CHAPTER 16

Notes from a Nominalist in a New Incunabulum by Symphorien Champier

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Introduction

No incunabulum can be new, of course, but the book described here is a new candidate for that classification: it is a textbook for university undergraduates, an Introduction to Instruction in Grammar and Logic by Symphorien Champier (c. 1470–1539). Champier was a physician who spent most of his life in Lyon, publishing about four dozen books, most of them in Latin and mostly about medicine. Whether the copy of his Isagoge described here is an incunabulum will be decided by bibliographers and other experts – not by us. Without doubt, however, this little book is a source of fresh information about Champier’s early career and about the contest between scholastic philosophy and the new classicism before and after 1500.

In modern times, the systematic identification of incunabula – books and other items printed before 1501 – goes back to 1822, when Ludwig Hain began to publish his Repertorium bibliographicum, which later scholars updated and is now being replaced or extended by the Gesamtkatalog der Wiegendrucke (GW) of the Berlin Staatsbibliothek, the Incunabula Short Title Catalogue (ISTC) of the British Library, and – most recently – the Universal Short Title Catalogue (USTC) hosted by the University of St. Andrews and directed by Andrew Pettegree. In 1827 Hain gave only two titles (4906, 4907) for Champier, and neither is actually an incunabulum. ISTC does not list Champier’s Isagoge, showing only his Gateway to Logic and Science (ic00420000) and Dialogue on the Destruction of the Magical Arts (ic00421000) as printed before 1501 – both in or around 1498 by Guillaume Balsarin in Lyon. But entry 0655320N in GW is

1 Isagoge Simphoriani Champerii in grammaticam disciplinam et logicam cum denotatione realium vanitatum et elucidatione nominalium veritatum, n.p., n.d., cited here as Isag. We thank Robert Black, Isabelle de Conihout, Martin Davies, Jürgen Dinter, William Kemp and Bruce McKittrick for their advice and criticism.

“Champerius, Symphorianus: *Isagoge in grammaticam disciplinam,*” attributed to the printer Jean Pivard in Lyon around 1500. The sole source of the entry is Jürgen Dinter of Antiquariat Jürgen Dinter in Cologne, and no libraries are listed as owning a copy: it was Mr Dinter who generously notified us, in the summer of 2010, of the book’s existence and provided us with photographs.³

However, Mr. Dinter also told us that the Bibliothèque Mazarine in Paris owns a copy (Rés. 27675–6) of the same title by Champier; Mme Isabelle de Conihout, Chief Curator of the Mazarine’s Fonds Ancien, has confirmed this. Further correspondence with Mme de Conihout and Mr Dinter led us to Baudrier’s *Bibliographie lyonnaise,* which dates the Mazarine’s *Isagoge* around 1512 and locates it in Lyon with the publisher Pierre Mareschal. Since this was the only copy of the *Isagoge* known before Mr Dinter’s discovery, and since it was not described as an incunabulum, Champier’s book would not have appeared in any of the standard listings of incunabula from Hain to the *ISTC,* and *GW* lists it only from Mr Dinter’s copy.⁴

The older specialized bibliographies also differ in their treatment of Champier and his *Isagoge.* Ferdinand Buisson’s 1886 compilation of pedagogical books locates it in the Mazarine but gives no date, place or printer. Most important: Paul Allut’s very detailed bio-bibliography of Champier, published in 1859, does not mention it at all. Allut’s silence effectively erased the book from later scholarship on Champier – including the study published by one of us in 1978, based on a dissertation finished in 1970. A closer look at Baudrier – although it is organized by printers and publishers rather than authors and does not, in principle, list incunabula – would have shown what Allut missed.⁵

That was the bibliographical story of the *Isagoge* – as far as we knew – until very recently, when the *USTC* became available online in January of 2014. The *USTC*’s ancestor, which deals only with French vernacular books, was not relevant for Latin books like the *Isagoge.* In addition to the Mazarine copy, the *USTC* lists (as of February 7, 2014) four others, all in Italian libraries: the

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³ Ludwig Hain, *Repertorium bibliographicum in quo libri omnes ab arte typographica inventa usque ad annum MD typis expressi ordine alphabeticō . . . recensentur* (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1827), 1.2.95; *GW, ISTC* and *USTC* are online.
