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Sixteenth-Century Books in the Grand Valley Library

ROBERT BEASECKER

Among the first books purchased for what was to become the Grand Valley State University Library were fifteen printed between 1502 and 1587. These are relatively early dates in the history of printing from movable type, so where they came from and how we acquired them is, I think, an interesting footnote in the history of the establishment of Grand Valley.

The goal which President James H. Zumberge had set for the college library was having in place and catalogued, some 10,000 volumes by the official opening of Grand Valley State College in September 1963. One of the first staff hired by Zumberge in July 1962 was Stephen Ford. As Library Director, he was given the task of meeting the above goal in approximately one year. Identifying books appropriate for a new college in its first year of course offerings is not especially difficult—there are useful bibliographies and catalogs from other institutions helpful in library development. Harder can be the acquisition of the books themselves. Are they in print? What publishers handle them? Out of print, what used book dealers might have them? How much is all this going to cost? Three weeks after his appointment, Ford received a timely letter from Mrs. Frances Brewer of the Detroit Public Library:

'We have been offered for sale the attached list of books which was the library of Mr. Reeves, forty years English Professor of Kenyon College. The list of books contains so many duplicate titles for the Detroit Public Library that it does not seem reasonable for us to purchase these books. However, for a college library just starting, the titles seemed extremely useful, especially since the library [i.e., Reeves'] includes so many standard sets. . . .

William Peters Reeves was a scholar in a variety of fields and also a highly regarded teacher at Kenyon College. His personal library reflected his wide interests, and memorial tributes at the time of his death in 1945 make pointed mention of these books. Reeves was such a respected figure on campus that a reading room in the Kenyon College Library was named in his honor after his retirement in 1935. A dedicatory plaque claims that Reeves "for more than a third of a century . . . kindled the love of books in the hearts of Kenyon men."
He was born in Richmond, Indiana in 1865 and attended Johns Hopkins University, where he received his A.B. in 1889 and Ph.D. in 1893. Reeves taught at Union College and Iowa State University before his arrival at Kenyon in 1900 as Professor of English.

Reeves' interests and talents were many. Besides chairing the English Department, he founded the Ohio Athletic Conference, was reputedly a marksman with both rifle and pistol, played the violin, and produced dramatic presentations.

Frances Brewer informed Ford that Professor Reeves' widow hoped to sell her husband's books—numbering about 650 titles in 1000 volumes—for $1500. The list of books showed a "personal library strong in liberal arts, not only the expected language and literature, but also fine arts, philosophy, religion, and political and social sciences." Obtaining a scholarly collection of standard authors and reference materials at one stroke was a very attractive proposition, even more since the price per volume was quite low, even at the time. Negotiations for the purchase of the library began at once.

The books had been offered originally to the Detroit Public Library by a nephew of Mrs. Reeves, a prominent Detroit banker who was acting as her agent and personal representative. Ford made arrangements to inspect the entire collection on site in Gambier, Ohio, in October 1962. It was clear that the Reeves collection would indeed make a fine beginning of a Grand Valley library; however, many books were of such specialized and esoteric natures that Ford concluded they really had no place in Allendale "at the present stage in the development of our library."

Consequently, he offered to buy only those works of standard authors and criticism which comprised half the collection. Mrs. Reeves preferred to sell her husband's books en bloc, so an offer of $1150 was made for the entire lot. She accepted.

The books immediately needed for the college library, processed, catalogued, and shelved, came to be the important nucleus of the 10,000 volume opening day collection. As the college and its curriculum grew, the remainder were also added to the library—including the fifteen sixteenth-century books.

With the Reeves library coming to Grand Valley, this institution benefitted—and still benefits—from the many areas of study that its scholar-namesake undertook. Not the least are the fifteen books printed in the 1500s which are in themselves a miniature museum of medieval life and thought, religious debate, and the art of printing. What follows are detailed descriptions of nine of these sixteenth-century books, chosen for their antiquity, interest and historical significance.
Although Dante's *Divine Comedy* first appeared in print in 1472, no other edition had the impact on the scholarly world and printing industry as this one produced by the renowned Venetian printer/entrepreneur, Aldus Manutius (1450-1515). He was a dyed-in-the-wool scholar with a mission: he wanted to take the book from its luxury status and place it into the hands of as many readers as he could, to spread what he considered the best books, mostly the ancient Greek classics. Aldus was able to do this by drastically reducing the size of the books he printed, which in turn reduced the cost of production. The result, not surprisingly, was a wide selection made affordable to the buyer of modest means. Aldus' 1502 printing of Dante was reputedly based on two reliable manuscripts of the *Divine Comedy*—and was so well thought of that it continued to be the preferred text for new editions of the poem for the next 300 years. It was also one of the first of the new small format "portable" books from the printer, and an early example using the new typeface Aldus had designed expressly for his new series: italic. The success that this volume had is underscored by the fact that a counterfeit edition was produced in Lyon the following year. Figure 1 reproduces the last two pages of *Paradiso* in Italian along with the colophon in Latin which gives the place and name of the printer and the month and year of printing.

Avicenna, *Liber Canonis* *Avicenne revisus et omni errore mandaque purgatus summa quam cum diligentia impressus* [Colophon: Venetiis: D. Octaviai Scoti, MCCCCCV. die 24 Januarii]

Avicenna (980-1037) is the name by which Europeans of the Middle Ages knew the Persian physician, philosopher, and scientist, Ibn Sina. Entirely self-taught, his remarkable precocity, powers of concentration, and memory made him a well-known physician throughout the Islamic world by the time he was twenty-one. His prodigious output of writings included not only medicine, but also philosophy, logic, metaphysics, language, politics and sociology. Avicenna's *Liber Canonis*, the final codification of Graeco-Arabic medicine, is considered one of the most important medical works ever printed. It contains five sections devoted to anatomy, physiology, illnesses, fevers, pharmaceutics, and even dentistry. This work remained authoritative in the West until recent times, and is still used in some areas of the Middle East and Asia.

Because of its importance *Liber Canonis* was printed in many editions, one of
2, no other edition is one produced by Aldus (ca. 1500-1515). He was a printer from its luxury to spread what he was able to do in turn reduced section made affordable to so well thought the poem for the "portable" books that Aldus had designed a month and year of

which is the Library's 1505 copy. The illustration (Figure 2) is from the first page of Book III. A heavy gothic typeface is used for the Latin text which is in a contractional form peculiar to the age. A contemporary hand, possibly that of a physician or scholar, has made numerous marginal comments in Latin. Reeves has made a pencilled note that he bought this book in Rome for $52 in 1929.

![Figure 1](attachment:Figure1.png)

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**Figure 1**

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The Council of Constance (1414-1418) was convened by the Church to try to come to grips with and to find solutions to three great contemporary problems. The first was to end the Western Schism which by 1414 had seen three different popes reigning concurrently, each elected by his own faction. The second was the worrisome matter of the Wyclif and Hus heresies. Lastly, the bishops desired to reduce papal authority over local taxation and diocesan appointments. One of the first printings of the proceedings of this four-year council was Acta scitu published by Jean Petit in Paris, probably intended for students of theology. Petit was one of the four great official publishers of the University of Paris. Over the span of thirty years his press produced over a thousand titles, most of them important for students at the university and was instrumental in the spread of humanism throughout France. This copy appears to be the only one held by a library in North America. Figure 3 reproduces the title page, showing the rather elaborate printer's device used by Petit.

Saint Thomas Aquinas (1225?-1274), the foremost theologian of the Catholic Church, was a prolific writer of religious and philosophical matters. He was the main proponent of the integration of the recently discovered philosophy of Aristotle into Christian thought. In fact, Thomas himself seems to have been the motivator in having Aristotle translated into Latin, heretofore known only in Greek or Arabic versions. Thomas then went on to write a series of commentaries, or interpretations, on eleven of Aristotle's works, covering metaphysics, ethics, and politics, among others.

In De Caelo, Aristotle proposed a mechanical geocentric model of the universe complete with three-dimensional bodies and their motions. He also postulated the existence of a fifth element (besides fire, air, earth and water) called "quintessence," which made up all heavenly bodies. Figure 4 shows a page from Book II which carries an illustration of the Aristotelian universe, showing a large earth made up of four layers representing the four elements in the center. The planets, moon and sun orbit around the earth, and the fixed stars are pictured against the signs of the zodiac.

This 1516 printing of the Thomist commentary on Aristotle's De Caelo, while certainly not the earliest, appears to be one which is rather uncommon. Only the University of Wisconsin reports owning it, and it is not to be found in the national libraries of France or Great Britain.
Acta scitu dignis
Suna docteq; concunnata constantiqis
Consiliecelebratissimi.
Secundus

Tempestatum vis sibi opposita est. 

Figure 4
The works of Aristotle had long been known to scholars even before the Latin translations initiated by Thomas Aquinas. The 12th century Moslem philosopher Averroes, as he was known to the Europeans, had written his own commentaries to the works of Aristotle. When his edition of Aristotle was eventually translated, so too were the commentaries. At first the latter were well thought of by scholars and formed the basis for a philosophical movement called Averroism, which had its center in Paris. The Church, however, saw that the acceptance of Averroes' philosophy as manifested in his version of Aristotle was at odds with Christian thought. A few of the Averroist tenets were that the world and all its lifeforms are eternal (hence no Creation), God only acts indirectly on the world, and that instead of a personal soul there exists a sort of collective intellect for all of mankind.

John of Jandun (1275?-1328) was the most important advocate of Averroism in his day. He wrote his own commentaries on a number of books of Aristotle, all of which were heavily influenced by Averroes. By the end of the 1500s Averroism had run its course and quietly disappeared, partly because of Church opposition and partly because Aristotle and his writings had become unfashionable.

The two books here are representative of the many editions which were printed, solely, it seems, by the Scotus family of printers in Venice. Figures 5 and 6 are reproductions of the respective title pages which show very nicely the growing use of emblematic printer's devices. The 1557 book includes some writings of Marco Zimara (1470?-1532), himself an avowed Averroist and prolific writer who edited the works of John of Jandun. Reeves has noted that he bought the book in London in 1930 and paid the equivalent of £11 for it.
Averroes' philosophy had its origins in the thought of Averrism in his commentaries to the works of Aristotle, all of which were printed, along with the growing use of heretical treatises. Scholars and translators of Averroes' philosophy translated his works, so that Averrism had many opponents and was eventually suppressed, in figures 5 and 6 are engravings of Marco Verro, who edited the book in London in 1543.
IOAN· GANDAVENSIS
PHILOSO·PHI ACVTISSIMI
QVAESTIONES,

Super Paruis Naturalibus,

CVM MARCI ANTONII ZINARAE DE MOVENTE ET
Moro, ad Aristotelis & Avruol intentionem, absolu.tissima
quæstione, ac variis marginae scholiis hinc inde ornate.

Nunc denud per ALBRATVM Apulum, in Gymnasio Patavino Philo-
osophiam publicum profitemur quidamdiligentissime emendare, & pro
Philosophiae studiis variis adnotationibus, non mi-
nus utilibus quam necessarios illustrare:

Venetiis, apud Hieronymum Scotum,
M D L V I I.

Figure 6

1553
[Petrarch, Francesco Gesualdo... Colophon]

1554
[Petrarch, Francesco...]

1584
[Petrarch, Francesco...

Francesco Petrarchar, the most important figure
was recognized
The three important works by the author,
Petarch's poetry has
Figure 8 reproduces
the printer's device
complete works; not
reliable that it was
De Remedi... a collection of pres
many varieties of ba
nity in the face of
dition to be printed.
Francesco Petrarch (1304-1374), man of letters, poet, and humanist, is one of the most important figures of world literature. Known at an early age as a poet and scholar, he was recognized at an elaborate public ceremony in Rome where he was awarded a laurel crown, a diploma, and Roman citizenship. He promoted the study and translation of classical authors such as his favorite, Cicero. He traveled much, both as a scholar and diplomat, and wrote prodigious numbers of poems, letters, polemical tracts, historical works, and philosophical treatises. He was the prototype of the "renaissance man," the cultural and literary arbiter of his age.

The three sixteenth-century printings of Petrarch at Grand Valley represent important works by the author. The first, a 1553 edition of poetry in sonnet and terza rima form, is interesting for illustrating how elaborate and serious the presentation of Petrarch's poetry had become. Figure 7 shows a page from "Del Trionfo di Amore" [The Triumph of Love] where the large design shows Cupid being drawn along on a triumphal chariot; on the bottom left is the poem itself which is annotated at the bottom right.

Figure 8 reproduces the title page of the first volume of Petrarch's Opera Omnia. The printer's device showing a divine hand striking a rock with a hammer is a play on the Italian printer's name, Petri. Surprisingly, this is the only edition of Petrarch's complete works; no modern edition exists. In fact, this 1554 work is considered so reliable that it was reprinted in 1965. Reeves has noted that this set was purchased for him in Florence for $32.40, date not given.

De Remedi was one of the most influential of Petrarch's philosophical works. It is a collection of prescriptions for the inherent dangers of more than 100 separately identified kinds of good fortune; the second half of the book is the same, but for as many varieties of bad luck. He extolls the virtue of stoicism as giving man moral dignity in the face of changing fortune. Figure 9 illustrates the title page of the second edition to be printed in Italian.
DEL TRIONFO DI AMORE.
CAPITOLO PRIMO.

EL TEMPO,
che rinosa i miei
fischi
Per la dolce memo-
ria di quel giorno,
che fu principio a
i lunghi mas-
tiri;

Scaldava il Sol gia l'anno, e l'altro corvo
Del Taurone la fanciulla di Titone
Correa gelata al suo amico soggiorno.

OLGENDO adora
que il Fur defero-
pure il Trionfo di
Amore, seguito di
nelle righe in qua-
tro Capitolo, dia
messa prora il tempo de la sua uno
fiorito, dicendo che nel TEMPO,
de nove e aver fisca di Tramontar
nel Met d'Aprile in quel giorno, e
in quell'anno, che de M. L., a primo
cippo s'ammore, che sa il di Toffa
d'Aprile, il luna prona, si come de-
mattone nella via di lui. CHE,
ilqual tempo rendeva i suoi fischi
ri Per la dolce memoria di quel
giorno, offrendo dolce il ricordarsi de quel giorno e quale fu principio a
i lunghi martio
ri, a gli amorosi affanni e qual fi lungo tempo voleva per amor di lei, sottomesso e
ne dà a divider, che il giorno de la sosteni fussi il melfismo, che Amore co' bigliocchi la fuggi, et accese.

Figure 7
FRANCISCI PETRARCAE FLOrentini, Philosopi, Oratoris, & Poëtæ clarissimi, restitutoris literarum Latinae linguæ, aliquot fœculis horrenda barbarie inquinata ac penitus sepulta, aerroris & infauratoris. Opera quæ extant omnia. In quibus praeter Theologicam, Naturalis Moralim, Philosophei praecipua, liberalium quod sunt, Encyclopediam, Historiam theaertæ & Poëtæ dialectiam quamam uiam, pari cum sermonis maiestate, consùnta inventae.

Adiecimus eiusmodem auctoribus, quæ Hetrusco Sermo scripsit CARMINA, siue Rhythmos in quibus Graecorum gloriam, Latinorum copiam, utrisque lucratur, docilissimum acque, impius martialis & elegantia luparum modum, solus est. Hac quidem omnibus, nec tecum summa diligentia menda repurgata agi innumerabilibus locis, genuina integritas rutilans, & in Tomos quatuor distincta. Quæ autem quovis Tono continentur uerba, pagina Lectore exhibetur.

INNSIGNIORUM ATOQUE DOCTISSIMORUM
in rem literarum uirtutem, de hoc auctore testimonia in Praelectione habebatur.

Figure 8

Basileae excudebat Henrichus Petri.
I would like to acknowledge Emeritus, for his recent edition, Thomas Green-Porter, important biographical...

Brewer, Frances. Letters...

Ford, Stephen. Letters...

Greenslade, Thomas. Ohio: Kenyon College...

*Reeves Room Dedication.* March 1936: 1.

*Dr. Reeves, Beloved.* 1945.

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Figure 9
I would like to acknowledge the invaluable help given by Stephen Ford, Librarian Emeritus, for his recollections concerning the purchase of the Reeves library. In addition, Thomas Greenslade, archivist at Kenyon College, was able to supply some important biographical information on William Peters Reeves.

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