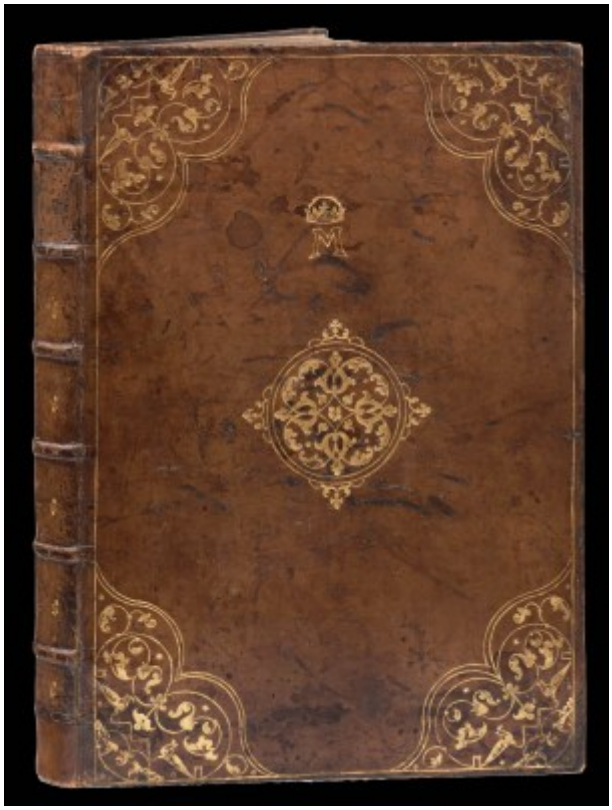


Folio (440 by 310mm). Pages numbered [1]-285 (verso blank). Title-page with large woodcut printer’s device, with 175 woodcuts in the text, including numerous diagrams, 13 of which are full-page volvelles and one half-page volvelle, composed of a total of 36 moving parts preserving a number of diagram indicator strings, brown calf, richly gilt, large corner tools and central medallion, capital letter M gilt with coronet to upper part of both upper and lower board, gilt edges.
Collation: a-i(4), k-t(4), v(4), x-z(4), A-I(4), K-N(4)

AN UNIQUE MAGNIFICENT COLOURED ASTRONOMICAL WORK FROM THE LIBRARY OF MARY, QUEEN OF SCOTS

Astronomique discourse par Jaques Bassantin Escossois.

Author
BASSANTIN, Jacques

Publication date
1557.

Publisher
Par Jan de Tournes,

Publication place
Lyon,

Physical description
Folio (440 by 310mm). Pages numbered [1]-285 (verso blank). Title-page with large woodcut printer’s device, with 175 woodcuts in the text, including numerous diagrams, 13 of which are full-page volvelles and one half-page volvelle, composed of a total of 36 moving parts preserving a number of diagram indicator strings, brown calf, richly gilt, large corner tools and central medallion,

capital letter M gilt with coronet to upper part of both upper and lower board, gilt edges.
Collation: a-i(4), k-t(4), v(4), x-z(4), A-I(4), K-N(4)

Dimensions

Notes

First edition of the Scotsman James Bassantin's (c1500-1568) copiously illustrated, large-format compendium on calculating planetary positions. From the library of Mary, Queen of Scots, bound in Paris with her crowned initial, and with all the illustrations in fine contemporary hand-colour.
'Astronomique discours'
The work takes as its forebear Peter Apian's famous (1495-1552) 'Astronomicum Caesareum' of 1540, and includes among its 175 woodcuts a total of 14 volvelles (13 of which are full page), here complete with all 36 moving parts. The discs of these paper instruments perform many functions conventionally associated with the astrolabe, such as simulating the movement of planets, reckoning time, and assisting with the practical matters of surveying and astrology. "A Scottish astronomer of considerable reputation", Bassantin cut no corners in producing the 'Astronomique discours': "The size of this volume and the extent of its illustration and ornamentation make this an unusually fine example of the attention given to the printing of scientific works at this period" (Mortimer, p. 64).
The text of the 'Astronomique discours' is arranged in several 'treatises' of increasing complexity, beginning with information about understanding sine tables and trigonometry, moving to the application of these principles to the terrestrial and celestial spheres and to the interaction of planets, and closing with a lengthy section concerning practical problems of the heavens (the majority of the work's volvelles are contained here). While Bassantin gives the reader much information in textual and tabular formats, his illustrations provide the bulk of the didactic force and do so without sacrificing beauty (for example, its armillary sphere supported on the back of Atlas, its handsome volvelle of the constellations of the northern hemisphere, the glowering moon-faces in discussions of eclipse, the fine metalwork form of its paper instruments).
The correct collation of the volvelle parts to this 1557 first edition has long been a matter of debate among bibliographers, with Mortimer calling for 36, although most otherwise well-preserved, extant copies retain between 33 and 35 parts. The present volume is one of only a very few known to contain all 36 parts.
James Bassantin
James Bassantin studied at the University of Glasgow and seems to have taken pride in his Scottish heritage even as his work took him to the continent (for example, he prominently identifies himself as "Escossois" on this work's title page and lists 8 Scottish towns in his tables of longitude and latitude). Bassantin eventually settled in France as a teacher of mathematics, first at Lyon and then in Paris. His revised edition of Jacques Foucard's 'Paraphrase de l'astrolabe' (1555) shows him to have been familiar with the most recent advances in German and Italian mathematics and astronomy.
Bassantin returned to Scotland in 1562 and on route discussed with Sir Robert Melville the current political tensions in the Isles, predicting that there would be "at length captivity and utter wreck" for Mary, Queen of Scots, at the hands of Elizabeth, and that the kingdom of England would eventually fall to the crown of Scotland (comments preserved by Sir James Melville, Robert's brother, in Memoirs of his own life, p. 203; see also DNB). Bassantin's astrological acumen seems to have appealed to the superstitious James VI (James I of England and Ireland) who kept in his library this copy of the Astronomique discourse inherited from the collection of his mother Mary ("de la royne": see Warner, p. lix).

Literature:

Brunet, I, 692; Mortimer, French, 47; Brun, 117; voir Foot, I, article sur Wotton's binder B. ; Cartier

II, 357; Gültlingen, IX, 368; Graesse, I, 308; Adams B-369; Poggendorff, vol. 1, col. 113; Honeyman 244; Horblit 89; Warner, The Sky Explored, p. 17; DNB, vol 3., pp. 372-3; George F. Warner, The Library of James VI, p. lix (https://archive.org/details/miscellanyofscot01edin/page/n21); British Armorial Bindings, University of Toronto website (https://armorial.library.utoronto.ca/stamp-owners/MAR008)

Bibliography

Brunet I, 692; Horblit 89; Mortimer, French, no.47; Deborah Jean Warner, The Sky Explored: Celestial Cartography, 1500-1800 (Amsterdam, New York: Liss, 1979), 17; George F. Warner, The Library of James VI 1573-83 (Edinburgh: Constable, 1893), lix.

Provenance

Provenance

1. Mary, Queen of Scots (1542-1587)

Mary, Queen of Scots, daughter and only child of James V of Scotland and his queen, Mary of Lorraine, was born at Linlithgow 5 December 1542. Five days later her father died. She was sent to France for safe keeping, and married 24 April 1558 the Dauphin Francis. Very shortly afterwards Henri II was killed in a tournament, and Francis and Mary ascended the throne of France. A year later Francis, who had always been sickly was dead. She returned to Scotland at the beginning of September 1561. She married Boswell on the 15 May 1567. She took refuge in England and was executed for treason by Queen Elizabeth in February 1587.

This magnificent copy was bound in Paris for Mary, with her crowned initial. It is well known that the Queen had a large library of several hundreds of titles that she brought back to Scotland on her return from France in 1561. The books were located both in the Royal Palace of Holyrood and the Castle of Edinburgh. This copy of Bassantin was already mentioned in the inventory of Holyrood Library made on November 25th, 1569 after the Queen's abdication. This inventory lists 87 books from the library of the Royal Palace of Holyrood, that were supposed to be given to Mary's half-brother, the new Regent, James Stuart, who was going to be killed soon after. These 87 works were "probably all that had survived of the Holyrood collection in the disorders of the time" (Warner). In this catalogue made by the Regent's secretary, John Wood of Tilliedavy (or Tullidavie), the Bassantin is n°4.

2. King James VI and I (1566–1625)

James Charles Stuart was King of Scotland as James VI from 24 July 1567 and King of England and Ireland as James I from the union of the Scottish and English crowns on 24 March 1603 until his death in 1625.

The second document mentioning the Bassantin was drafted by Peter Young, the tutor and librarian of King James VI, son of Mary on March 26th, 1578. It is a list of 149 books present in the library of the fortified castle of Edinburgh. According to Sharman in 'Scottish notes and queries', the books had been moved from Holyrood to Edinburgh "for the sake of protection, being of a kind that in turbulent age of intolerance and unreason would be in far safer keeping behind the fire of Kilrkaldy's guns". This manuscript was published in 1893 for the Scottish History Society with notes by George Warner, curator at the British Museum.

"The most important group of bindings put forward as being bound for Mary Queen of Scots is the group which contain the impressive stamp on the Du Choul binding (Stamp 1), and those with the rather clumsy arms (Stamp 2) and one other associated binding. These have a number of things in common. All of them are redecorations of existing bindings. This would seem to suggest that Mary bought her books ready bound, and then added her coat-of-arms and the crowned Ms. This is of course possible, though most royal bindings were executed for their owners, and where they bought second-hand, as in the case of George III, who was a keen book collector, they often had the books rebound. Lastly they all have tools in common, those with the stamps of her arms have also the same crowned Ms, used in the same way. The anomalous binding is a copy of the Astronomie of Jacques

Bassantin (Lyon,1557). The book was bound in dark brown calf with a centrepiece and cornerpieces in gold, a pleasant but not sumptuous binding. Above the centrepieces has been added an open M, possibly hand drawn with a fillet, and above this is a crown. The crown tool is that of stamp 2, thus suggesting that the crown in that stamp is a separate tool. The book came from the library of the Stanhopes, Earl[s] of Chesterfield, and in the catalogue of their library is described only as having a crowned M on the sides". (British Armorial Bindings, University of Toronto website).
3. The library of the Earls of Chesterfield, Bretby Hall, Bretby, Derbyshire.
4. The Chesterfield-Carnarvon Library, London, Sotheby's, 8-11th April 1919 (lot 170, £86).
5. Private collection, France, thence by descent.

Price:

Inventory reference: 15148

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