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The Woodcuts of *Der Spiegel menschlicher Behältnis* in the Editions Printed by Drach and Richel.¹

The woodcuts illustrating the German editions of the *Speculum Humanae Salvationis* (*Der Spiegel menschlicher Behältnis*) printed by Peter Drach (Speier n.d.) and Bernard Richel (Basle 1476) are important to the history of woodcut and printing. They also make a major contribution to our understanding of late medieval iconography in general, and to the *Speculum* in particular. Yet expert opinion has long been divided about the relationship between these two large series of pictures. Most authors who have written on the subject believed that the woodcuts in Richel's edition were models for those in Drach's.² Unfortunately, no valid reasons for these assumptions were given beyond the fact that Richel's edition is actually dated 1476, while Drach's has been conjecturally dated, on the circumstantial evidence of the type, 1478-1491.³ Two writers, Müther in 1884 and Geisberg in 1939, expressed the rarer opposite belief: that Drach's edition was the model for Richel's.⁴

I believe that the view of Müther and Geisberg merits attention not because it is rare but because it is right. Regrettably, Müther gave no reasons for his dating of the Drach at 1474, two years earlier than the Richel. Geisberg gave no convincing reasons for his opinion either. He simply observed that of the two undated editions of Drach's *Spiegel*, the first must have appeared by 1476 because in that year appeared the ugly (*hässlich*) woodcuts in the Richel, which he states are not, in spite of current opinion, the originals, but copies of those in the Drach.⁵ His view has been ignored by most later cataloguers of incunabula, who still date the Richel earlier than the Drach, so implying, though not claiming, a similar relationship between their woodcuts.⁶

It is possible to show from internal pictorial evidence that whatever the dates of printing, many of the woodcuts in the Drach edition were indeed, as Müther and Geisberg said, models for those in the Richel. The neglected evidence is to be found in the thirty-six occasions on which woodcuts in the Drach are closely related to woodcuts in the forty-page blockbook *Biblia Pauperum*, now dated c. 1460.⁷ That there is a relationship between the *Biblia Pauperum* and the two much later editions of the *Spiegel* has been noted before, but no conclusion drawn from it.⁸ Hind saw a general relationship between the woodcuts in all three books, but surprisingly still regarded the Richel as the source for the Drach woodcuts: 'The treatment of the subjects [in the Drach] derives more closely from Richel's Basle edition of 1476 than from Günther Zainer's *Speculum Humanae Salvationis* (Augsburg 1473), showing variations which are sometimes more nearly allied to the Netherlandish blockbook of the *Biblia Pauperum*.'⁹ Hind is

Biblia Pauperum



Drach



Richel



right in that the relationship between the Drach and Richel woodcut series themselves is indeed much closer than any resemblance which either shows to the Zainer editions, and the Drach and Richel do indeed show a stronger *Biblia Pauperum* influence than appears in the Zainer books (which need not concern us further, except to note that their format is different from that of the later editions). The odd thing is that Hind did not notice that the Drach woodcuts are much closer to the *Biblia Pauperum* than are those in the Richel.

The designer of many of the woodcuts in the Drach obviously turned for a model to the c. 1460 blockbook *Biblia Pauperum* and not, as one might expect, simply to a blockbook version of the *Speculum Humanae Salvationis*, or even to one of its manuscripts.¹⁰ With the exception of only three cases, wherever the Drach echoes the *Biblia Pauperum*, the corresponding woodcut in Richel has lost all but the most superficial resemblance to the 1460 woodcuts. One can see a process of progressive degradation or alteration in the images' transmission from the *Biblia Pauperum* to the Drach and on to the Richel.

The relevant woodcuts from all three books are listed below. Since it is impossible to reproduce them all here, the complete evidence can only be examined by the interested reader with some difficulty, comparing the original books or their subsequently published woodcuts for himself. It is almost impossible to give useful references to enable readers to locate the woodcuts in the original editions of *Der Spiegel menschlicher Behältnis*, which have no pagination or signatures, and in the case of the Richel, no foliation either, though the chapter numbers are shown. To make the task as easy as possible, references are given in some detail, mentioning three later publications of the woodcuts.