

Copy of Hypnerotomachia Poliphili.

When Morris and Burne-Jones were at work in the mid-1860's on the projected edition of The Earthly Paradise to be illustrated with woodcuts, their model was the Hypnerotomachia Poliphili, one of the most famous of all fifteenth century books. The first edition of 1499, printed at Venice by Aldus Manutius, has always been a collector's item, and it has been supposed that Morris and Burne-Jones used a later reissue belonging to either Ruskin or Rossetti, both of whom admired the book. Now the Morris-Burne-Jones copy has been rediscovered at Houghton Library, Harvard University, the original edition in remarkably fine condition. This apparently was the book Burne-Jones took with him on his seaside vacation at Lympington in August, 1866, as noted in William Allingham's Diary. Morris eventually gave it to him and acquired another edition in the 1870's.

The flyleaf bears the following inscription: "Edward Burne-Jones/from/William Morris/Red House/Upton, /Kent" the first two lines in Burne-Jones's hand, the latter four in Morris's. The book was presumably purchased (from F. S. Ellis?) before the Morrises left Red House in 1865. Below the inscription is the name "E. Burne-Jones" and date "1884" in calligraphy, possibly by Lady Burne-Jones, who is known to have catalogued her husband's books. The later provenance of the Morris-Burne-Jones Hypnerotomachia is uncertain: most of the artist's illustrated books were sold after his death in 1898, many of them to Fairfax Murray, but there are no auction records until 1919, followed by a long gap to 1971, when Mrs. Howard Sachs gave the book to Harvard.

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