

The King's Eye

Of all the positions of honour or service that might lose the holder his head in the court of King Henry VIII, one imagines that 'biblioscopus' to the king was a safer billet than most. The precise meaning of the title is open to interpretation, but 'a looker at books' ought to have been able to keep himself at a safe distance from the king's strong right arm. The title was applied to the naturalized Dutch scholar Wouter Deleen (c. 1500–1563), and perhaps he applied it to himself for he is the only known bearer of the title. An interesting volume in New College Library, the manuscript portion of which was written by Deleen in his own hand, goes some way towards identifying what he himself perceived the king's *biblioscopus* to be.

Wouter Deleen was born at Balen, near Antwerp.¹ He studied at Louvain, and became the first teacher of Hebrew in the northern Netherlands, first at Haarlem (1523–7) and then in Amsterdam (1533–5). A convert to Reformation opinions, his lectures in Amsterdam and his involvement in an Anabaptist coup brought him under the suspicion of the authorities. He left for Haarlem and then, in 1537, for England, where his scholarly distinction quickly brought him into royal service. He found himself to be in step with the prevailing mood, and was enthusiastic about government policies such as the royal supremacy and the dissolution of the monasteries. He took out letters of denization in 1539 and in that year received a handsome quarterly salary from the royal purse of £5 6s 8d. Doubtless he was being retained for the promise of his scholarship, which bore first fruit in 1540 when he published his *Novum Testamentum* (STC 2799), a reworking of the Erasmian New Testament.

It has been suggested that the title *biblioscopus* was given to the scholar who was charged with sifting and registering the books that came into the royal library from the wreck of the monastic dissolutions.² In fact, as is well known, the man connected to the court who took an interest in books from the suppressed monasteries was John Leland (c. 1503–1552); but it seems that the books that Leland took over for the royal library belonged to his private initiative; there was no centralized royal policy for salvaging monastic collections.³ The only evidence for any comparable act of policy comes earlier, from 1528, when efforts were made to sequester copies of rare texts that might prove useful in securing precedents to bolster the king's legal position in his 'Great Matter', his divorce from the queen, Katharine of Aragon.⁴ Overseen by Cardinal Wolsey, agents were sent out to Lincolnshire and doubtless other places too, to rummage through the 'dust and worms' of the libraries of religious houses for recondite, forgotten material that could be pressed into service to support the case for divorce. It is the reason why so many rare commentaries on Leviticus and Deuteronomy are present in the royal library, these being the books of the Bible that discuss the legitimacy of marriage to one's brother's widow.

There is no evidence that Deleen had anything to do with ex-monastic books. When he arrived at court these early sequestrations were over and there was no organized sequel. Deleen's activities were intellectual and, indeed, polemical. His own work, and the survival of one of his books in New College Library, make it more natural to regard the king's *biblioscopus* as some sort of scholar-librarian or reading-secretary, charged with finding and vetting books for the king's attention. That is certainly the context for the

¹ His biography is given accessibly by Andrew Pettegree in *ODNB*.

² *ibid.*

³ See further James P. Carley, *John Leland, De viris illustribus. On Famous Men* (Toronto & Oxford 2010).

⁴ As has been established by James P. Carley, *The Libraries of King Henry VIII*, *Corpus of British Medieval Library Catalogues* 7 (2000), pp. xxxiii–xxxv.

New College volume, MS 136. It happens to be the only manuscript written by Deleen to have escaped from the Royal Library.⁵

The book is a composite of two parts. The larger part is a printed book, a copy of a strident work of Reformation polemic put out under the name of the Lutheran archbishop-elect of Cologne, Hermann von Wied (1477–1552, *sedes* 1515–46). The work, entitled *Einfältiges Bedenken, worauf eine christliche, im Worte Gottes gegründete Reformation . . . anzurichten sei*, sets forth a proposal for the reformation of the Cologne cathedral chapter. It was actually written by Martin Bucer and Philipp Melanchthon; the edition was printed at Bonn by Laurenz von der Mülen in 1543 (VD16 K1734). The New College copy is complete and is the only copy known from Britain. It was apparently Deleen's own, for in a paper quire bound before it, he inserted, written in his regular, upright italic hand, his own translation of the text from the German into learned Latin—a service to those around him, not least the king, who did not read in the original language. In truth, his ambition rather outran the achievement, and the translation breaks off early after a chapter on the origin of sin and death (c. 6). Deleen had given up his translation by 1545 when the two parts of the present book were bound together: the date is stamped on the binding. A Latin translation was printed independently in Bonn in 1545 under the title *Simplex et pia deliberatio qua ratione Christiana reformatio tantisper instituenda sit*, which must explain why Deleen had decided to abandon his work.

Undeterred, and incomplete as it is, Deleen none the less intended the volume to be a royal presentation. He prefaced his text with a dedication to Henry, in which the king's *biblioscopus* seems eager to remind the king of the title that he went by: there are many references to 'seeing' in the dedication, and Deleen encouraged the king to rely on other eyes and ears since no prince could be omniscient. He added to the work when it came to his attention that Archbishop Hermann's proposal for the reformation of his cathedral chapter had received a vituperative reply from his canons, published as *Antididagma* (Cologne 1544). The *biblioscopus* had evidently seen a copy of this work soon after it had been published, for in a continuation of his translation, copied on to blanks after the book had been bound, he wrote, 'After I had sent this book with my translation off to the binder, I chanced upon a little book entitled Antididagma'. He went on to express his low opinion of the validity of its argument with lengthy quotations from Isaiah about darkness and ignorance (Is 59:10; 29:11–14). The antithesis represented by an all-seeing *biblioscopus* was perhaps not accidental.

Being able to locate both these Cologne texts so close to the king's scholarly circle is not without a wider significance. Archbishop Cranmer laid the *Pia deliberatio* much under contribution in expositive sections of his 1549 Prayer Book.⁶ An English translation was published at London in 1547 under the title *A Simple and religious consultation* (STC 13213). There are quotations from *Antididagma* in BL MSS Royal 7 B. XI and XII, known as 'Archbishop Cranmer's Commonplace-Books', and there is a copy of the 1544 edition at Lambeth Palace. The New College manuscript is the first evidence for either text's reception in England.

One of the more extraordinary aspects of the volume is its binding. It is lavish, covered in royal insignia, as to suggest that the book had indeed been intended for the royal library. Pasteboards covered with brown calf are patterned with a flamboyant gold-tooling, identifiable as the work of the justly named Flamboyant Binder. Three other bindings from the same shop are known, all of them connected with Wouter Deleen and

⁵ The other books are BL MSS Royal 7 D. XX, 8 B. II, 12 A. XXXII, 12 B. II, 12 B. XIII, App. 80.

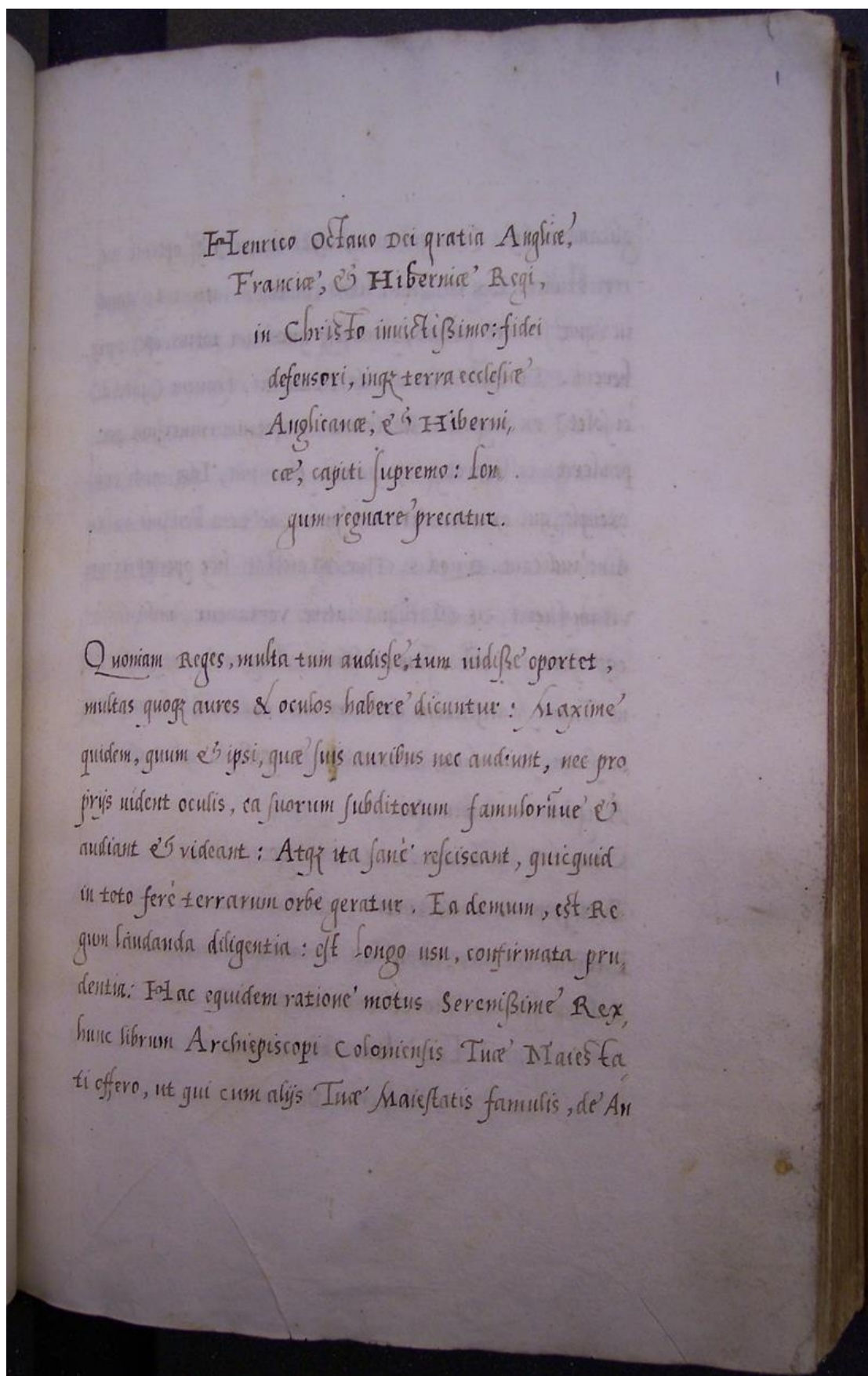
⁶ C. J. Cuming, *A History of Anglican Liturgy*, 2nd ed. (London 1982), pp. 45–69. Cranmer's copy of the *Pia deliberatio* is at Chichester Cathedral.



MS 136, New College Library, Oxford

still in the royal library.⁷ Prominent on the binding are the royal arms, crowned, flanked by *H* and *R* for *Henricus Rex*, with Tudor roses and cornucopias among the scrollwork. In the lower quarter is a lettered panel bearing the date 1545: 'Henry the VIII. by | the grace of God Kyng | of England. Fraunce. | and Irelande. and. C. | with Godes help. | Ano. D. M. D. XLV.' The back board is more or less a match, albeit the scrollwork is more restrained. In the lower panel is a different inscription: 'O. Iesv. miserere. mei. | dum. tempus. est. | miserendi.' and then in a discrete panel below that: 'VVivat. Rex. | Amen.' There are fixture holes on both boards for two fore-edge clasps or ties, and four holes for a chain-staple towards the foot of the upper board's fore-edge, which correspond to a chaining arrangement that was not New College's.

⁷ H. M. Nixon, *Five Centuries of English Bookbinding* (London, 1978), p. 34 (no. 11); id. 'Early English gold-tooled bookbindings', in *Studi de bibliografia e di storia in onore di Tammario de Marinis*, 4 vols (Verona, 1964), vol. 2, pp. 283–308, at p. 299; I. G. Philip, *Gold-tooled Bookbindings* (Oxford, 1951), pl. 5.



Henrico Octavo dei gratia Angliæ,
Franciæ, & Hiberniæ Regi,
in Christo inuictissimo: fidei
defensori, inq[ue] terra ecclesiæ
Anglicanæ, & Hiberni-
cæ, capiti supremo: lon-
gum regnare precat[ur].

Quoniam Reges, multa tum audisse, tum uide[re] oportet,
multas quoq[ue] aures & oculos habere dicuntur: Maxime
quidem, quum & ipsi, quæ suis auribus nec audiunt, nec pro-
prijs uident oculis, ea suorum subditorum famulor[um] &
audiant & uideant: Atq[ue] ita sanè resciscant, quicquid
in toto ferè terrarum orbe geratur. Ea demum, est Re-
gum laudanda diligentia: q[ue] longo usu, confirmata pru-
dentia: Hac equidem ratione motus Serenissime Rex,
hunc librum Archiepiscopi Colonien[sis] Tuæ Maiest[atis]
effero, ut qui cum alijs Tuæ Maiest[atis] famulis, de An-

The book is undoubtedly one of the curiosities of the College Library. It is not yet known quite how or when it arrived. Certainly, it was at the College before 1697, when it was listed for the union catalogue that is *Catalogi librorum manuscriptorum Angliae et Hiberniae*. The College received many books from the estate of Cardinal Pole, and this is the sort of book, given Cranmer's interest, that Pole might have found at Lambeth when he was Mary's archbishop of Canterbury. He is known to have collected texts of protestant opinion, the better, no doubt, to refute them.⁸ But New College received Pole's Greek manuscripts, not his Latin. Besides, Pole had the habit of signing his books, and this book has no signature. An alternative route to the College may go through Thomas Pope, who had the stewardship of Greenwich palace at Henry's death and was one of the executors of the king's will. Pope gave a number of Henrician books to his foundation of Trinity College, Oxford. But the passage of this particular book from the hands of the *Biblioscopus* to New College awaits further investigation.

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⁸ A. Overall & J. M. W. Willoughby, 'Books from the circle of Cardinal Pole: the Italian library of Michael Throckmorton', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 75 (2012), pp. 111–40.