A Fresh Look at Harley MS. 1413: ‘A Book … fairly written in the German or Switz language’

Pamela Porter

Among the manuscripts that Humfrey Wanley purchased for the library of the Earls of Oxford from Mr Foresight, executor of John Spicer of the Painter Stainers’ Company, was a volume that evidently presented him with something of a linguistic challenge – or so it seems from his entry for it in his unpublished catalogue of the Harley manuscripts, an entry that was later to be adopted virtually without change when the British Museum produced a printed catalogue of the Harleian collection. Wanley’s introductory paragraph reads ‘A Book in fol. fairly written in the German or Switz Language; and formerly belonging (as by the arms on the Cover it may seem) to one of the Electors of Brandenburgh. It treateth de re militari, and in all probability was the second or third Volume, of a Work written upon that Subject. What is herein contained, (as well as a friend & I could pick it out,) followeth here in order’. In the event Wanley and his friend seem to have negotiated the linguistic obstacle rather well, as the itemized list which follows provides a comprehensive and more or less accurate summary of the manuscript’s contents, including the illustrations.

In the earlier of two Prefaces to the British Museum’s published catalogue, written in 1762, Harl. MS. 1413 (as the volume had by then been numbered) appears in a summary overview of the collection, occupying a prominent position in the section headed ‘Books of ARCHITECTURE, GEOMETRY, GUNNERY, FORTIFICATIONS, SHIP-BUILDING, AND MILITARY AFFAIRS’. The account given there reads:- ‘a large Volume, written in High Dutch, soon after the Invention of Fire-Arms; being a Treatise on Military Affairs, illustrated with a great Number of fine Drawings, in Water Colours, representing the proper Forms of Marches, Encampments, and Disposition of Armies; Orders of Battle, Attacks, Sieges, and Storms of Forts, Towns, Castles, Draughts of Ships of War, Fire-Ships, and Fleets; Bridges of Timber and Stone, Hydraulic Engines, Tools, Instruments, and warlike Machines of every Kind; the Form of the ancient British Chariot, &c’. The volume was clearly considered to be one of the ‘Books of the most approved Value and Curiosity’ that had been singled out for special mention, despite the fact that its text had not been identified, it had not been formally dated, and nothing but a clue had been provided as to its possible origin. This lack of information almost certainly explains why the manuscript has remained virtually unnoticed for almost 250 years.

Harl. MS. 1413, written on paper and striking in appearance, is a large bound volume measuring 428 x 286mm. It contains Books VII to X of a treatise on the art of war, possibly unfinished, since the final book has neither colophon nor formal conclusion. Written in black ink in a Gothic hybrid cursive hand with a pronounced backward slope, the text incorporates a number of calligraphically-written headings and full-page titles with many elaborate flourishings (fig. 1). Books VII and VIII of the volume are lavishly illustrated with

1 Add. MS. 45704, ff. 188-189.
4 Ibid., p. 7.
A Fresh Look at Harley MS. 1413: ‘A Book … fairly written in the German or Switz language’
well-executed and partially pictorial coloured plans, sometimes occupying double pages and occasionally extending into fold-outs. They demonstrate various options for positioning the army while encamped (fig. 2), formations for the organization of troops, and forty-two different ways of ordering the army for battle (fig. 3). There are in addition a number of schematic plans drawn in black and red ink relating to the management of the Wagenburg, again with occasional fold-outs. Claiming to be accurate in scale, the plans serve to support an accompanying text which includes detailed tables of associated numbers and costs. The remaining chapters are illustrated at appropriate points with water-colour drawings. Book IX, a chapter on sieges, includes a double-page bird’s eye view of an assault on a town and a picture of the besieging of a castle. Book X deals with warfare at sea and includes two drawings – a ship being prepared for naval combat (fig. 4) and a double-page illustration showing a fleet under sail. A further fourteen water-colour drawings have been gathered together and bound in at the end of the volume. Two of these, showing preparations for a siege and the outcome of an assault (fig. 5), may possibly have been misplaced when the manuscript was bound or rebound. The others, all technical, could well have been intended to illustrate a further chapter, planned but not written. Alternatively any or all of them could have been simply surplus to requirements.5

Some leaves have been cropped to fit a former binding, a fold-out belonging to one of the plans has at some point become torn off and lost, and evidence of earlier damp staining can be seen in the lower right-hand corner of all but the first few pages. Otherwise the volume is sound, since basic repairs were carried out when its previous covers – recorded as having been in an extremely poor state (fig. 6) – were replaced in 1968 by the standard British Museum binding that is still in use. Two panel stamps from an earlier binding have been retained and laid down on the first of the three initial blank leaves, which also bears Wanley’s pressmark for the Harleian Library – ‘81.c.5’ – written in black ink, together with the pencil annotation ‘2/IV F’, possibly another pressmark, as yet unidentified. A water-mark of a heraldic shield party per fess, in chief an eagle’s head crowned, the base fretty, occurs at intervals throughout the volume, although the three blank leaves at the beginning, possibly intended as flyleaves,7 appear to come from a different stock of paper, since one has a water-mark of a heraldic double-headed eagle surmounted by a large crown.8 The manuscript is foliated 1-225 in pencil throughout in the top right-hand corner (f. 212 is repeated, one of the leaves being blank), although those illustrations actually incorporated in the text have been excluded from this foliation. The pictorial plans illustrating the forty-two formations for battle have been given numbers in ink in the lower right-hand corner, rather curiously commencing with twelve and running through to fifty-three. Where these plans have fold-outs the numbers have been placed so as to be visible when the page is folded in, suggesting that this numbering must have been added at or after the time of binding.

Investigating the provenance of the volume in Fontes Harleiani,9 C. E. Wright identified the arms on one of the two panel stamps preserved from an earlier binding as those of

---

5 A description of the manuscript with full details is to be included in the British Library Digital Catalogue of Illuminated Manuscripts.
6 Unsigned report on the condition of the Harleian Collection in the Department of Manuscripts binding records, apparently produced in the 1960s in connection with the initiation of the Fontes Harleiani project.
7 The volume is too tightly bound to permit a proper collation.
8 This bears a resemblance to, but is not identical with, C. M. Briquet, Les Filigranes (Paris, 1907), no. 304, Würzburg 1552-1585 (identical examples Leipzig, 1559, Prague 1559-64).
A Fresh Look at Harley MS. 1413: ‘A Book … fairly written in the German or Switz language’

Fig. 2. Plan of an army encamped. Harl. MS. 1413, ff. 18v and facing page.
Fig. 3. Plan showing the sixth order of battle. Harl. MS. 1413, ff. 99v and facing page.
Fig. 4. Preparing a ship for war. Harl. MS. 1413, f. 181v.
Fig. 5. An assault on a fortified town. Harl. MS. 1413, f. 220v.
Albrecht Friedrich, 2nd Duke of Prussia (1553–1618), a member of the Ansbach branch of the Hohenzollern family resident in Königsberg, and evidently an early owner of the manuscript. It was also possible to name a much later owner, since the volume was included in the group of books purchased by Humfrey Wanley from Mr Foresight, executor of the Painter Stainer, John Spicer (d. c. 1710). There is no direct information available as to how John Spicer came by this particular volume – he could of course have acquired it on his own account from an independent source – but he is known to have purchased the library of John Saunders, Master of the Painter Stainers’ Company (d. 1687), who had bought books from one of his predecessors, John Withie (d. c. 1678), whilst Withie owned volumes acquired from Edward Barwick, herald painter and likewise member of the Painter Stainers’ Company (d. c. 1650). Although no evidence can be produced to indicate that the volume actually belonged to any or all of John Spicer’s predecessors the possibility cannot be discounted, and ownership by Edward Barwick would place the manuscript in England as early as the mid-seventeenth century. For the time being, however, the puzzle as to exactly when and how it made its way from Königsberg to a new owner in a foreign country remains to be explained.

Duke Albrecht Friedrich, the earlier of the two owners identified in the Fontes Harleiani, was the weak and sickly son of Albrecht von Brandenburg-Ansbach, 1st Duke of Prussia and last Grand Master of the Teutonic Order (1490–1568). At the time of his father’s death Albrecht Friedrich was not quite fifteen years old, and for the following three years East Prussian affairs of state were managed on his behalf by a regency council. On reaching the age of eighteen he was already showing signs of the serious mental disorder that was to plague him for the rest of his life, and there is little about the details of his unhappy existence to indicate any appetite on his part for scholarly investigation in general or for studying the art of war in particular. His father, on the other hand, had been of an altogether different disposition. Despite lacking a formal academic education, Albrecht, 1st Duke of Prussia, was a civilized man with a remarkable range of talents, who transformed his ducal city of Königsberg situated on the Baltic in a quiet corner of Northern Europe into a thriving centre of Renaissance culture and learning. An enthusiastic patron of the visual arts, music, humanistic studies and the various branches of science, he surrounded himself with scholars and artists, founded a university, and assembled a number of impressive libraries. For personal use he kept a significant collection of German works in his Kammerbibliothek, housed in a special room in the east wing of the ducal residence, Königsberg castle.

Duke Albrecht had a lifelong interest in, and a deep understanding of, the theory of war, devoting a considerable amount of time to corresponding on the subject and assembling an extensive collection of books, manuscripts, drawings, plans and other material relating to it. His interest culminated in the composition of his own work on military theory, his Kriegsordnung, which has a strong claim to be one of the most important studies written in the sixteenth century on the art of waging war. The German text of this work has until now

---

11 Edward Barwick certainly had a connection through whom he might have acquired a German manuscript, since his brother was John Barwick, Dean of St Paul’s (1612–1664), who not only maintained communication with the King’s ministers in exile on the Continent but was also something of a bibliophile.
12 For an account of his mental illness see H. C. Erik Midelfort, Mad Princes of Renaissance Germany (Charlottesville, 1994), pp. 73-181.
been known solely from a manuscript of 1555, at present in the collection of the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin-Preussischer Kulturbesitz (MS. boruss. fol. 441), a volume recently published in facsimile with an accompanying scholarly text. This manuscript contains an introductory dedication to Albrecht’s cousin, Sigismund II Augustus, King of Poland, to whom the work was sent in 1555 and who in 1561 commissioned a Polish translation of it from Maciej Strubicz, afterwards cartographer to King Stephen Báthory. One 1561 manuscript of this Polish version survives and is now kept in the Czartoryski Library in Kraków (MS. 1813).

Even a cursory examination of the Harleian volume and the Berlin manuscript of Albrecht’s Kriegsordnung can confirm some kind of connection between the two. Both are written in the same backward-sloping hand with the same sort of calligraphic headings and flourishes, and – although differently placed in the course of the narrative – both contain virtually the same texts dealing with the figures and orders of battle, illustrated by plans and diagrams identical in composition but evidently executed by different draughtsmen. There are obvious variants – in the tables of numbers and costs, for example – but since Harl. MS. 1413 is lacking the first six books of its text, it is impossible to make a full comparison with the contents of the Berlin manuscript to establish other parallels and differences. Nevertheless, sufficient similarities can be recognized to make it highly likely that the Harleian volume is the second part of a variant version of the text of Duke Albrecht’s Kriegsordnung. It is impossible to take this notion further, however, unless some concrete information can be produced about the contents and format of the manuscript or manuscripts containing Books I–VI.

In 1908 Bernard Quaritch, the firm of antiquarian booksellers in Grafton Street, issued a sale catalogue with the title Description of an Important Manuscript on Military Science written for Albert of Brandenburg, 1st Duke of Prussia, giving an account of a lavishly illustrated military treatise comprising six chapters. The transcriptions provided for the headings of the various sections reveal that in format they closely resemble those of the chapter headings in the Harleian volume. The book is described as follows:

Folio. Manuscript on paper consisting of 762 pages, written for Albert of Brandenburg, first Duke of Prussia (1490–1568), with a full-page portrait (in water-colours) of him on horseback clothed in a beautiful suit of gold damascened armour attended by 3 halberdiers, a full-page coat of arms; and 58 very fine water-colour drawings (11½ x 7½ ins [292 x 191 mm]) depicting the uniforms and duties of each rank in the army, together with various military operations, etc., bound in old calf, a few leaves very slightly damp-stained, otherwise in very fine condition.

The catalogue compiler states that he considers it to be a most interesting relic, clearly the work of a learned and experienced man who was a follower of the Reformed church, and – in the absence of any concrete evidence of authorship – suggests that it was most probably written by Albrecht himself. His independent conclusion chimes with the fact that the

---

15 Ibid., vol. i includes a Polish transcription of this volume, and (pp. 35–8) a detailed account of what is known about manuscripts of the Polish version.
chapter headings listed by him resemble some of those in the Berlin manuscript and cover a similar range of topics, whilst the introductory verse that he quotes in full is identical with the verse found at the beginning of the Berlin text -

Kriegs ordenung bin ich genant.
wer kriegt und ist in mir bekant,
Der kan nach der Zeit und gestalt,
all sein schlachtordnung machen balt,
Auch brauchen manchen vortheil gut,
dem feindt zustillen sein obermut.

Once again, however, the possibilities for further comparison cease, since the Quaritch catalogue does not contain any transcriptions of text other than the headings. Moreover the six black and white photographs that it reproduces are confined to a selection of the water-colour drawings that accompany the text, a type of pictorial illustration that is totally lacking in the Berlin manuscript.

This is not the case with Harl. MS. 1413, however, where there are a number of such water-colour drawings, all in the same style and format as those reproduced to illustrate the catalogue. Moreover, the bound volume and its drawings more or less correspond in size with the reported dimensions of the Quaritch manuscript, whilst the text of the latter is divided into Books I-VI and the chapters in the Harley volume are numbered Books VII-X, a strong indication that the two must surely belong together. Regrettably no information was forthcoming as to the identity of the 1908 purchaser of the Quaritch manuscript, and after numerous enquiries and many long years of fruitless searching I started to wonder whether it was ever going to be possible to discover details of its subsequent fate. It was, therefore, a stroke of totally serendipitous good fortune that the first volume unexpectedly made an appearance during the early stages of writing this article when it was offered for sale (and was subsequently sold) at Sotheby’s, the anonymous vendor having inherited it from an unnamed private collection.17

Fortunately it was possible to make a very brief examination of this volume before the sale took place, providing conclusive confirmation that it is indeed the missing first half of Harl. MS. 1413. The volumes are of a comparable size, both texts are written in the same backward-sloping hand with the same form of calligraphic headings and flourishes, and their illustrations match perfectly in format, style and – in the case of individual water-colour drawings – dimensions. In addition a water-mark was noted matching that occurring throughout the Harleian manuscript, namely a heraldic shield as described above, which appears to be identical with a water-mark associated with Königsberg in 1553.18 The two volumes most probably came to England together – it seems intuitively unlikely that they would have arrived by different routes – and became separated at some point before Wanley purchased the Harleian volume from Mr Foresight. One possibility is that John Spicer was responsible for their separation, since the published Harleian catalogue records (in the description of Harl. MS. 1402) that the executor Mr Foresight was selling all volumes that were available, but that ‘there are wanting divers excellent Books which Mr. Spicer was known to be master of; which seems to be occasioned by his lending them to divers; & also leaving them behind him in his different Countrey Lodgings, which he took, time after time, for the sake of the Air’.

16 I understand from a reliable source that this description was written by E. H. Dring, managing director of the firm.
17 Sotheby’s, Western Manuscripts and Miniatures, London 7 July 2009, lot 25.
18 Online Piccard 24923
Thus the German text of the *Kriegsordnung* of Albrecht, first Duke of Prussia, hitherto regarded as having survived exclusively in the Berlin manuscript, also exists as a two-volume work made up of the Quaritch/Sotheby manuscript and Harl. MS. 1413. Moreover this is an extensively illustrated version, apparently longer and more detailed than the Berlin text and containing an appreciable amount of additional material relating to warfare at sea. A closer and more precise analysis of textual variations will be necessary to establish the exact nature of the relationship between the two recensions, but meanwhile a few preliminary observations can be made on circumstances surrounding the composition of the work and the production of the manuscripts.

Albrecht probably started to compile the written version of his *Kriegsordnung* in the 1540s, but appears to have become disillusioned, setting it aside before completion. Whilst on a visit to Königsberg in 1552, his cousin Sigismund Augustus of Poland gained sight of the work, whereupon he urged Albrecht to complete it and expressed interest in owning a copy for himself. On returning to his unfinished text Albrecht felt the need for much revision, and it was not until 1555 that he had completed a version suitable for sending to Poland. This is the text preserved in the Berlin manuscript, complete with its prefatory letter of dedication. The two-volume version contained in the Sotheby/Quaritch and Harleian manuscripts has a preface addressed to all warrior princes, lords, military leaders and their common soldiers, indicating that it was intended as a general and comprehensive manual on the art of waging war. As such it was presumably the original reference work that Albrecht had been compiling for his own use and that of his heirs and to which he alludes in his prefatory letter to Sigismund Augustus, albeit possibly edited, modernized and augmented whilst preparing the version for Poland. Despite the lack of colophon the text could even have been brought to its intended conclusion, but the existence in Harl. MS. 1413 of a number of surplus drawings depicting technical equipment for war, such as pontoon bridges, a cart with scythed wheels (fig. 6), hydraulic machines and a page of tools, suggests that a further chapter may have been planned.

In conclusion a word must be added about the nature of the manuscripts and their possible dates. Harl. MS. 1413, its companion volume and MS. boruss. fol. 441 are all fair copies written in the same style by the same unidentified scribe, suggesting that they were very probably produced at around the same time. The date given in the Berlin manuscript is 1555 but the other two manuscripts are undated, although the compiler of the Quaritch catalogue makes a plausible suggestion of around 1560, based on the estimated age of Duke Albrecht as depicted in the illustrations to the first volume. Whether the Berlin manuscript was a fair copy made for Duke Albrecht himself or for some other recipient is an open question (it is not thought to have been the copy that was actually sent to Poland), but it seems that the two-volume version was a copy intended for one of Duke Albrecht’s libraries in Königsberg. Harl. MS. 1413 provides evidence for this, since the two panel stamps preserved from an earlier binding can be positively associated with Hans Guttich, a bookbinder working at the Königsberg court in around 1575. Such a binding would almost certainly have had additional roll-stamp decoration, and it is tempting to assume that both parts may originally have been bound in the same way, although no trace of such a binding has survived with the first volume.

All in all Harl. MS. 1413 certainly merits its extensive description as a key item in the 1762 preface to the British Museum catalogue. For one thing it can be regarded as a manuscript of considerable interest in its own right, being a relic from Königsberg (now

---

20 Leng, op. cit., p. 52.
Kaliningrad), a historic city that lost its identity and much of its cultural heritage as a result of the Second World War. In addition it contains the second half of a formerly unidentified version of one of the most important works on the management of war written at the time of the Renaissance. For many years the text of this work has been available to military historians only in a modified version, while the section on naval warfare – the final chapter in the Harleian manuscript – has been unknown and totally unsuspected. Now that the identity of the manuscript has been established it can be studied in more depth, both in respect of its text and in the context of its historical background. The Renaissance court at Königsberg has in recent times become the subject of a new wave of scholarship that is bringing many unknown facts to light, and with this new body of information there are already indications that Harl. MS. 1413 has many more secrets to reveal.

Fig. 6. A form of scythed chariot. Harl. MS. 1413, f. 222v.