



Spotlight on the *Theuerdank*

Courtly Love and the Last Knight

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Manuskripte und seltene Bücher

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Follow the adventures, based on true stories, of the valiant and most famous hero, lord Theuerdank ... 'the last knight'.



This Spotlight presents the story of a book, made by and for Maximilian of Austria - in memory of his great love for Mary of Burgundy, the dramatic events to win her hand, and the tragedy of her loss (1477-1482).

Currently, we have two copies of
the famous book, the
Theuerdank,
available at
Dr. Jörn Günther Rare Books: a
spectacularly illuminated rare
vellum edition, and a fine
edition printed on paper.





Theuerdank - Maximilian I,
Die ... geschichten des ...
Ritters Tewrdannckhs.
Edited by Melchior
Pfintzing.
"Nürnberg" [Augsburg]:
Johann Schönsperger,
1 March 1517.

We also have a [video presentation](#) about this book on our website.





The *Theuerdank* is an epic poem retelling Maximilian's dangerous adventures on his journey to claim his bride, Mary of Burgundy.

It is written in rhyming couplets as an allegorical medieval romance.

Die genezlichen vnd ernstlichen
der geschichten des loblichen streit-
pären vnd hochberumbten helds
vnd Ritters herz Sewrdamichs

On his way to claim his bride,
Lady Ernreich (Mary of
Burgundy), Theuerdank has to
overcome 80 obstacles.

Although traditionally
attributed to Maximilian
himself, most likely it was
Melchior Pfinzing, his chaplain
and secretary, who prepared
and edited the text, following
Maximilian's instructions.

Each of the 118 chapters is
decorated with a splendid
engraving.

Wie der Künig Romreich sein leben in einem garten
enden wolte vnd bii worden benent so Er seiner tochter bii
Dan erwölt hat:



Insmals der Künig an sein pet lag
Bedahte nun ist thomen der tag
Das Ich sol ordnen mein sach
Dann Ich bin worden alt vnd schwach
Das empfinde Ich an mir ganz wol
Doch hoff Ich nicht ersterben sol

Often referred to as 'the last of the knights', Maximilian - as the *Theuerdank* relates - sets out as a young man of only eighteen years, to claim Mary, his damsel in distress, whose father, the duke of Burgundy, had just perished on the battle field before Nancy.

Indeed, their marriage took place in haste by proxy, but was soon after celebrated with great ceremony in Ghent, Flanders, on 19 August 1477.



12
Die Son mit irem lieche
Brache wider das gesichte
Verend die vinstern nache
Darumb der Held gedache
Es ist die auf lustan
Das gedache vnd gethan
Gleich von stund ein ding was
Saud auf sein Ross Er sase

The book's main characters are:
the knight Theuerdank (Noble
Thought; Maximilian), on his
journey to claim his bride Ernreich
(Rich in Honour; Mary) after the
death of her father Romreich (Rich
in Fame; Charles the Bold, duke
of Burgundy).

Theuerdank is accompanied by
his faithful squire Erhold
(Steadfastly Honoured),
identifiable by the wheel of
fortune on his tunic.



On their journey, they are constantly beleaguered by three of Ernreich's captains who wish to prevent the match - Fürwittig (Over-confident), Unfalo (Unlucky), and Neydlhart (Envious).

The three enemies can be interpreted as the dangers of the three ages of man, Youth (Fürwittig = impetuous), Maturity, and Old Age. Despite their efforts to stop him, Theuerdank reaches his goal and wins his bride.



33

Unfalo west ein hirschen stoltz
Wann manden jaget in dem holz

Lured by Unfalo, Theuerdank's horse stumbles, but the hero remains unharmed.

Ultimately, Theuerdank overcomes all perils – thanks to his bravery, skills, and knowledge.

At the end of the book, the reader learns about the identities of the key players.

The preparations to publish the *Theuerdank* took many years before it was completed in 1517 – long after the marriage took place (1477) and long after Maximilian's beloved wife's tragic death (1482).

The design of the book with 118 woodcuts is considered an apogee in the history of book art.

The present copy is one of the most finely coloured and illuminated editions on vellum that are known.

Maximilian planned three autobiographical texts, of which only the *Theuerdank* was finished during his lifetime.

The chivalric *Weisskunig* and the *Freydal* were incomplete when the emperor died in 1519.





13

Nach etwas verschinen tagen
Sprach Fürwittig Ich hab sagen
Gehort wie Ir seye ein Jeger
Damit Euch dann in dem leger
Nü werde verdrossen Ewer weil
So wollen wir reyen ein meil
Oder swü hinaus in das holtz
Daselbst wil Ich Euch zeigen stoltz

Gedruckt in der Kayserlichen
Stat Nürnberg durch
den Etern Hamfen
Schönsperger
Burger zu
Augsburg.

The book went into production in Augsburg in 1513, under the direction of Conrad Peutinger (1465-1547).

Augsburg was the seat of the Imperial Council and became a centre of printing with Johan Schönsperger as imperial printer since 1508.

The design was executed by a team of extraordinary artists such as Hans Burgkmair (1473-1531), Hans Schäufelein (1482/3-1540), and Leonhard Beck (1480-1542). Jost de Negker (1485-1544) oversaw the cutting of the woodblocks. We currently also have an uncoloured edition on paper available.

Durchleichigster Grosmleichigster König Ge-
nedigster herr. Sieweil nun Ewer Küniglich
Majestat. die manigfaltigen gestrenngen sorglichen ge-
ferlichkeiten dem Edlen. vnd berümbten Fürsten Lewr-
danck hiu gestanden hievor durch mein buch erick. verno-
men hat crag Ich für sorg. Nach dem dieselben überstan-
den gefelicheiten nie allein hüuerwundern / sonder Ee vn-
menschlich zu machen sein. Ewr Küniglich Majestat vnd
ander denen bemelt mein buch fürkomē / möchten gedencken
Ich het dem obbemelten Edlen vnd berümbten Fürsten
Lewrdanck mer preß lob vnd Ee dann in der warheit
Im begegnet wer. aus schmaichendem gemüt hügemessen
denselben nach / damit solch gedancken. Ewr Küniglich-
vnd andere gemüt nie in pösem argtwan führen mögen
hab Ich Ewr Küniglich Majestat. einlautere anrügung
vnd warbaffte bestetzung. aller geschichten / in bemeltem
meinem buch begriffen thun wollen. daraus Ewer König
Majestat. nie allein den grund der Rechten war hat
sonder an welsamort. vnd ende der yedes besch. hen ist
erkennt mügen. Geben hiu Nuremberg am ersten tag
des Hertzen Anno domini Tausent funff hundert vnd
im sybentzenden Jar.

Ewr Küniglichen
Majestat. **D**ienüchigster
Capplan.

Melchior Pfintzing hiu
Sand Alban bey Aentz
vnd Hannß Sebald hiu
Nuremberg Brobst.

Dem durchleichigsten Fürsten vnd herren hern Carlen
Künigen hiu Hispanien etc. Ertzhertzogen hiu Osterreich
hertzogen hiu Burgundien. meinem allernedigsten hern.

A

The fine, blackletter typeface is attributed to Maximilian's secretary Vincenz Rockner and was based on script used in the Imperial Chancery - and in the prayer book of Maximilian I (1513).

A later version of the type came to be known as 'Fraktur' type. In order to increase the illusion of the book being a manuscript, a series of separate flourishes was cut to add to the letterforms.



42

Unfaloder wolt seinen list
 Offnen vñnd sprach Held hñeben ist
 Ein haws darinn ligen etlich Jar
 Zwen loben die seyen so gar
 Schön vñnd lustig zñsehen an
 Dan sage Dy sollen die art han
 Welher man sich nicht fürcht vor In
 Derselb gee on all scheden hin

n iii

Here we see Unfalo endangering Theuerdank before two charging lions who supposedly would not attack - but the hero chases them away with a shovel.

This was a design by Hans Schüfelein: see his signature H with a little spade ('Schüfelein') in the bottom right corner of the image.



105

Der dritte tag der kam daher
 Deszhalbender selbig Ritter
 Kay in seinem deug auf die pan
 Lewrdanne der was auch angehan
 Fuegt sich an das bescharden ore
 Vnd sach die Künigin haltendore
 Die darumb was thomen daher
 Das Sy wolt die tewfchen stecher



Battling the fourth knight,
as designed by Hans Schüefelein.

In text and illustration, the book shows the revival of chivalric ideals of the latter half of the fifteenth century among the aristocracy of Germany.

This enthusiasm extended not only to reworking courtly romance, but also to holding jousts and tournaments.

Maximilian himself was a keen joustier who introduced new innovations to the 'chivalric' sports.



116

Tewrdannet hin zu der Künigin gieng
 Gar freündlichen Sy In empfieng
 Fürer In in Ir köstlich gemach
 Darinn Sy stet zu wonen pfleg
 Namdarbü etlich Ir geheim Bedt
 Des gleichen auch Tewrdannet der Held chee
 Auf dasselb Sy anfieng vünd sprach
 Herz habe Ir Euch auf dise sach

¶

Its striking illustrations and fine design have kept the enthusiasm for this book alive – throughout the ages. It is cherished by bibliophiles all over the world.

The shift, manifested beautifully here, from earlier woodcuts to true works of art is attributed to the influence of Albrecht Dürer from Nuremberg, who carried the art of book illustration to new heights, in works such as the *Apocalypse* and the *Life of the Virgin* – both also available at Dr. Jörn Günther Rare Books.

Der beschluß dieser History von dem Handlichen
vnd gluckhaffigen Held Teurdannek.



118

Theurdank stands on 14 swords as
'champion over fortune', by Hans Burgkmair.



The book was never intended for sale.
About 40 copies of the first edition
were printed on vellum, only a few of
which have been coloured.



In fact, on the day they married, Maximilian and Mary saw each other for the first time. According to the legend, it was love at first sight. The couple had two children. Tragically, Mary died in 1482 after falling from a horse.

Although Maximilian later lived with a concubine for many years and even remarried, it is related that he wept whenever his first wife's name was mentioned.

The quest for their idealized love has an eternal monument in this beautiful book.



Maximilian's second marriage to Bianca Maria Sforza turned out to be an unhappy one. Both of their portraits were painted by the Milanese painter Ambrogio di Predis. Vienna, Kunstmuseum and Washington, National Gallery of Art



The so-called *Wedding Hours* of Bianca Maria Sforza, a fine Book of Hours, illuminated by the Master of Anna Sforza, was a gift from Ludovico Sforza to his niece, Bianca Maria upon her marriage to Maximilian I in Milan in 1493.

It was our finest book in 2018, sold to a private collection.

Nativity scene in the Hours of the Virgin, on the right: Maximilian's coat of arms impaling those of Sforza and Savoy, flanked by gems.



Below the Flight into Egypt, rabbits are painted as a symbol of fertility, yet the marriage turned out to be an unhappy and childless one. Below right: An angel with medallions, in blue: the arms and motto of Maximilian I ('HALT MAS IN ALLEN DINGEN'), in red: the Sforza device of the plant with the motto 'MIT ZEIT'.



Maximilian by Albrecht Dürer, 1519
Vienna Museum of Fine Arts

In the age of the Game of Thrones, the story of Maximilian and Mary of Burgundy was also made into a film: "Maximilian - The Game of Power and Love", a 2017 Austrian-German co-production.



Maximilian is credited with the famous saying "*Bella gerant alii, tu felix Austria nube*" (let others wage war: thou, Austria, marry) The *Theuerdank* is an incredibly fine testimony to the epic last knight and his bride

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