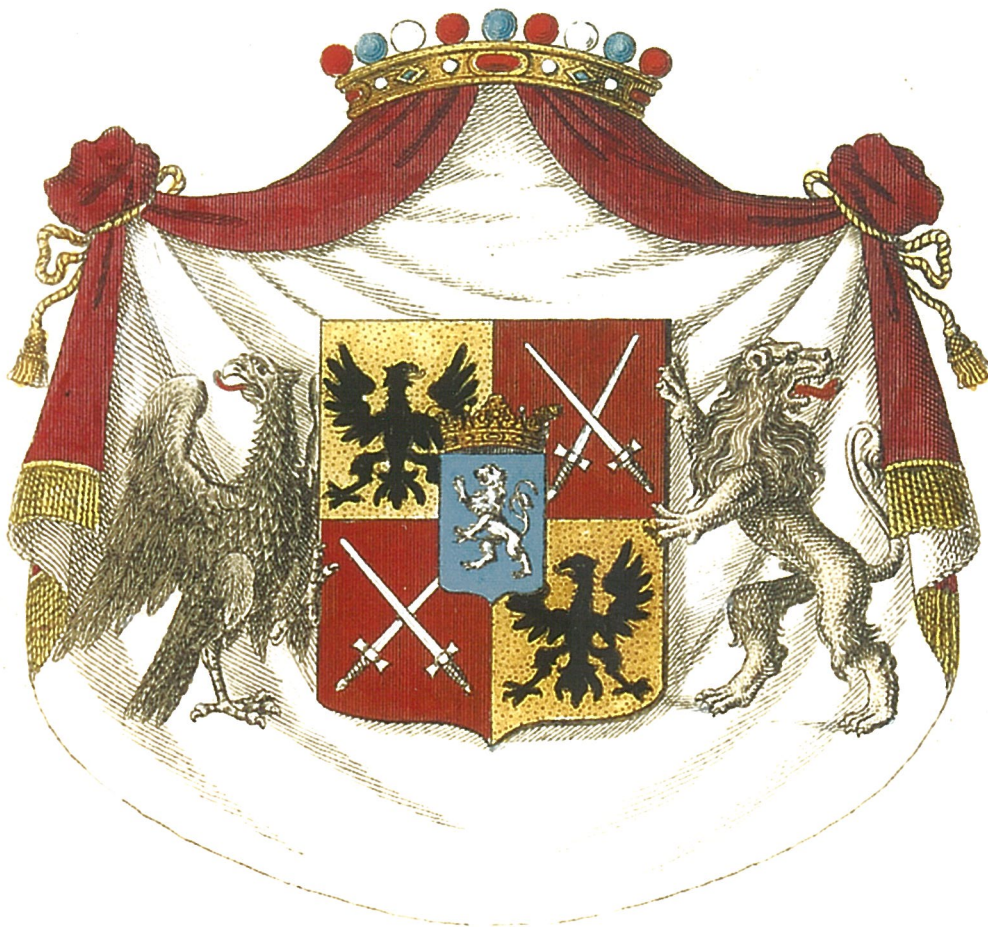


# CHRISTIE'S

London

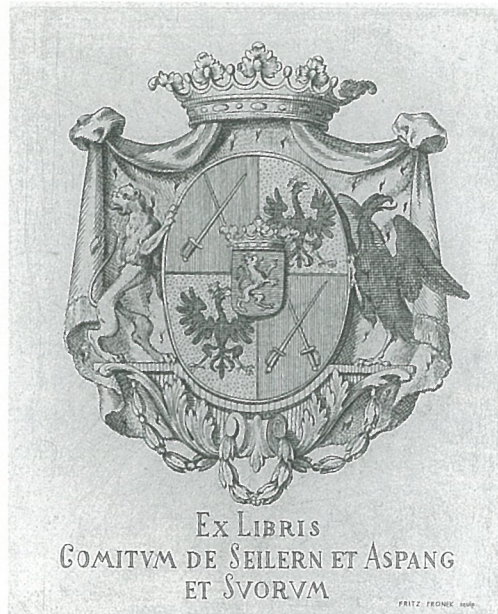


The Count Oswald Seilern Collection

WEDNESDAY 26 MARCH 2003







Count Oswald von Seilern und Aspang (London 1901-1967 Zurich) began collecting books in the decades between the 20th-century's two world wars, a time when libraries of European religious houses were still coming on the market; when the most energetic and erudite Continental dealers published catalogues offering hundreds of medieval manuscripts, thousands of incunabula and tens of thousands of later printed books in all subjects; when supply first rose and prices subsequently fell. In the two decades following the Second World War, Count Seilern continued to build his collection by patronizing some of the same booksellers, who now worked from London and New York rather than from Leipzig, Munich or Vienna. He bought with such discrimination, circumspection and discretion that records are scarce, his library occurs only in the occasional census, and the present sale will contain a number of surprises to the antiquarian book historian. Two items in the sale may be singled out here as being of particular importance and representative of the collector's greatest passions: 15th-century printing and early illustrated books. The 28-leaf portion of the Trier II copy of the Gutenberg Bible, comprising the complete books of Maccabees, is one of the largest fragments left in private hands of the first book ever printed from movable type (lot 34). His magnificent copy in a contemporary blind-stamped binding of the 1482 Ulm Ptolemy, the first published modern atlas, with the woodcut maps coloured by a contemporary artist connected with the printer's shop, can find few equals in private libraries today (lot 93).

Count Oswald's better-known younger brother, the late Count Antoine Seilern, the great painting collector and benefactor of the Courtauld Institute, had an unerring sense of rarity and high quality. His acquisitions of old books were few but exquisite as two additions to this sale from his collection illustrate: a codex combining Alchandreus with Boethius's *Arithmetica* and *Musica*, illuminated in Paris c. 1405 by the so-called Virgil Master (lot 8), and the astonishing De Wit *Atlas*, containing 150 maps printed on silk, all hand-coloured and in the finest possible condition (lot 112).

After selling in recent years from the Shuckburgh, Wentworth, Rothschild and Botfield collections, manuscripts and incunabula that had not been seen in many generations, Christie's are now pleased to offer equally rare books from another exceptional library.