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Woodcuts in Old Calendars

In my study I would like to present a few calendar illustrations. My survey will be quite brief, and I will focus on just a few examples from hundreds of publications. First, I should define what I mean by "old calendars": printed almanacs and calendars from the 15th to the 18th century's Europe, that is the overall material of popular press between the apparition of the print and the Enlightenment. There are medieval manuscript calendars too, such as the first Polish written document, a calendar from 1250, according to Teofil Żebrawski's bibliography.[1] One of the Hungarian liturgical codices - the München codex from 1466 - contains a manuscript calendar too (for the years 1416-35). Another calendar that preceded bookprinting and came out in 1405 in Augsburg is Johannes von Gmunden's xylograph calendar[2] - a form of wood engraving, an intermediate stage between the manuscripts and printed almanacs. Out of this special edition form the German "Volkskalender" developed and, simultaneously with printed calendars it spread in several copies all through the 15th century. Those copies contained already various illustrations.

Calendar illustrations in the 15th and 16th centuries depict mainly astronomical themes, and their recurrence was strongly connected to the outburst of the astronomical and mathematical discoveries of the Renaissance. It is not coincidental that the most variable and richest illustrations appeared in Krakow and Vienna universities: just like the Bible pauperum, the woodcuts of the almanacs represented a special "Astronomia pauperum" (Figure 1). In Western Europe Flounders was such a center of mind: prognosticons and almanacs compiled by the Laet family and by Borchloen reached France and England and became very popular for a long time.[3]

The department of astronomy in Krakow was formed in 1410. By 1495 an independent astrological movement grew out from it. The scientists did not consider this "applied astronomy" inferior to their science, but they also practiced astrology, instead of having rejected it. The famous Polish mathematicians, Martin Bylica of Olkusz and Adalbert of Brudzewo (he was Copernicus's tutor) held professional connections with the Vienna School of Astronomy, with persons like Johannes Regiomontanus and Georg Pauerbach. Martin of Olkusz had for a while

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been the astronomist of the king's court at Buda, just like Regiomontanus who made his calculation tables of the Planets in Esztergom in 1467 and dedicated it to Johannes Vitéz, Matthew's chancellor. Regiomontanus' calendar referred to the period between 1475 and 1530. He did not use woodcuts except for the initials and the geometrical representation of the eclipses of the Moon.[4]

The Renaissance calendar illustrations developed, therefore, in two directions: one shared the strictly scientific character of astronomical discourse, the other, addressed to laymen, had strong symbolic and mythological implications. Both groups attempted, however, to overcome the insufficiencies of one-dimensional representations, and to create perspective. One step in their endeavor was the depiction of astronomical instruments - for example illustrations of the astrolabium and armilarsphere, etc. Ewa Chojecka's remark[5] about Krakowian calendar illustrations is more or less valid for the period's German, English and other calendars as well. She speaks about three stages. The first, lasting till 1530, artistically belongs to the previous century and its astronomical illustrations are the most valuable, dominated by scientific astronomy. In the second phase, by the middle of he 16th century the popularity of astrology surpasses that of astronomy and the illustrations turn back to antique themes and motives. The third stage, by the end of the 16th century falls under the dominance of astrology and calendar illustrations approach folk art becoming literal illustrations: "Was der Text in Worten sagte, druckte in Illustration aus. Es bestand eine direkte Verbindung zwischen Wort und Bild."[6]

1. One of the most interesting group contains illustrations of the planets personified (Saturn, Jupiter, the Sun, Mars, Venus, Luna, Mercury). These representations came from two different traditions: the antique and the oriental culture. The oriental tradition became well-known all over Europe due to Michael Scot's miniatures which accompanied his tractatus written to Frederick Hohenstaufen the IInd, by the end of the 13th century.[7] Later the personified planets get dressed according to the European aristocrat's fashion in that epoch; for example in Mikolaj Toliczkow's calendar published in Krakow in 1512 (Figure 2). The portraying of Mercury and Luna reminds one of a troubadour and his lady, it could just as well be a woodcut variant for certain pictures from the Manasse Codex in Heidelberg. In Mikolaj Shadek's Prognosticon for the year 1519 (Figure 3), Mars, wrapped in armor and supplied with spear, and Saturn wearing a king's gown are so faithful to the period, that without considering their planetarian names, we could easily take them for wholly earthly creatures.

2. Another constant motif of the calendars is the natural representation of the zodiac, that is the picturesque and literal illustration of symbols, the meaning of these being determined by the ever-growing number of laic readers. Chojecka also explains the metamorphosis of the dragon motif, borrowed from Hindu astronomy through Arab transmission into European calendars.[8] This dragon, little by little has lost its original astronomical meaning, and thus has become the embodiment of Evil on calendar woodcuts. The illustration of eclipses, together with this dragon motif will appear from the middle of the 16th century, not in the scientific publications of astronomy, but in the popular almanacs.

3. The so-called month representations (Monatsbilder) remained for the longest period the ornamental elements of calendars. The twelve months are symbolized by human figures and depict twelve different moments of farm- and housework. These pictures are quite realistic, sometimes idyllic as well. I would like to mention the woodcuts of a Hungarian calendar published in Vienna in 1641 (Figure 5)[9], but there are many other examples with similar pictures. These representations of the months sprang out from very old sources: according to several experts (Zinner, Brévart, Chojecka etc.) they originate from the late ancient tradition; in Philocalus' Chronograph - 4th century - human figures appear and stands for the months, each of them bearing a special character feature as a monthly attribute. From this tradition the medieval genre painting developed; the most famous examples the "Stundenbuch" of Jean duc de Berry from the 15th century. The late medieval miniatures influenced the woodcuts of the 16th and 17th centuries, as the before mentioned Hungarian calendar exemplifies. But the same influence can be traced on Csízió's woodcuts which was printed in Heltai's printing house in 1592 in Kolozsvár. The months, the zodiac, the planets and the blood-letting scene prove that Heltai used German sources[10]: the Temporal of Regiomontanus, the Planetenbuch and other calendars. This tradition was passed on, almost with no change, to the 17th century. There is another Hungarian version of Csízió, published in Lőcse 1650 and I could easily notice the survival of the German woodcuts and the traditional symbolism of pictures.[11] In general, these illustrations were common property of printing offices all over Europe, they wandered from one printer to the other in several variations as the comparing of the English, German, Polish, Hungarian and French calendars proves it.

There are many examples for noticing the combination of abstract astronomical signs and pictures: I mention a sheet calendar of Christopher Froschauer, edited in Zürich 1541, with various woodcuts informing the once

owner on months, feasts and medical advice: symbols of the months (30x25 mm), blood-letting manikin and blood-letting scene (55x55 mm) and very small symbolic woodcuts and signs printed in red and black.

4. A very characteristic picture of old calendars is the blood-letting manikin. There was a strong connection between astronomy and medical science beginning from the ancient times (as we can see it in Tetrabiblos of Ptolemy, for example), through the Renaissance, and lasting perhaps till the Enlightenment, therefore it is obvious, why the popularity of medical astronomy (or astronomical medicine?) grew respectively.[12] I found such illustrations up to the end of the 17th century in Polish, Hungarian, English and German calendars. This theme was so popular that even in the second half of the 17th century in English mock-calendars the blood-letting manikin was always present as the object of parody. In Poor Robin's calendar for 1670 the following text comments the events of blood-letting: "The Anatomy of Man's Body, according to the manner as Julius Caesar was slain in the Senate House".[13] (The woodcut shows how this blood-letting, in this special case, serves for good.)

5. Starting from mid 16th century, the Baroque style appeared on woodcuts: decorated title pages, dynamic and overcrowded images characterize most of the almanacs of that time. One example is Michael Peterle's calendar published in Prague 1578 (Figure 4).[14] A little more harmonic and more elegant publication was the Protestant "Calendrier Historial"[15] of Jean de Tournes which came out in Lyon in 1563. The framing ornamentation of the title page consists of arabesques, human and animal figures. In the middle of the page a serpent, biting its tail, forms a circle, and the same circle encloses a Latin aphorism: Quod tibi fieri non vis, alteri non feceris. This illustration is also an old topos, I have found it in many English sheet calendars of the 17th century and in other almanacs of the earlier period.

This "Calendrier Historial" is indeed very Protestant: for Prognostication the author quotes the Bible (Jeremiah 10, Leviticus 26) crying out against the vanity of star beliefs and predictions. Yet the calendar has wonderful woodcuts representing the months, these are real idyllic scenes accompanied by psalm verses in beautiful calligraphy. The second half of the calendar contains the Psalms, a long tractatus by Theodore Beze, a catechism, religious liturgy, and finally, the testimony of the French Protestant Church. The Psalms are surrounded by nice

initials and various frame decorations. It is curious that these pictures seem to be closer to Rabelais then to the spirit of the Psalms.

Step by step, in the 17th century astronomical illustrations faded away, and more and more actual political pictures, coats-of-arms from different countries and towns, persons, portrays of high officials and of calendar authors (such as William Lilly's and George Wharton's), panoramas - as Leipzig, Wrocław, Lőcse, Nürnberg in David Frölich's and Christoph Neubarth's calendars.[16] This change was due to the process of separation between astronomy and astrology on the one hand, and on the other hand, it was caused by growth of the functions the calendar was appointed to have, and by the withering of astralmythology, in contrast with political, economical and cultural themes. Thus only the strictly geometrical illustrations appear to follow the astronomical facts, or an entirely different, a new symbolic pattern decorates the late 17th century calendars. This phenomenon shows how the relationship between art and science changed around the turn of the 18th century; while in the Renaissance the two formed unity, in the Enlightenment they split, and developed further on independently.

We could catch the last glimpse of the Renaissance unity in the Latin and German calendars of David Frölich (1595-1648, a German-Hungarian scientist from Késmárk).[17] His texts and illustrations have preserved the tradition of the classical, theoretical and practical astronomy. Among the Central and Western European calendars I have investigated so far, I have not found another such attitude, that of connecting the actual work to the spirit and form of late Renaissance calendars. This was not an anachronism from his part, but a conscientious preference, because his knowledge in natural sciences and arts was high at the level of the epoch, in physics and geography especially.

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Notes

1. Teofil Żebrawski, *Bibliografia Pismennictwa Polskiego z działu Matematyki i Fizyki oraz ich zastosowań*. Kraków, 1873, p. 1.

2. Bronislaw Kocowski, *Drzeworytowe książki średniowiecza*. Wroclaw: Ossolineum, 1974, pp. 97-102; Francis B. Brévart: "The German Volkskalender of the Fifteenth Century". *Speculum* 63 (1988), Cambridge, Massachusetts: Medieval Academy of America, pp. 312-342.; *Apokalypse...Die lateinisch-deutschen Blockbücher des Berlin-Breslauer Sammelbandes* (Einführung und Beschreibungen Nigel F. Palmer). München, 1992.

3. Bernard Capp, *Astrology and the Popular Press. English Almanacs 1500-1800.* London, 1979, pp. 23-67.

4. Ernst Zinner, *Der deutsche Kalender des Johannes Regiomontan* (facsimile). Leipzig, 1937.

5. Ewa Chojecka, *Astronomische und astrologische Darstellungen und Deutungen bei kunsthistorischen Betrachtungenalter wissenschaftlichen Illustrationen des XV. bis XVIII. Jahrhunderts.* Veröffentlichungen des staatlichen Mathematisch - Physikalischen Salons, Bd 4, Berlin, 1967.

6. *Ibid.* 22.

7. F. Saxl, "Beiträge zu einer Geschichte der Planetendarstellungen im Orient und im Okzident". *Der "Islam"* Bd IV, 1912, pp. 165-169. Quoted in Chojecka, "Krakowska grafika kalendarzowa i astronomiczna XVI wieku". *Studia Renesansowych* III (1962), pp. 319-482.

8. Chojecka, op. cit. 1967, pp. 71-75.

9. Országos Széchényi Könyvtár, Budapest, RMK I. p. 710

10. Borsa, Gedeon, "A Csízióról". In *Csízió, vagyis a Csillagászati tudománynak rövid és értelmes leírása.* Budapest, 1986, pp. 165-176.

11. Országos Széchényi Könyvtár, Budapest, RMK I. pp. 834/b

12. Kákosy, László, *Egyiptomi és antik csillaghit.* Budapest, 1978; Szabó, Árpád - Kádár, Zoltán, *Antik természettudomány*, Budapest, 1984.

13. Bodleian Library, Oxford, Ashm 601 (3)

14. Bodleian Library, Oxford, G.Pamph. 1829 (21)

15. Bodleian Library, Oxford, Douce, CC 173

16. *Der Neue und Alte Schreibkalender Davidis Froelichii...*1626, Wrocław: Ossolineum, XVII-7319-III; *Új és Ó Kalendárium ... melyet írt Neubart Christoph*, Lőcse, 1679, OSZK, RMK I. 1237, etc.

17. Dukkon, Ágnes, "Asztrológia és keresztény hit a régi kalendáriumokban." *ITK* 5-6 (1992), 584-607.

Figure 1. Jacobus de Iszlza: Calendarium...
1512, Kraków. Biblioteka Jagiellońska, Kraków.

Figure 2. Mikolaj Toliczkow: Judicium ... 1512, Kraków. Biblioteka Jagellońska, Kraków.

Figure 3. Mikolaj Shadek: Prognosticon Judiciale, 1519, Kraków. Biblioteka Jagellońska, Kraków.

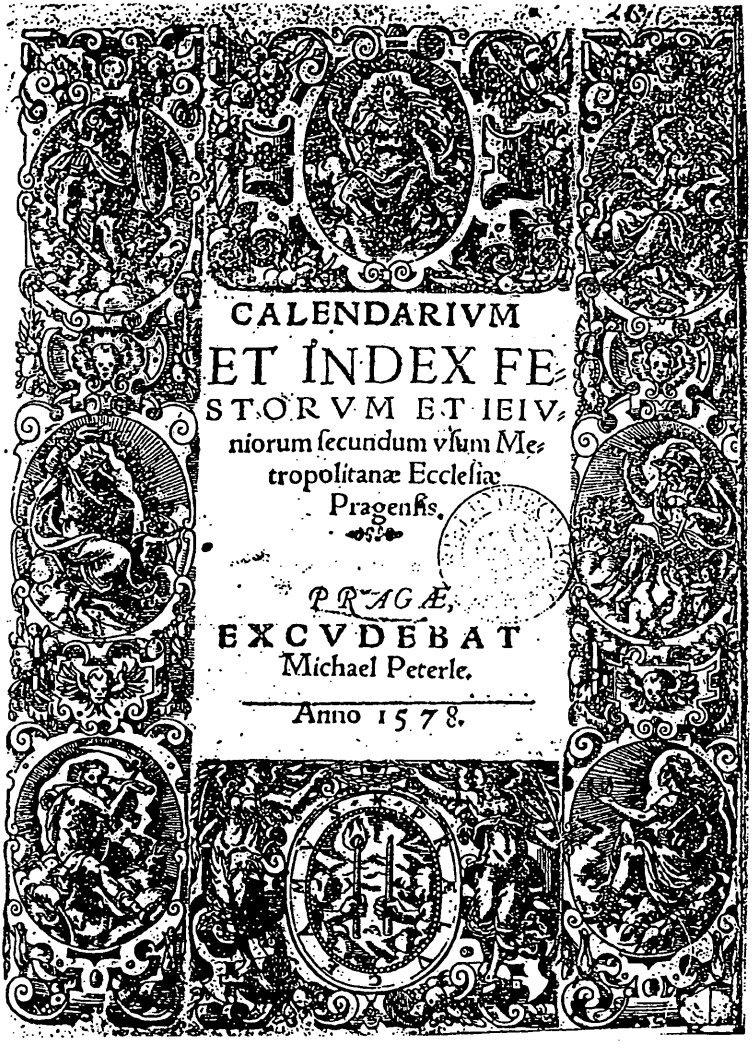

Figure 4. Michael Peterle: Calendarium, 1578, Praga. Bodleian Library, Oxford.

MARTIUS.

1	Mar	d Albinus Pűſp.		mértekl.
2	ti	e Simplicio Páp.	☉ hoſz. 8. o. 12. m.	
		¶ *Jéſus ördögöt űz ki, mely néma vala.*		
		Sz. Luk. 11. réſz.		
3	us	F Oculi, Kunegund. Szűz.		hó.
4	of	g Caſimir Conf.	☾ 1. o. 24. n.	
5	fi	a Adorián Márt.		ſzél
6	ci	b Evag. Pűſp.		hó
7	o	c Aquinás Tamás Conf.		*haboru*
8	de	d Filemon Márt.		
9	co	e Negyven Márt.		melegh
		¶ *Jéſus átt árpa kenyézzel megh elegit.*		
		Sz. Ian. 6. réſz.		
10	ra	F Lætare, Viktor Márt.		
11	tur	g Eutimius Pűſp.	● 3. o. 41. m, n.	
12	Gre	a Gergely Pápa.		
13	go	b Niceforus Pűſp.		
14	ri	c Matildis Aſz.		*háboru.*
15	an	d Longinus Márt.		

Figure 5. Jan Tonski: Kalendárium ... 1641, Bécs (in Hungarian).
Országos Széchényi Könyvtár, Budapest.