

# Colby



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## Our Second-Oldest Incunabulum

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### OUR SECOND-OLDEST INCUNABULUM

**N**EARLY two years ago, announcement was made in this quarterly that "from Mr. Arthur G. Robinson we have received . . . a splendid . . . incunabulum by Nicolaus de Lyra, printed about 1487." When the book came into the hands of the Colby curator, it presented a real difficulty as to how to change the vague statement that the book was "printed about 1487" into anything more specific. As stated in our issue of October 1946, "the concluding pages of the book are defective, and this fact has made it thus far impossible to establish either the exact date of the printing or the name of the publisher." Thus, a year after our receipt of the book, we were able to give the title, *Moralia super totam Bibliam* (a moralizing commentary on the entire Bible), but little more.

Now, after another year's intermittent activity, we are happy to be able to report that final identification of the book has been accomplished. Of course, a trained bibliographer, with every modern reference-tool at hand, would have been able to achieve this result in a few minutes. But for months, the Colby library was without the services of an experienced cataloguer, and our library is, even yet, not equipped to deal with minute incunabular problems. Hence the necessity for less orthodox methods of identification as well as for more prolonged labor.

This interesting Biblical commentary turns out to be the second oldest printed book in the Colby College Library. Our oldest complete volume was printed in Venice in 1476. The incunabulum now under comment was printed in Mantua, Italy, in 1481. A generation after Gutenberg, two German printers from Butzbach, near Mainz, came to Italy, to print for a patron in Mantua. Later, George and Paul von Butzbach set up a shop of their own and printed one of the earliest editions of Dante. After a while, the partnership was dissolved and Paul continued to operate the printing-press at Mantua alone. In 1481 he printed de

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Lyra's *Moralia*. Four hundred and fifty years later, this book had become extremely rare. A copy was offered for sale in a British catalogue last March for one hundred dollars.

At the time when Paul of Butzbach printed this book, it was a recently published one. It had been printed in 1478 at Cologne, and at Strassburg in 1479. Our copy of Paul of Butzbach's edition was thus (apparently) the first Italian edition of this work, and the third printing of it.

Unfortunately, the defects in the Colby copy include the absence of the page that (in a perfect copy) carries the printer's colophon. This defect necessitated a search for other copies of the *Moralia*, with which to compare ours, and books printed in the fifteenth century are not to be found on every street-corner. The *Second Census of Incunabula in American Libraries* informs the reader that McGill University and the Huntington Library have copies of the first edition of the *Moralia* (Cologne, 1478). Upon investigation, these copies proved to be large folios, fifteen inches or more in height,—considerably larger than the Colby edition. The *Second Census* locates three copies of the second edition (Strassburg, 1479), but two of these copies (those at Yale and at Michigan) were discovered to be even larger than the Cologne edition. With the editions of 1478 and 1479 thus eliminated, by reason of their size, as candidates for twinhood with the Colby copy, attention was next directed to the edition printed at Mantua in 1481. The *Second Census* located only seven copies of this edition in American libraries; and correspondence with the librarians in charge led not only to definite identification of the Colby copy, but also brought to light further information about the book such as is not found either in the *Census* or in the records of the Union Catalog in the Library of Congress.

It is now clear that, in the course of the centuries since Paul of Butzbach printed this book, most of the surviving copies have been cut down in size, as worn edges have been

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trimmed. The result is that none of the eight copies in America is exactly as wide or as tall as any other American copy. The largest specimen is in the Walters Art Gallery in Baltimore. The Colby copy ranks sixth in point of size. For the sake of the record, the list is printed here, with the size of the page of each copy given in centimeters:

1. Walters Art Gallery	31.0 x 21.3 cm.
2. Library of Congress	29.5 x 20.3 cm.
3. Holy Name College, Washington	29.2 x 19.7 cm.
4. University of Minnesota Library	29.2 x 19.1 cm.
5. St. Hyacinth Seminary (Granby, Mass.)	27.9 x 20.3 cm.
6. COLBY COLLEGE LIBRARY	26.0 x 18.3 cm.
7. University of North Carolina Library	24.5 x 17.5 cm.
8. Oberlin College Library	23.5 x 16.5 cm.

The Colby copy is bound in vellum. The paper is in good condition, the type clear, but the spaces originally left blank for the rubrication of large initial letters have never been filled. On one page a marginal handwritten note warns the reader, in Latin, that the index at the end of the book is defective. And if our copy had contained page 257b, we now know that it would have informed us, in black-letter Latin, that "this work [was] printed at Mantua by Paul John of Butzbach in the year 1481." This specimen of Italian paper-making and printing is therefore now 466 years old.



### HARDY ADDITIONS

ON March 13, 1877, Longfellow wrote to George W. Childs (owner and publisher of the *Philadelphia Public Ledger*): "You do not know yet what it is to be seventy years old. I will tell you, so that you may not be taken by surprise when your turn comes. It is like climbing the Alps. You reach a snow-crowned summit, and see behind you the deep valley stretching miles and miles