

Who Made the Geese Book?

Volker Schier and Corine Schleif

Georg Rayl

Speaker 2

At least one other St. Lorenz cleric prepared liturgical manuscripts. It was Georg Rayl. Inventories of books that were still present in the St. Lorenz sacristy in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries list a two-volume choir book – perhaps also a gradual like the Geese Book – that Rayl completed in 1475. The work is listed along with several old parchment books and it is described as “very finely written and ornamented with painted initials.” A two-volume antiphoner that he wrote in 1471 for the parish of St. Sebald survives in a Nuremberg school library. Rayl included his name in the colophon, and the date in a bas-de-page design. As was common for liturgical books, this antiphoner too contains historiated initials. These illustrate stories pertaining to church festivals, for example the story of Pentecost. Some include the application of gold leaf, as in the initial for Easter showing Christ’s resurrection. An artist was undoubtedly hired to provide these. Far more creative are the unique calligraphic flourishes and caricature-like faces embedded in the less important initials and emerging from the extensions of letters, often serving as fanciful bas-de-page miniatures. Executed with pen and black ink, finished off with subtle and judiciously chosen pastel colors—pink, green, yellow, and blue, with small amounts of red—all applied with a brush, these one-of-a-kind cartoon-like drawings enliven the pages. Rayl himself must have fashioned them, since they continue in the same self-assured practiced scribal hand. Many are rendered with great economy of means—faces composed of but a few steady strokes of the pen. Although some faces seem to peer out frontally from the manuscript, most appear as distinctive, sometimes almost deformed profiles. All are male. Although some sport outlandish head coverings, many of the heads are suggestive of those of clerics, several wearing miters, some wearing cowls, many appearing to be tonsured. These features suggest

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A list of the archival sources, bibliography, and an index of the art objects and architecture shown in the videos can be found under the button „sources“ on this web site.

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that Rayl may have intended them as self-reflexive of their users, the clerics of St. Sebald who sang from the books when they gathered in the choir stalls seven times each day for the offices during the canonical hours. He has also placed special emphasis on the mouths. Several stick out their tongues, a contortion expressing disrespect, common in marginalia and corbel sculptures since the early Middle Ages. With many others Rayl seems to have been playing with metaphorical notions of sound and song emanating from the mouths. In some cases it is a single continuous stroke of the pen, from which twigs, branches, or floral arrangements emerge.

It need not surprise us that someone so adept at compiling and decorating a liturgical manuscript might act as an advisor for another work that was commissioned. Sources show that in 1490-91 Rayl was consulted by the Collegiate Church of Neunkirchen am Brand, located north of Nuremberg, when this church commissioned Nuremberg artisans to fashion an elaborate monstrance. The work survives to the present day and is still used in Corpus Christi processions.

Speaker 1

Was the church of St. Lorenz a center for the production of liturgical manuscripts? The question cannot be easily answered. We have evidence of two names of priests from St. Lorenz who compiled and/or wrote and executed some decorations. And it is recorded that they performed work for other institutions: the church of St. Sebald and the Collegiate Church St. Gumbertus in Ansbach. By the way, preparing the antiphoner for Ansbach would have meant that Rosendorn had to familiarize himself with the liturgy of another bishopric, namely that of the Diocese of Würzburg. Nonetheless at this late date, after the invention of printing, we note that the making of manuscripts was a very specialized occupation. Only a few experienced individual clerics were involved in the making of liturgical books and then, only in certain aspects, such as the planning, calligraphy, and very limited kinds of decoration. Others outside of this clerical community would have been responsible for other facets of production, including both the more mundane tasks such as preparing the parchment and the more spectacular responsibilities of elaborate illumination.