleet Street, 1812, p. 265.


37. Ibid.


42. Ibid.

43. Ibid.

44. Ibid.


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**ABSTRACTS**

Housed in the United Kingdom, at the John Rylands Library in Manchester (item number 17252), the xylographic printing block that we study in this article has an uncertain date. Some scholars believe that it dates to the fifteenth century and that it is, consequently, the oldest extant woodblock printing apparatus. Other scholars believe that it was made in the eighteenth century and it imitates the medieval iconography. Lacking more scientific investigations, the exact date of the woodblock cannot be established. Our article investigates both possibilities of dating in regard to the iconographic tradition (the carved image on the block represents a scene from the life of St. John, largely inspired by the illustrated Apocalypses of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries) and of our understanding of the block. We examine, therefore, the status of the block as an object that is an authentic fifteenth-century object and as an eighteenth-century imitation.

Conservé au Royaume-Uni, à la John Rylands Library de Manchester (cote 17252), le bloc d'imprimerie xylographique que nous étudions dans cet article est de datation incertaine. Pour certains il remonterait au xve siècle et il serait par conséquent le plus ancien outil d'imprimeur en bois que nous conservons. Pour d'autres il aurait été fabriqué siècle xviiié et imiterait l'iconographie médiévale. Faute d'investigations scientifiques plus poussées, la date exacte du bloc de bois ne peut pas être établie. Notre article envisage donc les deux hypothèses de datation au regard la tradition iconographique (l'image gravée sur ce bloc représente une scène de la vie de saint Jean largement inspirée des Apocalypses figurées des xiiié et xivé siècles) et de nos connaissances sur l'histoire de ce bloc. Nous examinons ainsi le statut cet objet selon qu'il est un authentique artefact du siècle xve siècle , ou selon qu'il est une imitation du xviié siècle.

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