

DOMINICUS CUSTOS

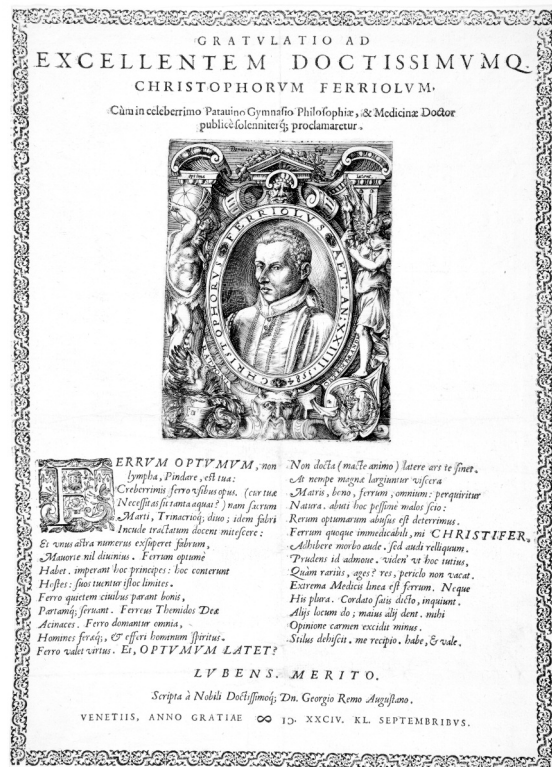
Antwerp, Innsbruck, Venice

Born around 1560, Dominicus Custos was the son of an artist family. His grandfather Balthasar Custodis was a sculptor; his father Pieter and his uncle Melchior were both painters. Pieter used the name Custos, Custodis, de Costere, or – as was customary in the Netherlands – his father's abbreviated first name, i.e. Baltens, as a middle name. Pieter was mainly known as a painter but was also active as an engraver and publisher. His estate included 230 copper plates. Dominicus grew up with nine siblings and was probably trained as an engraver in his father's workshop from an early age. At the end of his apprenticeship he left Antwerp, although the circumstances of his departure and his destination remain unclear. According to the currently prevailing view, he settled in Augsburg towards the end of the 1570s, where he established an internationally renowned printing workshop and publishing house.

However, upon closer investigation of the known sources and the artist's oeuvre, this assumption began to look increasingly less tenable. What emerged paints a rather different picture:

Dominicus Custos made his first dated work in Innsbruck. The engraving after a design by the Innsbruck court painter Giovanni Battista Fontana is dated 1582. It shows an allegory of Ferdinand II of Tyrol and his reign, which was designed as a frontispiece for Ferdinand's extensive collection of historical arms and armour, the so-called *Heldenrüstkammer* or *Armamentarium Heroicum*. In the years 1584 and 1585 Custos had travelled from Innsbruck to Padua and Venice, where two of his congratulatory prints for students of medicine were published in 1584 (fig. 1) and 1585. Back again in Tyrol he became court engraver of Ferdinand II in 1586. On 2 August 1586, Dominicus and his brothers, Hieronymus, Peter, Tobias, Johann Baptist and Raphael, were granted an augmentation of arms (Wappenbesserung) and the right to acquire and

possess noble fiefs. In this function as court engraver he made several portraits of Ferdinand II, his wife, some relatives and some of the rulers high officials. He continued working on the *Armamentarium Heroicum* proven by a portrait of Giovanni De' Medici, called Giovanni dalle Bande Nere (1498-1526), dated 1586 (fig. 2). Together with Giovanni Battista Fontana Custos must have travelled to Trent in the autumn of 1586 or spring of 1587, where Custos painted a manuscript with coats of arms of nobles who had fallen in the Austro-Venetian war of 1487. His most important task during this period however, was the production of the engravings needed for the *Armamentarium Heroicum*. Unfortunately the project came to a standstill, perhaps caused by Giovanni Battista Fontana's death in September 1587.



1: Dominicus Custos, Christoph Eiselin, *Ferriolus*, 1584, Brunswick, Herzog Anton Ulrich Museum



2: Dominicus Custos, *Giovanni de' Medici* (Giovanni dalle Bande Nere), 1586, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Département des estampes et de la photographie

Augsburg

In 1587, Bartholomäus Kilian, a goldsmith from Silesia, died in Augsburg. He left behind his widow Maria Pfeiffelmann, three sons, Hans Christoph (1578-?), Lucas (1579-1637) and Wolfgang (1581-1662), and a well-established goldsmith's workshop. Dominicus Custos seized the moment and married Maria Pfeiffelmann on 25 September 1588. Through this marriage, Custos became a citizen of the city of Augsburg, where he lived from then on, established his own workshop and regularly paid his taxes.

The first known engraving by Dominicus Custos that can be proven to have been made in Augsburg is associated with Octavian Secundus Fugger. It is a portrait of his youngest brother, Johann Georg Fugger, who had died in 1585, just twenty years old. The print, which is dated 1589, is notable for two

'firsts': in the inscription, Custos refers to himself as a citizen of Augsburg for the first time, and it is also the first known instance of his use of the monogram "D.C." as his signature, a "trademark" he was to use with increasing frequency. In the years 1588 to 1591 the artist was mainly working on his series of Fugger portraits, which, beginning with a small-format series of nine portraits (fig. 3), ended in his impressive magnum opus *Fuggerorum et Fuggerarum*. In the meantime, work on Ferdinand II's *Armamentarium Heroicum* had also continued. Which and how many plates Custos engraved for it in the years between 1588 and 1591 remains unclear. The sources only show that he received a payment of 194 fl and 18 kreuzers in September 1591 and that he must have travelled to Innsbruck in 1592.

The Custos Publishing House

Probably around 1596, Dominicus Custos engraved and published an undated, small series of caricatures. The grotesque heads, which are reminiscent of Leonardo, were made after drawings by Lucas Kilian and commissioned by the Fugger family for the collection of Emperor Rudolph II. The following year, Custos published a similarly curious series entitled *Les songes drolatiques de Pantagruel, ou sont contenues plusieurs figures de l'invention de maistre Francois Rabelais derniere oeuvre d'iceluy, pour la recreation des bons esprits ...* (Augsburg 1597). As indicated by the title, these were caricatures based on the satirical novel cycle *Gargantua and Pantagruel* by the French writer François Rabelais (fig. 4). The series is very rare today and one would hardly associate it with the oeuvre of Dominicus Custos if the connection were not clearly spelled out in the inscription on the title page, which reads 'Imprimé en Augustae Vindelicorum, par Iean Pretoir [Hans Schultes], en depens du Dominique Custodis.' The designation 'en depens', at the expense of, leaves much room for speculation what share Dominicus Custos or his workshop had in the engravings for this series of caricatures.

In March 1599, Dominicus Custos published a series of portraits of the Counts of Tyrol entitled *Tirolensium Principum Comitum ...*. The work was dedicated to Emperor Rudolph II, among whose

numerous titles at the time was also that of the reigning Count of Tyrol. The years around the turn of the century were an enormously fruitful period for the Custos publishing house. In 1600, the memoir of the Swabian knight and diplomat Georg von Ehingen was published. In the same year, Custos published a small-format volume with views of Roman sights based on etchings by Antonio Tempesta and Giovanni Maggi. The long-term project *Armamentarium Heroicum* was completed in about 1601/02, and, last but by no means least, between 1600 and 1602, one of his most famous books, the *Atrium Heroicum*, a portrait gallery of princes, statesmen, military leaders and other famous personalities of his time, was finished. The reasons behind the massive expansion of the Custos publishing business around the turn of the century were probably manifold. But Dominicus's bold decision to compile a work as ambitious as the *Atrium Heroicum*, which was originally planned to run to five volumes, and to produce it for the open market at his own expense was certainly driven by the much increased manpower he now had at his

disposal. Dominicus had trained his two stepsons, Lucas and Wolfgang Kilian, to become excellent engravers.

Even more helpful than the support from his stepsons may have been the financial windfall that came to Custos in the form of a substantial legacy left to his wife around 1599/1600. This inheritance opened up the possibility of pre-financing large projects independently of patrons and clients in order to sell them at fairs and in his own bookshop. With the *Atrium Heroicum*, Custos had correctly assessed the needs of the market. It was an immediate success, appeared in several editions and can still be found today in numerous copies in European libraries and print collections. The letterpress printing was carried out by the Augsburg printers Hans Schultes (Praetorius), Michael Manger and Christoph Mang, with whom Custos collaborated on several occasions over the years.

The Family

Lucas and Wolfgang Kilian did not work continuously in their stepfather's workshop. Lucas went on an educational journey to Italy from 1601-1604, including a long stay in Venice. After his return, Wolfgang travelled to Venice, Milan, Mantua and Rome (1604-1608). Both artists brought back fresh ideas that invigorated the output of the Custos workshop. Over the following years, a lot of engravings after paintings by Italian masters like Titian, Tintoretto, Veronese, Jacopo and Francesco Bassano as well as Palma il Giovane were published.

During the absence of the stepsons, the workshop took on Raphael Custos, Dominicus's much younger brother, who had also settled in Augsburg. Although the sources attesting to the family relationship have been available for many decades, during which time they have been published several times, 'alternative facts' persist in the literature. These describe Raphael, Jacob and David Custos as Dominicus's three biological sons with an extrapolated year of birth of c. 1591 for Raphael.



3: Dominicus Custos, Title page to: *Icones novem ...*, 1592, Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, Graphische Sammlung

Stephen J. Kostyshyn provided evidence in 1994 that according to all sources known up to that time, Dominicus Custos had no children of his own and that the engraver Raphael Custos, who was active in Augsburg, was Dominicus's youngest brother.

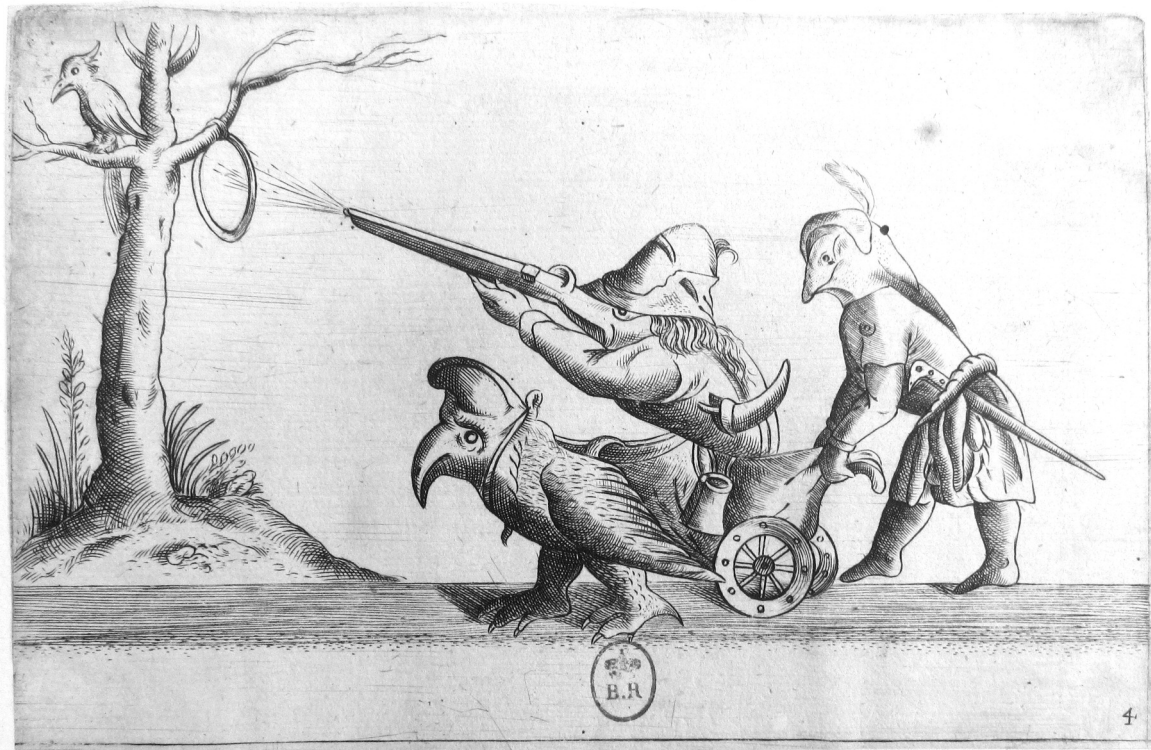
The collaboration of the family members continued unchanged over the following years, and even in the plague years of 1607/08, production did not grind to a halt. The workshop and publishing firm were located in a house in the Spenglergasse in the vicinity of the cathedral, a district in which numerous goldsmiths had settled.

The Final Works

Portraits had become Custos's main business but not the only subject of his art: title pages, topographical views, architecture, sieges, maps, illustrated broadsheets, caricatures, genealogical family trees, religious scenes, ornamental engravings etc., there is hardly anything that Custos did not turn his hand to. Having started out as an engraver,

he gradually focused more of his attention on the publishing side of the trade and became a publisher and a book and art dealer.

In 1611, Custos published a rather unusual work, a 'spiritual card game', of which only one copy seems to have survived. It was published under the title *Ludus Chartarum Spiritualis*. It is not a presentation piece, but a playable deck, which uses the 'spiritual suits' hare, lantern, lamb and lark instead of the usual suits clubs, diamonds, hearts and spades. The cards assign quotations from the gospels to the individual values (fig. 5). The pack of cards is part of the furnishings of a 'table cabinet' and is now in the Armoury of the Dresden State Art Collections. Philipp Hainhofer mentioned it in his letters. According to him, Custos had published a Latin and a German edition. However, there is as yet no trace of the German one. In 1613 the first edition of the famous *Hortus Eystettensis* (Garden of Eichstätt) by the Nuremberg pharmacist Basilius Besler was published. Johann Conrad of Gemmingen, Prince-Bishop of Eichstätt, (1561-1612) had initially



4: Dominicus Custos, *Grottesque Hunter in a Bird-shaped Cart Shooting at a Bird*, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Département des estampes et de la photographie

contracted the Custos workshop to produce the copper plates. After his death in November 1612, his successor, Prince-Bishop Johann Christoph of Wetterstetten (1563-1637), transferred the commission to Nuremberg, where he found it easier to supervise the progress of the work. The Custos workshop is said to have produced a total of 50 plates, which unfortunately can no longer be traced today, as most of the plates are unsigned. Wolfgang Kilian signed the title page and a few of the illustrations. Several other plates bear the signature of Raphael Custos, one the monogram of Dominicus Custos. Custos knew Johann Georg of Gemmingen from an earlier commission. It therefore seems most likely that these personal relationships were the decisive factor in initially entrusting Custos with the commission and then divesting him of it after the death of his advocate. From this point on, the works of Dominicus Custos become increasingly scarce. There are still a few prints that name him as publisher in 1616, 1617 and even as late as 1618, which contradicts the Augsburg tax records. There the final mention of Dominicus Custos by name is on 10 July 1615, while in the next entry of 12 May 1617 his wife is already described as a widow.

Custos probably died at the beginning of the year 1617. The print dated 1618 was published by his widow under her husband's name before she, too, died around 1618. In the last years of his life, Custos had reached not only the professional but also the social peak of his career. In 1611 and again in 1615, he was elected to the great council of the city of Augsburg. In his research paper of 1922, Hans Wengenmayr described Custos as 'A man with a well-tempered disposition, who could also be used in front of an audience.'

Artist Colleagues, Friends, Musicians

The oeuvre of Dominicus Custos contains several works that provide an insight into his personal relationship with a few of his contemporaries. First off, there is the portrait of Alexander Colin (c. 1527-1612), engraved by Lucas Kilian in 1601 after a design by Giovanni Pietro Telesphoro de Pomis. Colin was a compatriot of Dominicus Custos from Mechelen near Antwerp. He was the same age as



5: Dominicus Custos, *Nine of Leporis*, c. 1611, Dresden, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Rüstkammer

Dominicus's father, Pieter Baltens (ca. 1526-1584), and had been employed as court sculptor at the court of Ferdinand II in Innsbruck even before Custos's arrival. It is quite possible that it was under his auspices that Ferdinand became aware of Custos and that he was the young engraver's first point of contact in Innsbruck. Custos dedicated the sheet to his patron and sponsor Ferdinand II 'in affection': 'Memoriae Chariss. Patronis amoris et recordat. ergo Dom. Custos.'

In Augsburg, Abraham del Hel (c. 1534-1598) may have been an important contact for Dominicus Custos. Del Hel, too, may have been acquainted with Pieter Baltens in Antwerp. Both Dominicus Custos and Lucas Kilian engraved portraits after paintings by del Hel.

At the same time, Custos had a close professional collaboration with Franz Aspruck, who produced numerous drawings for Dominicus Custos and Lucas Kilian. Aspruck was born in Brussels, probably around 1575. Evidently the relationship between Custos and Aspruck went beyond the merely professional association. In February 1599, Franz Aspruck married Helena Lutz. In 1612, Dominicus Custos published an allegory on the cruelty of the world, dedicating the print to the bookseller Johann Georg Lutz, whom he describes as his friend and brother-in-law, thus attesting to a kinship relationship between the Aspruck and Custos families.

In the Augsburg-born artist Alexander Mair, Custos had a colleague who was not only his coeval but also a past master of both woodcut and copperplate engraving. Mair had established himself as an engraver in Augsburg several years earlier than Custos. In 1584, the so-called *Bissbuch* (Book of Bits) by Mang Seutter, stablemaster to Marcus Fugger, appeared in its first edition. The ambitious large-

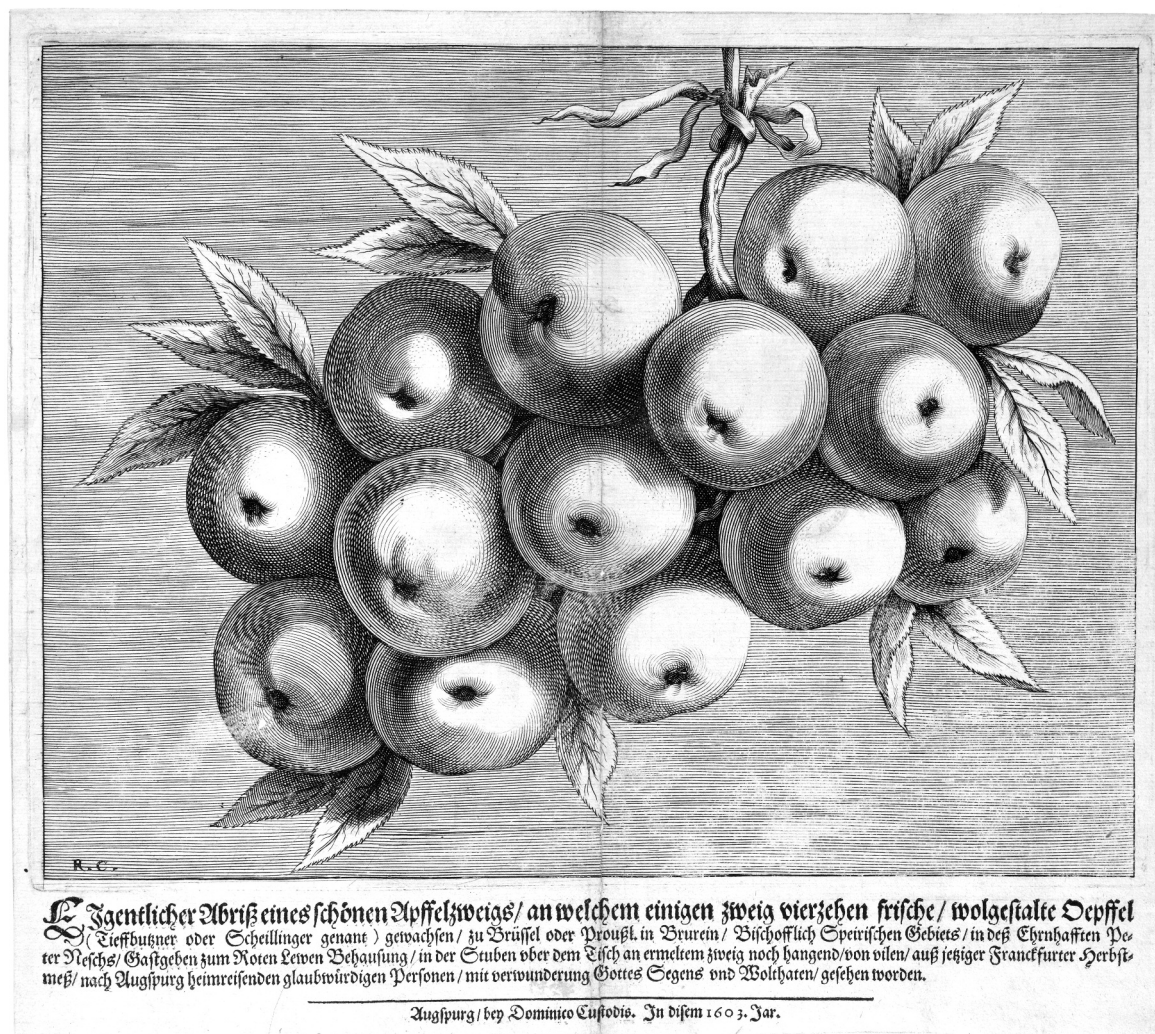
format work on the various designs and uses of horse bits featured more than 200 etchings by Alexander Mair and is considered the first major book publication in Augsburg to employ the printing from copper plates instead of printing from woodblocks. Custos occasionally copied works by Mair and Mair made engravings published by Custos, who considered Mair as his friend. Other people whom Custos referred to as friends in his dedications were the Augsburg foundryman Wolfgang Neithardt, the goldsmith and gemstone specialist Christoph Schwaiger, the director of the public library of the St Anna Gymnasium David Höschel, the Württemberg chamberlain Johann Schleiss as well as the three composers Hans Leo Hassler, Gregor Aichinger and Adam Gumpelzhaimer.

Tilman Falk already described Custos as a music lover and referred to this connection as early as 1984. Other musicians and music lovers, among them the singer Johannes Spreng, the singer and composer Jacob Chimarraeus and the book and sheet music collector Johann Georg of Werdenstein, feature in Custos's oeuvre. The relationships with Hassler, Aichinger and Gumpelzhaimer, however, were of a closer nature. The composer Adam Gumpelzhaimer was the same age as Custos and had already been made cantor at St. Anna when Custos arrived in Augsburg. Custos engraved a portrait of him in 1593 with a dedication in which he described Gumpelzhaimer as his friend and himself as an 'amator musicae'. Presumably Gumpelzhaimer was a family friend, for Raphael Custos, too, engraved a portrait of him. For Gumpelzhaimer's *Compendium Musicae*, which went through numerous editions, Custos engraved a frontispiece in 1595, which was copied by both Alexander Mair and Wolfgang Kilian for later editions.

Hassler and Aichinger were in Venice at about the same time as Custos and very likely knew each other from that time. Hans Leo Hassler studied in Venice under the famous musicians and composers Andrea and Giovanni Gabrieli. In Augsburg, he had been organist to Octavianus Secundus Fugger since 1585. Custos engraved a portrait of Hassler dated 1593. In the inscription, he describes the sitter as being



6: Dominicus Custos, Hans Leo Hassler, 1593, Augsburg, Kunstsammlungen und Museen, Graphische Sammlung



7: Raphael Custos, *Twig of apples*, 1603, Berlin, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Kupferstichkabinett

twenty years of age (fig. 6), although at that time he was already almost 30 years old. This fact might suggest that Custos made the preliminary drawing on which the engraving is based as early as c. 1583/84, probably in Venice, and then, some ten years later, he chose to present the now-celebrated organist with the youthful features of the young man he had known in Venice. In the dedication, Custos states that he had engraved the portrait in honour of the sitter and out of friendship with him.

The composer Gregor Aichinger (1564-1628) had been organist at St Ulrich and Afra since 1584 and was composer to Jacob III Fugger. Custos published

at least three of Aichinger's books of sacred songs at his own expense. *Odaria lectissima* came out in 1601 with an engraved frontispiece; *Divinae laudes*, consisting of text and music only without any engravings, followed in 1602; *Vespertinum Virginis Canticum*, published in 1603, had an engraved frontispiece. Custos dedicated an image of Christ as a child surrounded by angels playing music to Aichinger as a token of his friendship and special affection for the composer.

Another relation of kinship was that between the Custos/Kilian and Miller families. Lucas Kilian had married Barbara Miller in 1604, and the name Miller

can be found in Lucas Kilian's work. In 1608 he engraved a portrait of Albrecht Dürer and dedicated it to his father-in-law Jacob Miller. This seems important in our context, as there is an exquisite, unsigned drawing in Matthäus Miller's family album, which, I believe, should be attributed to Lucas Kilian. The drawing shows the inner courtyard of the German trading post in Venice, the Fondaco dei Tedeschi. Raphael Custos used this drawing as a model for the engraving of the Fondaco, dated 1616, one of his most famous works and another example of the fruitful collaboration between the individual family members.

The Custos-Kilian Dynasty

To sum up, Dominicus Custos came from a family of artists and married into a family of artists. As a result, the lives of the Custos and Kilian families became intertwined. After training with his father in Antwerp, a study trip to Venice and a few years at the Innsbruck court, he settled in Augsburg, where he ran a very successful and extremely productive workshop as an engraver. For the Augsburg book printing industry, Dominicus Custos's work provided the decisive impetus for the gradual switch from woodcut to copperplate illustrations. His work draws on the sources of his Dutch homeland, uses Italian, especially Venetian, models, integrates French and German influences, and responds to the art of the Prague and Munich courts. Portraits became his speciality but not the only subject of his art. Having started out as an engraver, he gradually focused more of his attention on the publishing side of the trade. A very rare illustrated broadsheet, dated 1603, bears eloquent testimony to his collaboration with his brother Raphael. A detailed inscription documents their joint trip to Frankfurt, where several of their brothers had settled. The visit to the book fair and the stop at the Roter Löwe inn in Bruchsal on the way home are mentioned (fig. 7). After Dominicus Custos's death, Raphael ran his own workshop with the support of Jacob, who was presumably his son. Lucas and Wolfgang Kilian also established workshops of their own. They followed in Dominicus's footsteps and reissued many of his publications, sometimes as a joint endeavour. Lucas Kilian had numerous children but outlived them all

and was left without an heir. Many of his plates were evidently taken over and reissued – first by the Nuremberg art dealer, antiquarian and publisher Georg Kümmelmann (1590-1652) and then by Jacob Sandrart. Wolfgang outlived his brother by decades. His descendants continued to be outstanding artists of their time for generations, up to Georg Christoph Kilian (1709-1781), an exceptional engraver and publisher. He is the author of a family chronicle – the manuscript of which is preserved in the Augsburg State and City Library – in which he sought to summarise the lives and achievements of his ancestors. He should be allowed the final word on Dominicus Custos here: 'That he was an artful, well-read, and diligent man who had an honest, intelligent, and interested mind, is to be concluded'.

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