

= Bois Protat =

The woodblock fragment Bois Protat ([bw? p??ta] (" Protat wood [block] ") ; also Protat block or Protat woodblock , c . 1370 ? 1380) is a fragmentary woodblock for printing , and the images on it are the oldest surviving woodcut images from the Western world . It is cut on both sides , with a scene from Christ 's crucifixion on the recto , and a kneeling angel from a presumed Annunciation scene on the verso . The crucifixion scene likely consisted of three or more blocks ; the surviving block fragment features Longinus the Roman centurion at the Crucifixion , shown speaking with a banderole , a mediaeval precursor to the modern speech balloon containing his words .

The Bois Protat 's name comes from the Mâconnais printer Jules Protat who acquired the block after its discovery in 1898 near La Ferté Abbey in Saône @-@ et @-@ Loire , France , where it was wedged under a stone floor . Because of such poor preservation , only a quarter of the block has survived , and only one side was able to withstand making prints at the time of discovery . It is kept in the Department of Prints and Photographs at the Bibliothèque nationale de France , the National Library of France in Paris .

= = Description = =

A 600 × 230 × 25 @-@ millimetre (24 × 9 × 1 in) fragment remains of the Bois Protat , a walnut woodblock engraved on both sides for printing on cloth or paper . One side is a fragment of a Crucifixion scene . Part of the cross with the left arm of Christ is visible ; to the right two Roman soldiers and a centurion stand speaking . A phylactery , or speech scroll , emanates from the centurion 's mouth and contains the Latin text , " Vere filius Dei erat iste " (" This was really the son of God ") , as written in the Vulgate translation of Matthew 27 : 54 . On the reverse side remains a kneeling angel , probably part of an Annunciation scene .

Judging from the Crucifixion fragment , coming from a very commonly depicted scene , it is thought that only a quarter to a third of the original block remains . The surface of the complete scene is believed to have been about 100 by 60 centimetres (39 in × 24 in) , which is larger than contemporary paper sizes , indicating it may have been intended for printing on cloth , as was already common with patterns for clothing textiles . It is usually thought that it was intended for printing cloth altar frontals or hangings . It is rare for such a block to be carved with images on both sides , and was likely not intended to be printed using a press , as that would have defaced one side .

= = Background = =

Relief printing , in the form of woodblocks , originated in China . The earliest examples were printed on cloth ; paper prints followed the invention of paper c . 105 CE . Most printed images were religious Buddhist scenes , and the method was also the method used for texts of all sorts .

The Bois Protat is the earliest surviving example of the 14th @-@ century arrival of woodblock printing in Europe . The technology did not become widespread until the 15th century , when paper became readily available . Prints tended to be religious ; they were more affordable to most people than devotional paintings , and often illustrated religious books . Playing cards and other secular prints were also popular . From the mid @-@ 15th century woodcuts were combined with Gutenberg 's moveable type ; particularly in Germany , woodcuts appeared by master artists such as Albrecht Dürer , and the form enjoyed a high level of artistry .

= = History = =

The Bois Protat was discovered in 1898 in France in a corner of masonry in a house in Laives in the department of Saône @-@ et @-@ Loire , which had been a dependency of the Abbey of La Ferté until the abbey was destroyed in 1793 during the French Revolution . The board suffered from pressure and humidity , as it was wedged under pavement .

After its discovery the block was purchased by Mâconnais printer and collector Jules Protat (1852 ? 1906) , and came to be called le bois Protat (" the Protat block ") . Jules Protat made some test prints on China paper , one of which he exhibited at the 1900 World 's Fair in Paris . The block is not in a state to withstand repeated printings , as three @-@ quarters of the original has been lost to damage from humidity and insects ; the reverse especially has not held up well , and is not in a condition suitable for making impressions . The curator of prints at the National Library of France Henri Bouchot published a study on the block in 1902 called Un ancêtre de la gravure sur bois (" An Ancestor of Wood Engraving ") . Though some contested his conclusions , Bouchot dated the work to the 14th century based on technical details such as the style of art , the Uncial script of the centurion 's speech , and the costumes and weapons of the centurion and soldiers . No historical impressions (prints) made from the block are known , but other early woodcuts have been attributed to the same artist .

For some time the Bois Protat remained in Protat 's family before it was entrusted to Bouchot . In 2001 it was donated to the National Library of France .